Eco-Imaginging Conservation: 3 Parts

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Introduction: This focus on eco-imagining conservation and wolf reintroduction - *how to listen to others' concerns and respond in a thoughtful way* - is in three parts. The first part is a warm-up that encourages physicality through the embodiment of wild animals. The second is a short-form activity that includes listening and responding to a partner with the goal of solving a dilemma. The third is a long-from improvisation that utilizes Image Theatre and Playback Theatre techniques to represent each stakeholder in the wolf reintroduction conversation in Colorado. Controversy can be explored and overcome through expressing empathy and embodiment. This activity was developed with the assumption that the participants would have little knowledge about wolf reintroduction, but can be adjusted depending on the context and the participants' expertise and background on wolf reintroduction, whether it be in a town-hall on the Western Slope or a college classroom. Strengthen empathy and communication to work towards the common goal of preserving the culture and land of Colorado.

Warm-Up: As a fun, low-stakes way to get students to feel comfortable "playing" in a classroom environment, instructors can utilize the Species Matchup Game. Attached at the end of this document is one set of ten display "cards" featuring native animals that are classified as either threatened or endangered. Instructors are encouraged to print out enough sets to account for the total number of students in the class (for example, a class of 20 would need two sets). Cards are passed out randomly, and students are then prompted to physically embody the animal on their card, looking for anyone else who has the same animal. In a class of 30, there would be three "Bald Eagle" cards, and ultimately the three students with that card would identify each other. Students are discouraged from talking or making animal sounds: the focus is on creating a physicality that mirrors the animal on the card and the characteristics described.

Students may feel like they need “permission” to allow themselves to explore these animals in authentic ways, so they should be empowered to be as realistic as possible. Students may also find that they are not quite familiar with the animal they’ve been assigned, and so the instructor should be available to help guide/answer any questions.

Once a student finds a match, they can make a verbalization of their animal to the student whom they think is that match. The second student then makes their own verbalization back, which will confirm if the first student was correct in their guess.

Once every student has been matched, the instructor should give each group a few minutes to discuss what they discovered (a form of “Pair-and-Share”). Questions to consider might be: How did it feel to embody a wild animal? Did you have personal experience with your animal? What was it about your march’s embodiment that spoke to you? If time permits, a quick discussion about the inherent biases and animalistic stereotypes in portraying these animals might be fruitful. Yes, wolves do “howl at the moon,” but they also nurture their young, protect their homes and hunt. Allowing students to see and embody these animals as more than just superficial caricatures will open the doors towards the empathy that the rest of this lesson plan attempts to foster.

Endangered Animal Facts Cards

Short Form: This section gets students listening to another person's perspective, validating their beliefs, and building onto the conversation by adding their own take on the subject through a "Yes, And" activity. "Yes, And" is a common practice in improv - you accept what your scene partner offers and support them by adding your own suggestion. Here, the principles of "Yes, And" are used to encourage productive dialogue in conflict. Students can either remain in the pairs they found during the warm-up, or if necessary be reassigned.

The first exercise begins with a simple, non-controversial prompt such as "Plan a camping trip". One student will begin by telling their partner their suggestion to which the partner will respond with "No," followed by a different offer.

EXAMPLE:

> **A:** I think we should plan our camping trip for Rocky Mountain National Park.
> **B:** No, there are too many red ants there for me. How about we go glamping in Vail?
> **A:** No, I like the idea of roughing it. How about a secluded AirBnB where we can sleep outside?
> **B:** No, I've been feeling lonely lately, so I want to be around people.

In this exercise, no consideration is given to an offer as it is being rejected. Students should avoid feeling "empathetic" towards the offer, but rather center their own desires. Generally, each group should allow for one initial offer and three "no" responses, as in the example above. If time permits, each pairing should have their conversation in front of the rest of the class, with no time to plan for what they will say. It is important to stress that the counter-offers don't necessarily need to make logical sense: the focus of this activity is on "saying no." After students go through this activity for 1-2 minutes they will realize that it is rather difficult to successfully plan something if all the ideas are shot down with "no".

Bring the group back together and discuss the problems of this communication. Sample prompts might include, "How does it feel to be told 'No,'" and "Did you feel that your opinions were valued in this exchange?"
Next, students will go back with their partners and "Plan your perfect national park (money/space/practicality not a factor)". Instead of saying "No" to their partner they say "Yes, but …". This statement has the same effect as no but has the appearance of being more agreeable, and students will find that once again they won't be able to successfully plan the park.

EXAMPLE:

> **A:** I think our park should only have species native to Colorado.

B: Yes, but if this is a learning opportunity for visitors, we should expand our scope as much as possible.
A: Yes, but if we have too many animals the costs will skyrocket.
B: Yes, but costs aren't nearly as important as the welfare of the wildlife.

Finally, introduce the question "Plan how to reintroduce wolves into the Colorado ecosystem." These improv conversations should not be tied to one of the four stakeholder groups in the Long Form exercise, but rather general thoughts based on class readings. If students are not prepared to engage in a quick dialogue about wolf reintroduction, it is suggested that content be assigned prior to this lesson, that all students may be on equal footing for this game.

EXAMPLE:

A: We should reintroduce wolves into the Colorado ecosystem by acquiring them from Oregon.
B: Yes, and, we should ensure that Rocky Mountain Park is prepared for the reintroduction.
A: Yes, and, we can create safeguards to protect the land and cattle of ranchers.
B: Yes, and, we would track and monitor their movements in this new environment, prepared to adjust our plans if needed.

After these three exercises, students should be engaged in a discussion about the differences between "No," "Yes, But" and "Yes, And." Students might acknowledge the difficulties in having their ideas be dismissed versus the acceptance and agreement of those ideas. The key takeaway from this exercise is that acceptance builds empathy, and that equitable solutions to the concerns of multiple stakeholders can only be found through mutual understanding.

Long Form: The reintroduction of wolves into Colorado is a complex endeavor that involves multiple stakeholders. Generally, the needs of each of these constituencies are unique, and their concerns must be given equal weight (regardless of their place within capitalism): not just being heard but also being acknowledged. Building on the previous "Yes, And" exercise, students are tasked with developing common talking points for their own constituency.

Prior to the day when this exercise will be executed, instructors are encouraged to split up their class into four groups:

- Ranchers (rural)
- Environmentalists (urban)
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Indigenous Tribes (*Embody an advocate with indigenous people, NOT an indigenous person)

These groupings should be made well in advance of the lesson, with an assignment to research and prepare to represent the interests of their particular group. For example, the "Ranchers" group may read a Review of Policy Research paper, while the CPW website has significant information about the challenges and rewards state employees face. For maximum impact, students might self-select/be assigned a perspective that they don't naturally gravitate towards.

On the day of the lesson, students are tasked with embodying the caricature of their group, using their research, to roleplay different dilemmas. Some example dilemmas might include:

- **Tribal Dilemma:** Tribal groups are concerned about how wolves are being respected and not treated as units to be managed.
- **Rural Dilemma:** Rural farmers are upset about the loss of cattle and money due to the introduction of wolves.
- **Urban Dilemma:** Urban conservationists are concerned about the environmental impacts that have come from the lack of wolves.
- **CPW Dilemma:** CPW is concerned about how we manage natural migration of wolves coming/going between surrounding states

This exercise begins with a group voicing a dilemma, and then asking the other three groups to create a "living statue" to embody that dilemma, from the perspective(s) of that group. For example, in the above CPW dilemma, Rural members might create an image of wolves running wild across the space, while the Urban group might create an image of tracking animals via a computer. Give students 3-5 minutes to come up with their tableau, then have them demonstrate these tableaus one-by-one. Upon completion of each dilemma, the initial group may offer a response to each tableau ("We felt this truly demonstrated our concerns" or "We think you may have missed an opportunity to demonstrate X."). The goal of this exercise is to challenge students to consider multiple perspectives on a single issue, honor each perspective, and build

connection through disagreement. The success of this activity is dependent on the commitment of each stakeholder group in genuinely interpreting the concerns of the other groups.

“Living statues” are static/pseudo-static physical poses created by students to tell a story. There are no limitations to what can be created, except that no physical props should be incorporated. A tableau can include living and non-sentient items (consider one student playing a wolf, while two others create a lake or fountain). Realism is less important than intention in this exercise. Visual examples of this activity can be found in the video below.

Debrief: Following this embodiment exercise, students will shed their personas and the facilitator will offer the following questions to conclude the activity:

- What was it like to consider and argue from a position that differs from your own? What did you learn?
- How did it feel to see the issue represented in the tableau?
- How did it feel to embody the issue through tableau?
- Do you feel that any issues/ concerns weren’t represented in the activity?

Feel free to add or remove questions based on the needs of the group. The primary purpose of the debrief is to highlight the importance of acknowledging and accepting others’ concerns in conflict, while a secondary purpose might be to discover solutions to some of the voiced concerns, finding ways for these stakeholder groups to work together.

Here’s a Vimeo link that provides examples of each exercise:
https://vimeo.com/1127332464/dfea3ad127?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci