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Home Place



**PARTNERSHIP**

**Study Guide by Leslie Karasin**  
**Bullfrog Films**

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**Partnership** is one of the four videos in the Home Place series, which are based on Canadian ecologist J. Stan Rowe's book Home Place: Essays on Ecology. The series attempts to redefine the role of human beings as one of Earth's species and look anew at the systems which sustain and constitute life on the planet. Hosted by J. Stan Rowe and narrated by Liona Boyd, the series consists of **Inside - Outside, Life Cycles, Partnership, and Going Home**. Each film is 26 minutes.

Other videos in the series:

### **Inside - Outside**

Images of the earth from space finally enabled us to discard the human-centered concept of environment, replacing it with a more universal idea of ecosystems. Earth itself is conceived of as living...as an ecological being.

### **Life Cycles**

Explores the problem of trying to distinguish between living and non-living parts of the Earth. Everything on earth is linked by the cycling of matter and flows of energy. Life is a property of Earth.

### **Going Home**

Explores the ways in which cocoons of cultural myth affect the way we see and understand the world, and cocoons of technology insulate our senses from nature. Personal remedies are found in activities which overcome our alienation from our Home Place, and help us to reconnect with the earth.

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## **Organizations and Websites**

Center for a New American Dream 6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 900; Takoma Park, MD 20912 <http://www.newdream.org>

Earth Island Institute 300 Broadway, Suite 28; San Francisco, CA 94133

Institute for Alternative Agriculture 9200 Edmonston Rd., Suite 117, Greenbelt, MD, 20770.

Institute for Global Futures Research PO Box 263E Earlville QLD 4870 Australia

Institute for Local Self-Reliance 2425 18th St. NW; Washington, DC 20009 <http://www.ilsr.org>

LETS (Local Employment Trading System) <http://www.lets.uk>

National Centre for Sustainable Society 1896 Watson Street Victoria, BC Canada V8R 6N6 <http://www.islandnet.com/~ncfs/ncfs>

National Parks and Conservation Association 1015 31st St., NW, 4th Floor, Washington, DC, 20007.

The Land Institute Route 3, Salina, KS, 67401.

The Nature Conservancy National Headquarters: 4245 N Fairfax Drive, Suite 100, Arlington, VA 22203 <http://www.tnc.org>

Permaculture Assoc. PO Box 202, Orange, MA, 01364.

Permaculture Institute of North America 4649 Sunnyside Ave. N. Seattle, WA, 98103.

Population Coalition 1476 N Indian Hill Blvd. Claremont, CA 91711 <http://www.popco.org>

Redefining Progress One Kearny Street, 4th Floor; San Francisco, CA 94108 <http://www.rprogress.org>

Renew America 1200 1th St. NW, Suite 1100; Washington, DC 20036 [http://solstice.crest.org/sustainable/renew\\_america](http://solstice.crest.org/sustainable/renew_america)

*Into the Amazon: The Struggle for the Rain Forest.* Augusta Dwyer. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco: 1990.

*Living in the Environment.* G. Tyler Miller, Jr. Wadsworth Company, CA:1992.

*Making Peace With the Planet.* Barry Commoner. Pantheon Books, NY: 1990.

*Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility.* Keith Thomas. Pantheon Books, USA: 1983.

*Not Man Apart.* Friends of the Earth, 530 Seventh St. SE, Washington, DC, 20003.

*Organic Gardening and Farming Magazine.* Rodale Press, Inc., 33 E Minor St, Emmaus, PA, 18049.

*Rain Forest in Your Kitchen: The Hidden Connections Between Extinction and Your Supermarket.* Martin Teitel. Island Press, Washington DC: 1992.

*Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology.* Bill Devall. Peregrine Smith, Salt Lake City: 1988.

*The Arrogance of Humanism.* David Ehrenfeld. Oxford University Press, New York: 1978.

*The Control of Nature.* John McPhee. Farrar Strauss Giroux, New York: 1989.

*The Trumpeter Journal of Ecosophy.* P.O. Box 5883 Stn. B, Victoria B.C. Canada, V8R 6S8.

*The Emerald Realm: Earth's Precious Rain Forests.* Martha Christian, ed. National Geographic Society, Washington DC: 1990.

*Western Man and Environmental Ethics.* Ian Barbour, ed. Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA: 1973.

*What Are People For?* Wendell Berry. North Point Press, Berkeley: 1990.

*Wildlands for Wildlife.* National Geographic Publishers, Washington, DC: 1988.

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## Synopsis

There are signs of hope that the natural world is recovering from some of the abuses of humans over the past decades and centuries. The swift fox has been reintroduced in Canada, brought back from extinction by human efforts to redress earlier exploitation. But scattered and piecemeal efforts to restore natural systems will not be sufficient to achieve permanent improvements; to make enduring and resilient advances, we need to develop a new relationship with the earth.

The expansion of the industrial age has brought a distancing between humans and natural systems, and, increasingly, an attitude of domination and conflict with the earth. The evidence of ancient civilizations—the Mayan and the Anasazi—tells us that an attitude of domination and a failure to be cognizant of limits will end in societal collapse. The lesson is clear; man cannot pursue human growth indefinitely and ignore his place in the natural system.

We know that there is an alternative to the attitude of domination and the mindset that humans can use the earth however they like with impunity, and we

know that we must heed the lessons of the past and make this fundamental change in perspective if we want to continue to live a healthy and balanced existence. It is up to us, now, to begin this shift.

The change is quite simple. We need to adopt a humbler role on the planet. We need to learn from the earth, rather than ignoring it. We need to accept natural limits, and alter our concept of human growth. And, most essentially, we need to understand that we are part of the natural world, and act in partnership rather than discord. The film illustrates some practical types of changes to existing problems in forestry, agriculture, and land management. For more on the practical measures towards a new relationship with the planet, see the “How can we move towards Partnership” section, below.

### ***Key Concepts***

The film presents some revolutionary and highly philosophical ideas, many of which are a challenge to conventional modern thought. To help both students and teachers work through the material in the film, some of its key concepts are enumerated below.

- Unsustainability of human growth. The industrial age has increasingly separated us from contact with natural systems, and during this time human beings have begun to pursue a form of growth which is thought to be independent of natural processes. Based on the accumulation of wealth and the development of technology, this growth relies on natural resources as raw materials and pollutes and destroys natural systems which stand in its way. Ultimately, we will be reminded of the vital links between human growth and the natural world, and we will inevitably learn that humans cannot pursue endless growth

- Time. If one spends all of her time inside and insulated from nature, she will not truly be able to claim that she’s adopted a role of Partnership. Spending some time outside and in natural settings—whether walking, farming, or reflecting—is the best way to become more in tune with the other species which share the ecosphere.

### ***Resources***

#### **Books, Articles and Journals**

*A Bicentennial Malthusian Essay: Conservation, Population, and the Indifference to Limits.* John F. Rohe. Rhodes and Easton, Michigan: 1997.

*American Forests.* American Forestry Association, 1516 P. St NW, Washington, DC; 20005.

*American Journal of Alternative Agriculture.* 9200 Edmonston Rd, Suite 117, Greenbelt, MD, 20770.

*A Sand County Almanac.* Aldo Leopold. Oxford University Press, NY: 1949.

*Asphalt Nation.* Jane Holtz Kay. Crown Publishers, NY: 1997.

*Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle.* Arne Naess. Cambridge University Press, New York: 1989.

*Environmental Science: The Way the World Works.* Nebel and Wright. Prentice Hall, NJ: 1993.

*Healing Gaia: Practical Medicine for the Planet.* James Lovelock. Harmony Books, NY: 1991.

*How Many People Can the Earth Support?* Joel E. Cohen. WW Norton and Co., NY: 1995.

“Human Ecology: The Subversive, Conservative Science.” Garrett Hardin. In *American Zoologist*, Vol 25, 1985, pp. 469-476.

*Human Ecosystems.* WB Clapham, Jr. Macmillan, NY: 1981.

grown locally. Find out where the food you eat comes from, and how it is raised. Support local organic farmers by buying their products. Ask local stores to stock more local organic food.

- Forestry. Sustainable forestry practices can encourage biodiversity, provide habitat, and maintain the integrity of the land. Nonsustainable practices can inhibit biodiversity, drive out native species, and cause erosion and natural imbalance. Think about where your paper and wood products come from. Support sustainable projects.
- Think smaller. Part of the problem with the human relationship with Earth is that we simply demand too much. We can all reduce consumerism by considering what we really need and what we can do without.
- Population. The more people there are, the more difficult it will be to achieve balance. Family planning can enable us to reduce family size.
- Local economies. Our increasingly global economy isolates producers and consumers. Much of what we eat, buy and use is shipped part way around the world—sometimes more than once. Among other implications, this often means that we have no idea of the way in which the goods we use are produced. By making a conscious decision to buy local goods and services, we can help our own communities, have a greater say in the means of production, and increase local self-reliance. Some communities even have local currencies to ensure that local trade can increase without the use of cash. Participants provide goods or services and receive others according to abilities and needs, allowing everyone to be an active participant in the trading system. Find out more in the Resources section—see LETS.
- Permaculture. Directly related to many of the above topics, especially agriculture, permaculture is a science or practice which encompasses much of the art of Partnership. Developed largely by Australian Bill Mollison, this field is based on sensible planning: learning from nature and making decisions which work well with natural systems. See below for reference information.

without severe consequences for both us and the rest of the ecosphere.

- Sustainability. A complicated idea even by itself, the notion of sustainability is central to our understanding of success in achieving balance with the earth. See the activities sections and glossary, below, for approaches to the concept.
- Conflict and violence of modern society’s relationship with Earth. Our attitude towards nature is currently one of domination. We “break” the land, kill the plants and animals which interfere with our progress, and generally act as if we have “permission to manage and control everything in the world.”
- A new relationship: Partnership. To move beyond the culture of domination, we must establish a new attitude towards our relationship with the earth. Rather than being in conflict, we should move towards a perspective of partnership. This will result in subtle but significant changes in our approach to most aspects of life. It will be prompted by an acceptance that we are one of millions of species on Earth, and a realization that natural systems have a great deal to teach us.
- The importance of land reserves. Our relationship with the land is one of the first important areas in which we can make changes, and the primary alteration in this field will be to recognize the importance of allowing tracts of land to be free of the intrusion of human manipulation. These parks or preserves are vital to the health of the ecosphere, as they will protect biodiversity and serve as the spine of a system of natural lands, and also give us a model for land management in surrounding regions.

## ***Before Viewing***

*The following activities are meant to enhance understanding and enjoyment of the film, and can be effectively performed in a variety of ways.*

- Discuss the Anasazi and/or Mayan civilizations. When were they, what level of sophistication did they attain, and what happened to them?
- Consider the issue of well-being. What determines happiness? Success? Wealth? As a society, what are our goals? What constitutes an advance? What do we most often think of as growth? One possible way to explore this topic would be through individual free writing exercises. Ask students to write for a few minutes on: What makes me happy? and What are the goals of our society?
- What is the meaning of, and the importance of, biodiversity? (See the glossary and “Biodiversity Primer” sections, below.
- Try to define “sustainable.” For some help, consult the glossary.
- Discuss and/or research typical farming and logging practices. What herbicides and pesticides are used on the typical farm? What percentage of foods consumed in North America are produced organically? How many different crops are generally raised on a farm? What precautions do foresters take to preserve the forest ecosystem? What is a tree farm? How is one different from a forest?
- List a few examples of ways in which human problems and environmental problems are linked. If you need some inspiration, consider how public health is linked to air and water pollution, how skin cancer is tied to ozone depletion, or how natural

## ***How can we move towards Partnership?***

*The film raised lots of possibilities for ways in which we can make positive changes in our lifestyle and culture. Here is a compilation of a number of ideas mentioned in the film—briefly or at length—as well as a few related ideas. This list is not by any means complete, but anyone who embarks on these changes sincerely will surely find that others follow naturally.*

- Mindset. Undoubtedly the single-most important factor in the conversion to partnership is adopting a new attitude towards your role on Earth. This means rejecting violence against nature, deciding that new practices are important, and recognizing the inherent value of non-human parts of the ecosystem.
- Land-use. The film emphasizes the importance of not only protecting land as national parks and other protected areas, but also of using these lands as a model of management techniques on adjoining lands. A few isolated islands of natural habitat will not be sufficient to keep the planet healthy; we need to respect the important services which the land performs for us and for other species. To avoid obstructing natural processes, we need to respect native species and practice land management techniques which are attuned to natural cycles. (For more on biodiversity and habitat loss, see the biodiversity section immediately above this one.) To encourage these changes, support national parks and protected areas. If you or your family members own land, consider how you manage it. Is it necessary to mow the lawn? Can you increase habitat by hanging up bird boxes? Think about what land use changes are needed in your area, and find out how to support them. Local and national groups working in these areas can be found; start with the groups in the resources section.
- Agriculture. This is an area which has tremendous impact on the environment. A shift in agricultural practices could have enormous ramifications for land use, biodiversity, crop diversity, water and air pollution, chemical dependence, and topsoil erosion. We can also reduce shipping and dependence on foreign and far-away food producers by supporting local farmers and eating products which can be

The causes of extinction at human hands revolve mostly around the destruction and alteration of habitat. Deforestation, desertification and the loss of wetlands are most notable. Also important are poaching, the impacts of pollution, and the introduction of non-native species. These forces threaten the capability of our species and other species to survive.

There is much that we do not know about the consequences of the loss of biodiversity. Some argue that species loss has caused no major problems thus far. But the longer we heedlessly destroy habitat and threaten the viability of life forms, the greater our risk of serious ecological collapse. We are eating away at life's insurance policy and meddling with the natural balance of the ecosphere.

One cornerstone of biodiversity on the planet are the tropical rainforests, home to a stunning variety of life. A single example of the importance of these ecosystems is the medicines which use plants from them for raw material. Approximately one fourth of medications rely on these plants for raw materials; if the rain forests continue to disappear, potential cures for life-threatening diseases may be lost.

Another key issue involved with biodiversity is our dependence on a few key food crops. Over time North American agriculture has shunned the diversity of crops available to us, preferring to make intensive use of a few high-yield species. These monocultures are vulnerable to the threat of disease (ecosystems with a variety of species are stable ecosystems--monocultures interfere with natural balance), and we are losing species which could be alternative crops for us. Many of the rice, wheat, and corn species which we depend upon originated in the tropical regions threatened by a massive loss of biodiversity.

The final chapter on biodiversity may be the inherent conflict between the abundance of natural systems and a burgeoning human population. Put simply, it is unlikely that a continually growing human population will be able to coexist peacefully with the habitat preservation measures which are necessary if we are to protect biodiversity. So we must not only learn to live differently; we must also think seriously about how to curb the growth in human population.

disasters affecting all human communities are tied to climate change caused by the greenhouse effect.

### *After viewing*

- What are some specific problems with industrial agriculture? Discuss the film's statement that this type of farming is not sustainable because of the heavy dependence on fertilizers and fossil fuels; what is the link between fertilizers and pesticides and fossil fuels? What are the impacts of fertilizer, pesticide and herbicide use? How do industrial farms affect biodiversity?
- Discuss some scenarios of what might happen if our behavior patterns do not change. For example, if the price of oil rose dramatically, and fertilizer/pesticide use was no longer economical, what would happen to agriculture and food production in North America? Or if land reserves and biodiversity are not protected, what might be some results?
- How do individuals move away from domination and conflict, and towards partnership? (For more on this subject, see the "How can we move towards Partnership" section, below.)
- The film suggests that one aspect of a healthier relationship with the planet will be to recognize what we can do without certain products and services, and forsake some of these luxuries in exchange for a healthier and more balanced lifestyle. What kind of goods or services should we consider giving up? Would you be willing to do so?
- What's wrong with "converting Earth's wealth into human wealth"? Towards the end of the film, the host suggests that we should learn to "collect on Earth's annual interest rather than plunging into its

capital.” What does this mean? How can we do it? This is closely related to the idea of sustainability. Is it possible for us to have a sustainable society while depleting natural resources?

## **Glossary**

*Biodiversity, Biological Diversity* Diversity of living things; includes not only variation of species on Earth, but also variation of ecosystems and genes.

*Sustainable* Relating to the ability of a process to continue indefinitely; definitions may vary on the specifics of what this means for human processes. The most stringent definition is a process which does not deplete either natural resources, or human or economic capital at all.

*Subsidy* A grant or gift of money; esp. a grant from a public authority to a private enterprise deemed advantageous to the public.~

*Organic farming* Producing crops and livestock using organic fertilizer (manure, legumes, compost) and natural pest control (bugs that eat harmful bugs, plants that repel bugs, etc.) instead of using commercial chemical fertilizers and synthetic pesticides and herbicides.\*

*Pesticide* Any chemical designed to kill or inhibit the growth of an organism that people consider to be undesirable.\*

*Herbicide* Chemical that kills a plant or inhibits its growth.\*

*Capital* A stock of accumulated goods, particularly those devoted to the production of other goods and the generation of income.~

\*Definitions from Living in the Environment, G. Tyler Miller, Wadsworth Publishing.

~Definition from Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, Inc.

## **More information... A Biodiversity Primer**

Biological diversity has become a popular term among environmentalists and an oft-touted goal for governments and NGO’s alike, but public understanding of the meaning and importance of biodiversity is low. The basic definition of the phrase is fairly self-explanatory (see Glossary) but it is important to remember that, in addition to diversity among species, the phrase encompasses ecological and genetic diversity.

Millions of years of evolution have resulted in a tremendous variety of life forms—estimates range from 30 to 100 million species on Earth—as well as phenomenal genetic and ecological variety. We depend on all of these forms of diversity. Some of the ways in which we are dependent are quite obvious; we use various species for sources of food, energy, raw materials, and medicines. Other ways are less obvious; we rely on organisms as pest control and for the recycling of natural resources. And it is also important to remember the ways in which we depend on ecological and genetic diversity—unique ecosystems serve important functions in the oxygen, water and carbon cycles as well as myriad subtler roles; genetic diversity makes future evolution, adaptation, and resilience to change conceivable. The “genetic library” which has developed through evolution functions as an insurance policy against disasters for all species, including humans.

Despite all of the benefits of genetic, species and ecological diversity, there are very real threats at work. The primary foe of biodiversity is extinction, a process which has accelerated frighteningly as humans have expanded their sphere of activity. Estimates of extinction rates vary, but at the most considerable, up to 100 species may be disappearing from the earth each day, many of them species which we never had a chance to know or understand. Their loss is permanent, and with them the unique contributions they made to ecosystems and the genetic information they carried. With each loss, we risk severe consequences.