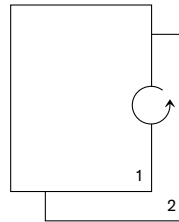


Shifting Landscapes Film Series

Engagement Guide

INTRODUCTION

This *Engagement Guide* is a companion to our four-part Shifting Landscapes documentary film series, which explores the power of art and story to orient us amid the darkness of our time. Following a musician, a poet, a writer, and a filmmaker who are each embracing the alchemical power of story to connect and transform us, this series opens ways of being that hold both catastrophe and love as our landscapes change and disappear. Responding to great changes within their landscapes—the vanishing song of the nightingale in southern England, the desecration of a sacred mountain in Hawai‘i, a melting glacier in Iceland, and a traditional way of life threatened by development in Cambodia—they create art that can help us understand the changes beginning to affect the places we call home; and offer stories that open us to our connection with the Earth. In four corresponding guides, we invite you to explore the pathways illuminated by these storytellers and a depth of relationship with your own shifting landscape. Through spaces of reflection, discussion, and practice, each guide offers ways to weave these stories with your own; to open a dialogue and share values within your community; and to cultivate a living connection with your landscape.



For hard copies, print the following two pages double-sided to save paper.

HOST A FILM SCREENING

Interested in hosting a screening of the film series?
Contact us at screenings@emergencemagazine.org



Shifting Landscapes Film Series *Engagement Guide No. 3*

REFLECTION

*This section invites you to reflect on the themes explored in *The Last Ice Age*. To engage with these prompts, you could write responses to them in a notebook, sit and contemplate them, or take them with you to a quiet outdoor space.*

THE LAST ICE AGE

(1)

Andri says that the issue of climate change is so big, it is larger than language. What do you think he means by this? Why do you think there is a disconnect between the reality of climate change and our ability to effectively communicate about it? What elements of climate change are most difficult to convey through words? What language, metaphors, or images would you use to try to encompass the scale and possible impacts of climate change? What is this language able to effectively express? What does it not manage to communicate?

(2)

Myths help people grasp reality, offering images that can “explain the bigger picture,” says Andri. In the film, he shares stories of his grandparents’ many trips to Vatnajökull glacier as well as the Ancient Greek myth of Prometheus to make sense of what he is witnessing in his landscape. How did these stories change your own understanding of glacial melt? How do these myths make the complexity of climate change more relatable or tangible? What are some other stories—cultural myths, family stories, or personal experiences—that have helped make climate change personal to you?

(3)

Andri shares that throughout Icelandic history glaciers have been perceived as eternal elements of the land—“they had always been there, and it felt like they would always be there.” What is something in your home place, or in a landscape you are deeply familiar with, that you thought would be everlasting but that is beginning to change, shift, or disappear? Are you able to comprehend what the future of this landscape will be like as these changes deepen? What helps you make sense of the reality and impact of this transformation?

(4)

To understand what the melting of Vatnajökull glacier means both for the nature of that landscape and for humanity as a whole, Andri says we have to look at how this change will affect us personally and collectively; we have to look at the glacier’s past and its future, and the science and the mythology surrounding it. Reflect on another change, minute or significant, that you have witnessed within your own landscape. Consider the change from each of the six perspectives Andri points towards. What depth of understanding are you left with?

(5)

Andri’s close relationship with his grandmother, who lived to be ninety-eight years old, allowed him to understand long spans of time differently. How does thinking about a hundred years through the lens of a personal relationship shift your perspective of the past and future? How do Andri’s familial stories allow you to see the glacier as more than just a changing landscape, but also as a living part of a history and identity that is shared between people and the Earth? In what ways does this personal connection create a sense of continuity and responsibility for places across generations?

As storyteller Andri Snær Magnason puts it, climate change is like a black hole: so big it’s larger than language. We understand it not by looking straight at its center, but by looking at its edges. In *The Last Ice Age*, Andri retraces his grandparents’ annual spring pilgrimage to Iceland’s Vatnajökull glacier, searching for the stories that lie at the edges of our climate crisis in both scientific data and his family’s memories. Witnessing the inevitable decline of Europe’s largest ice cap with his son Hlynur, Andri pulls on the ties of love that connect generations to try to grasp what the immense changes he has seen in just one lifetime will mean for the future of the planet.

This film explores how we can begin to properly understand the scale of transformation engulfing the Earth; to comprehend the impact of glacial ice melt, shifting Arctic landscapes, and significant sea level rise on the coming generations. Andri acknowledges the limitations of data and scientific projections to evoke empathy, and thus action, for the future and looks instead to the way stories and relationships can hold a personal resonance that links generations together. Understanding myth to be both a universal tool of connection and a format through which we can process vast questions and concepts through archetypal images, Andri shares the stories that bind him to his Icelandic landscape in the hope they can help us fathom the ways humans are radically changing the face of the Earth.

Ahead of the discussion prompts below, feel free to share what within the film and/or Andri's work as a storyteller resonated with you most.

Make sure you have ample space and time to allow yourself to engage deeply with each prompt.

(1)

Andri says that if scientific data isn't translated into stories, the paradigm shift needed to navigate the catastrophe of climate change won't occur. Discuss what it is that stories can hold that data cannot. How do stories infuse meaning into the data-led narrative of the climate crisis? Andri also asks, how do you write about something that is larger than language, suggesting that perhaps one has to understand beauty and poetry and love. Share what role you think these elements have in communicating about the climate crisis.

(2)

Andri says that the rapid ice melt of the Vatnajökull glacier is not just telling the story of the glacier itself, it's telling a story of a planet that is going out of balance. Beyond the changes to this landscape, what does the melting of this glacier tell us or symbolize about the Earth and our relationship with it? Discuss how Andri's own storytelling about this glacier's disappearance—his grandparents' accounts of their relationship with this landscape and his own visit there with his son—helps you comprehend the bigger picture of glacial ice melt.

(3)

In the film, Andri highlights that we collectively struggle to empathize with future generations—"when a scientist says 2100, we don't feel anything." Discuss whether we are responsible for what happens in one hundred or even one thousand years. Why does empathy often feel limited to only the immediate future? How does the inability of language to fully encompass the scale of climate change's impact on the future affect our sense of ethical responsibility around it? How can storytelling play a role in awakening an empathy for both future generations and the future of the Earth Herself?

(4)

Witnessing the change that is occurring in Andri's native landscape is an important part of his work and was also a part of his grandparents' relationship with the Vatnajökull glacier. Discuss what you feel is important about bearing witness to increasing loss and also enduring beauty amid ecological unraveling. What do acts of bearing witness offer the Earth and us in this moment? How does bearing witness go beyond mere observation to become an active, emotional, or ethical relationship with your landscape?

(5)

Andri says that our moment of ecological transformation is not only comparable to the greatest events in world history, but also in geological history. Our planet is undergoing a fundamental shift in what it *is*, and "that is a creation story or a destruction story." Discuss what emotions and thoughts arise in you as you contemplate how we are, through our collective actions and beliefs, changing and harming the very nature of the Earth. Share how your perception of climate change shifts when it's framed as a destruction story, and then a creation story. Can it be both?

(1)

Sit down with the oldest person that you know with the intention of having a conversation. This could be a parent, a teacher, a friend, grandparent, or local elder—all that is important is that you have a personal relationship with them. Make sure the person you are talking with is comfortable. If you don't know already, find out the year they were born and what age they are right now. Invite them to share what they know about the year they were born—any significant events, local and global, and also any personal circumstances. Ask any questions that allow you to get a good mental image of this year in your head.

(2)

Invite this person to share some stories from their childhood, prompting them to describe what life was like during this period. What did they do for fun or adventure? What are some of their most significant memories during this period? What were the social, cultural, and environmental issues and crises of this period? How did these affect their family or community? What was their understanding of climate change? Ask them to describe the landscape they grew up in. What was their relationship like with this landscape and how did they engage with it? Consider if this period feels like a short or a long time ago to you.

(3)

Calculate in what year you will become the same age that this person is now. Hold that date in your head and try to imagine what the world will be like in that year. What do you predict your life will be like? How will your home place be different? How do you think climate change will be impacting your landscape? What do you imagine will be some of the largest issues facing your community? How do you imagine your society will be responding? Does this date feel like a short or a long time away to you?

(4)

Think of the youngest person that you have a personal relationship with—perhaps your child, or a relative, or the child of a friend. Calculate in what year they will become the same age as the person you spoke with at the start of this practice. Conduct some research on what scientific data is predicting life to be like in that year, particularly environmentally. Can you fathom it? Does this year feel like a short or a long time away for you? How about when you compare it to the span of time between *this* moment and the childhood of the eldest person you know? Does your relationship with this young person help you hold empathy for this predicted future?

(5)

Taking this practice outwards into your life, stay present with the sense of intimacy with the past and the future that has been awoken by the personal relationships you have with different generations. As you make ethical and practical decisions that affect your landscape, and possibly its future, keep these relationships and your sense of empathy in your consciousness. See how it shifts and softens your way of being in relationship with this moment in time, the future, and your home.