

## **Oral Histories of the Land How-To Guide**

The stories in this theme explore the many ways people use land and water and the complexities of environmental sustainability. The oral history selections reveal the personal challenges and triumphs of land use in the United States. They encourage new perspectives on how we think about land use, conservation, economic development, and other important issues.

This document includes information on what materials you'll need, the roles for various participants in the program, what you need to do before the program, information on the arc of dialogue, and instructions for facilitating the program.

### **Materials**

Download the following from Listentoeveryone.com: audio clips, How-To Guide (this document), PowerPoint slides, and transcripts. The audio clips for this theme are:

- The Challenges of Growing Organic Vegetables (Kenyon Parsons)
- Running Your Own Farm (Matthew Wichowsky)
- Growing Organic Fruit (Rodney Ingalls)
- Against Unconventional Shale Gas Drilling (Marion Karl)
- Living in an Agricultural District (Jennifer Huntington)
- Searching for a Middle Ground (Earle Peterson)

\*Note: all content for this program can be found at the following URL:

[listentoeveryone.com/oral-histories-of-the-land/](http://listentoeveryone.com/oral-histories-of-the-land/)

You'll need a laptop, smartphone, or iPod as well as external speakers to play the audio files. In addition, we recommend that you use a separate computer and projector to show the PowerPoint slides—rather than trying to play the audio clips and show the PowerPoint from the same device, as this can be difficult to manage, especially when you are also facilitating the program.

### **Roles**

These titles will be used throughout the guide, to distinguish roles.

- Facilitator – This person leads the program. They read from the Program Outline (included at the end of this document), play the audio selections, and lead the discussion. They use a combination of ground rules, questions, and activities to ensure that all participants communicate effectively with each other. Their job is not to be an expert on the content, but rather to make sure that everyone can find their place in the conversation.
- Participant – These are the people who participate in the program. They listen to the audio selections and engage in conversation. They should feel comfortable expressing their opinions and gain insights into different perspectives from fellow participants.



## **Before the Program**

- Ensure that everyone involved in creating and executing the program understands that the primary goal is to encourage conversation and understanding among participants, not for participants to gain specific factual knowledge.
- Familiarize yourself with the oral history material. Listening to the clips several times in advance and reading through the transcripts and question prompts will give you greater flexibility when leading the discussion.
- Download the audio clips and PowerPoint slides onto your preferred devices. Print out this How to Guide and the transcripts for each participant.
- It's a good idea to have some refreshments available, so don't forget to buy coffee, tea, and cookies. People are always in a better mood when they're not hungry!
- Immediately before the program, set up and test your equipment.
- Immediately before the program, set up the room. We recommend placing chairs in a circle. Even if this is not feasible in your space, place chairs in a way so as many people can see each other as possible.

## **Notes on Facilitating**

- It is important to ask open-ended questions that all participants can answer without any specialized knowledge or prior research.
- Facilitators are not working to make everyone agree, although some participants may seek this agreement. If this occurs, facilitators should work to remind participants that the program's goal is to further personal and collective learning, not to accomplish a specific task.
- Some participants will be more talkative than others. Except during the introduction, not everyone needs to talk. However, one or two people should not be allowed to dominate the conversation.
- It is the facilitator's job to make sure everyone who wants to speak has a chance to speak. Be aware of who has spoken and who has not yet spoken. Use different strategies to encourage everyone to speak—e.g. small group discussions.
- Facilitators should refrain from sharing their own stories. The facilitator's role is to promote dialogue, not to dominate the conversation.
- Do not be afraid of the silence after a question has been asked; give participants time to think about the questions before answering.



- It is a good idea to repeat questions to ensure that all participants have heard them. Use of a microphone is recommended, especially with audiences that may include participants with hearing impairments.
- The facilitator does not need to ask all of the questions listed in the how-to guide—in fact, doing so would likely be impossible, unless one wants the program to last for three hours! Be selective and keep things moving at a moderate pace.
- It is acceptable to ask follow-up questions based on participants’ responses.

### **The “Arc of Dialogue”**

This program follows the “arc of dialogue,” which has been developed by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience.\*

#### *Phase One (Community Building)*

All participants introduce themselves to one another and answer an easy and accessible question. This allows people to build relationships with one another, which leads to a more productive discussion. When everyone is given the opportunity to share at the beginning of a program, they feel more comfortable contributing to the discussion later.

#### *Phase Two (Sharing the Diversity of our Experiences)*

Participants listen to audio selections from oral history interviews and then share their own experiences with the group. They listen to several clips, discuss the topic, listen to more clips, and then talk some more. Each person’s responses are treated equally. Questions during this phase help participants think about how individuals’ experiences are similar and different.

#### *Phase Three (Exploring Perspectives Beyond Our Own Experiences)*

Participants listen to additional audio selections from oral history interviews and then reflect on others’ perspectives. In addition, they explore the program’s theme more broadly. Participants listen to several clips, discuss the topic, listen to more clips, and then talk some more. During this phase, the group actively examines the underlying social conditions that impact how people think about important issues.

#### *Phase Four (Synthesizing the Learning Experience)*

During this phase, the facilitator asks one or more questions to synthesize the experience and help the group reflect on what they have learned from listening to the oral history clips and speaking with each other. Participants are also encouraged to decide what, if any, next steps they would like to take. This phase should reinforce a sense of community, but participants do not have to agree with each other.

\*For more information on the “arc of dialogue,” visit the [International Coalition of Sites of Conscience](#)’s website.



## **Program Outline for Facilitator**

Below is a detailed outline for the program. Use this as a roadmap while facilitating.

- Welcome – Introduce yourself, say who you are, briefly explain the purpose of the program and the agenda, and go over ground rules.
  - Agenda
    - Introductions.
    - Listen to oral history selections.
    - Use those oral histories as a jumping off point for conversation about the past and present of our land. Our hope is that oral histories can serve as a basis for an informed and civil dialogue about social and environmental issues.
    - A simple way to think about it is: We'll listen then we'll talk, then we'll listen some more, and we'll talk some more.
  - Share ground rules
    - Be respectful.
    - Make sure that everyone has a turn to speak.
    - Focus your comments on the oral histories.
- Phase I – Community Building

Everyone in the room should briefly introduce themselves, including the facilitator. Make sure all voices in the room are heard. When everyone is given the opportunity to share at the beginning of a program, they feel more comfortable contributing to the discussion later.

### Question for Introductions

- Give us your name and where you live, and tell us one place you feel most connected to the land.
- Phase II – Sharing the Diversity of Our Experiences

Start by playing three audio selections: Kenyon Parsons, Matthew Wichowsky, and Rodney Ingalls.

Before playing each selection, share the person's bio and a brief description of what will be discussed in the selection.

### ***Kenyon Parsons***

- Interviewed by Connor Wolfe, November 22, 2016
- File Name: 1.Kenyon\_Parsons\_Challenges\_Growing\_Organic\_Vegetables



***Kenyon Parsons Clip Description:***

Kenyon Parsons was born in 1966. He worked on his family's dairy farm in Sharon Springs, New York before attending Syracuse University and receiving a graduate degree from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. After returning to his family's dairy farm, he converted it into Parsons Vegetable Farm. In this clip, he talks about how growing organic crops can be difficult.

***Matthew Wichowsky***

- Interviewed by Alexa Wichowsky, November 23, 2016
- File Name: 2.Matthew\_Wichowsky\_Running\_Own\_Farm

***Matthew Wichowsky Clip Description:***

Matthew Wichowsky was born in 1958 in Cobleskill, New York. He was a farmer for most of his life, working on others' farms before renting and then buying his own farm in West Winfield, New York. He ran the farm for 25 years, first as a dairy farm and then as a hay business. In this clip, he talks about making improvements to his farm as well as the challenges of owning a farm.

***Rodney Ingalls***

- Interviewed by Jillian Reese, November 10, 2012
- File Name: 3.Rodney\_Ingalls\_Growing\_Organic\_Fruit

***Rodney Ingalls Clip Description:***

The Ingalls family has been farming in Hartwick Seminary, New York, for almost a century. Mr. Ingalls was born in 1919 and died in 2013. After graduating from college and serving in the Navy during World War II, he took over the family dairy business. After Mr. Ingalls's father died, he sold off the dairy business and started growing gladiolas, sweet corn, melons, and u-pick berries. In this clip, Mr. Ingalls talks about growing food on his farm and the dangers of using pesticides.

After playing the clips, use these discussion questions:

- Talk about a time you tried to grow something.
  - \*You may choose to have participants respond to this question in a pair-share format. Participants share their responses first with a partner and then with the full group. Not everyone needs to share with the full group.
- Name one thing you consider to be a natural, healthy food product.
- What makes a product natural or healthy?
- What does the word "organic" mean to you?
- What kinds of things do you like to buy at farm stands or the farmer's market?
- How do you choose a product when you shop for food?
- How has your experience of shopping for food or consuming food changed over the past 5-10 years?
- Talk about a time you changed something you did based on what you thought was good for the land.



- Phase III – Exploring Perspectives Beyond Our Own Experiences

Play three more clips: Marion Karl, Jennifer Huntington, and Earle Peterson.

***Marion Karl***

- Interviewed by Mary Alexander, November 16, 2012
- File Name: 4.Marion\_Karl\_Against\_Unconventional\_Shale\_Gas\_Drilling

***Marion Karl Clip Description:***

Marion Karl was born in 1928 in India where her parents were working as Baptist missionaries. She and her family returned to the United States from India just as World War II started. Mrs. Karl went to Keuka College and Syracuse University, where she studied to become a nurse. She moved to Cooperstown in 1961 with her husband and young children, and she has lived there ever since. Soon after her arrival, she purchased 100 acres of land, which she has kept in a natural state at the request of the previous owner. In this clip, she talks about the negative effects of unconventional shale gas drilling, or hydrofracking.

***Jennifer Huntington***

- Interviewed by Kate Webber, November 1, 2015
- File Name: 5.Jennifer\_Huntington\_Living\_in\_Agricultural\_District

***Jennifer Huntington Clip Description:***

Jennifer Huntington is the owner of the Cooperstown Holstein Corporation in Middlefield, New York. She was born in Cooperstown in 1962. She has spent her life in the Cooperstown area, apart from four years studying Dairy Science at Cornell University. She inherited her farm from her father, and has worked it for the past 25 years. In this clip, she talks about farmers organizing to protect agricultural industries.

***Earle Peterson***

- Interviewed by Araya Henry, November 20, 2013
- File Name: 6.Earle\_Peterson\_Searching\_for\_a\_Middle\_Ground

***Earle Peterson Clip Description:***

Earle Peterson was born in 1933 in Yonkers, New York and grew up on a farm. He has a doctorate in veterinary medicine from Cornell University, and he worked as a veterinarian on farms and in an animal hospital. He established the Greenwoods Conservancy in Burlington, New York and was one of the founders of the Otsego Land Trust in Cooperstown, New York, both of which are dedicated to protecting the local environment. In this clip, he talks about the Greenwoods Conservancy's position on hydrofracking.



After playing the clips, use these discussion questions:

- What motivates people to get involved with land-related issues or advocacy?
  - What do you think are our responsibilities today to protect our environment?
  - What responsibilities do we have to protect the environment for the future?
  - How do property owners protect their interests?
  - What sources are trustworthy when it comes to environmental issues?
  - How do we balance individual, local, and global concerns related to the environment?
  - How do people react to potential contamination of their environment differently? What do you think explains these differences?
  - Do you think it is possible to get natural gas for fuel and not affect the water supply?
  - Is the way we practice farming sustainable?
  - What are our most important natural resources?
  - How can we balance economic development and environmental protection?
  - In our community, who ensures that our environment is not polluted?
  - Who is affected most significantly by environmental contamination?
- Phase IV – Synthesizing the Learning Experience

Because dialogue programs reveal differences as well as similarities between participants, it is important to end by reinforcing a sense of community. All dialogue programs should end with synthesizing questions/activities.

Final discussion questions:

- What is one action you will commit to take that will have a positive effect on the land?
- With whom would you like to share these oral histories?
- What is one thing you'd like to ask the oral history narrators you've heard tonight?

Be sure to thank everyone for participating and invite them to have some additional refreshments and, perhaps, to continue informal conversations.

