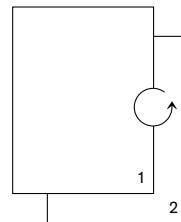


Shifting Landscapes Film Series

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. 1*

REFLECTION

*This section invites you to reflect on the themes explored in *The Nightingale's Song*. 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 NIGHTINGALE'S SONG

(1)

Much of Sam's practice is rooted in deep listening. In the film, we learn that before he first sung with the nightingale, he spent years simply listening to its piercing call. Reflect on the ways this is contrary to how we primarily interact with the living world at the moment. How might you quiet your own voice and create space for more-than-human beings' voices? How do you think listening to something with a depth of attention and over a long period of time changes your understanding of it? How can deep listening help open a relationship with birds and other creatures?

(2)

Sam's work centers the nightingale in our consciousness, reminding us of all the ways we are connected with, and influenced by, its presence in our landscapes. Pick a bird in your landscape and think about how your attention is drawn to it, as well as what may lead you to be forgetful of your relationship with it. Reflect on how this bird plays a part in your experience of this landscape. Does it feed in your backyard? Do you hear its song as you wake? Imagine some ways you could regularly center these moments in your daily awareness.

(3)

In the film, Sam expresses that it's only by falling back in love with the nightingale that we can actually begin the journey of its protection. Reflect on experiences where you have felt love or deep care for a more-than-human being—what ignited and sustained this feeling? How did this feeling of love influence the quality of attention you gave this being and the way you treated it? Consider what role love can play in species protection and changemaking right now?

(4)

Sam says that through singing with the nightingales, he has learned to be in their presence in a way that holds the concept of catastrophe together with the concept of love. What do you think Sam means by this? In what ways do you think holding this duality might affect how you respond to loss and destruction within the living world? How can experiencing love and grief simultaneously deepen your connection with your landscape?

(5)

Consider how Sam's practice of singing with the nightingale is an act of devotion to the living world. How does Sam honor the presence of these birds? How is Sam in reciprocity with the beauty they bring to his landscape? Reflect on what actions help you express devotion—contemplation, silence, meditation, or prayer? Consider how you could offer a devotional action towards something that you hold dear in your own landscape.

In *The Nightingale's Song* we meet Sam Lee, a British folk singer who joins nightingales in song during their mating season each spring. As climate change and development threaten their habitats, nightingales may disappear from England within fifty years. What would be forgotten, Sam asks, if we no longer heard the call of this beloved bird? The film follows Sam's journey of becoming a traditional folk singer; and follows him to the woods of southern England where he sings with nightingales as both an act of rebellion against their imminent extinction and an expression of love for the living world.

This film explores what it would mean if the nightingale and its song were lost from the English landscape. It draws attention to the musical vocabulary that nightingales share with humans; their influence on art; and the ancestral kinship that connects us with them—the vestiges of which are still profoundly present in our culture, storytelling, and emotional and physical understandings of certain landscapes. The film points to the irreversible implications of species loss, specifically the ancient relationships between human and more-than-human beings that could vanish with increasing rates of extinction. By honoring the ways previous generations heard the spirit of the land in the call of birds, Sam works with song and a practice of deep listening to nurture an embodied kinship with the nightingale that he hopes will lead to its protection.

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

(1)

In the film, Sam listens to the way song thrushes and robins honor each other's space and song, calling alongside, rather than overwhelming, the other's voice. The nightingale and Sam sing together in the same way. Discuss what we could learn from this way of listening and responding. Why does a genuine dialogue with the more-than-human world require our ears more than our voice?

(2)

Sam says in the film that our ancestors would listen into the spirit of the land and hear it in birdsong. While Sam notes that we collectively don't have the same level of interpretation as we once did—"we have stopped hearing nightingale"—share what you feel embodies the spirit of your landscape, even if we are not listening to or witnessing it as we once did. How would a renewed attention for these expressions of the land deepen a sense of connection with it?

(3)

We learn in the film that, in our lifetime, we may hear England's last nightingale. How might knowing that we could lose this creature from this land change our recognition of its presence? How does this awareness affect our appreciation of it right now? Should the nightingale disappear, what is the extent of our responsibility as the last generation to hear its call to ensure its significance is shared with those who come after us?

(4)

Responding to the possible extinction of the nightingale in England, Sam asks, "How do we memorialize the passing of a species, of a song, of a being not of our own? And are we able to? Are we prepared?" Share your response to this question and discuss what it could look like to memorialize not only the disappearance of a species, but the relationships and stories that vanish with it.

(5)

The film explores the need for kinship with other beings to be profoundly *felt* if we are to embody a role of stewardship: Sam says, "You can't protect what you don't know and what you're not in love with." Share what a felt relationship means to you, and how our experience of a relationship—whether emotionally, sensorily, or spiritually—shapes how we engage with it. Discuss how you think a feeling of love can influence what our stewardship for the living world looks like?

This practice is designed to bring you into a felt experience of the story of kinship with the more-than-human world that Sam offers. Make sure you have ample space and time to allow yourself to engage deeply with each prompt.

(1)

Bring your attention to a bird that belongs to the same landscape as you, and whose song is present when you begin this practice—during the dawn or evening chorus will be best. Sit, stand, or lay comfortably and spend some time first focusing on the inhale and exhale of your breath, and then attuning to your senses by paying close attention to what you can hear around you. Begin to listen specifically to the presence of your chosen bird. You might hear it singing or calling, or hear the rustling and scuffling of its feet or wings. Stay focused on a feeling of pure awareness of what you can hear. Try to frame each sound as a gift from the bird—as an invitation to listen to the beauty that is within your landscape.

(2)

Be attentive to how the bird's voice gives rise to emotion inside of you. Does its tone make you feel joyous? Does its call inspire melancholy? Identify the feeling as you listen and, with each warble, trill, and twitter, visualize this feeling swelling inside of you, spreading outwards from your center into the rest of your body. Take a moment to recognize how the song of this bird is affecting your inner senses—your emotions, the feeling in your heart—as well as your outer senses, and how this brings you into relationship with it.

(3)

From this space, seated in the emotion that has arisen, return to deep listening. Eyes closed, immersed in the sound, feel into the difference between how you were listening at the beginning of the practice and how you are listening now. How is the emotion evoked by the bird changing the way you listen to it? Are you listening with senses beyond the ears? What can you hear within the bird's voice that you didn't before? *Why* do you now want to listen?

(4)

Now that you have brought this creature into the center of your awareness, take some time to praise it. It needn't be complicated or formal—it could be as simple as speaking to the bird, out loud or silently, or offering a prayer of thanks for its presence in your day. You could also express this connection creatively: write a short poem, draw or sketch the creature. Another way to honor it is by sharing your experience with a friend, bringing the creature into their awareness too. What matters most is that the praise acknowledges and celebrates the growing relationship between you and the bird.