

Being Caribou by Karsten Heuer

Film documentary directed by LeAnne Allison and
Diana Wilson

This teaching guide was prepared for the documentary by
Deanne Esdale for the National Film Board of Canada © 2009



being caribou

STUDY GUIDE



A NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA PRODUCTION



BEING CARIBOU: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF DISAPPEARING NATURAL HABITATS

Subjects: Social Studies/Aboriginal Studies, Language Arts, Media Studies, Geography

Grades: Elementary to Junior High School

THE FILM

Husband and wife team Karsten Heuer [wildlife biologist] and Leanne Allison [media environmentalist] follow a herd of 120,000 caribou on foot across 1,500 km of Arctic tundra. In following the herd's migration, the couple hopes to raise awareness of the threats to the caribou's survival. Along the way they brave severe Arctic weather, icy rivers, hordes of mosquitoes and a very hungry grizzly bear. Dramatic footage and video diaries combine to provide an intimate perspective of an epic expedition. Produced by the National Film Board, 2004. Length: 72 min 19s.

THE FILMMAKERS

Leanne Allison became a filmmaker via a crash-course in documentary filmmaking, after 15 years as an outdoor guide. Produced by the NFB, '*Being Caribou*' is her first film. The film won the 2006 Gemini Award for best documentary, Best Environmental Film at the Telluride Mountain Film Festival and Best Environment and Conservation Film at the 2005 Japan International Wildlife Film Festival.

Karsten Heuer trained as a wildlife biologist and warden in Canadian parks. A gifted public speaker and author of books for adults and children, he is the recipient of the Wilburforce Conservation Leadership Award, the Outdoor National Book Award (2006), and the Banff Mountain Book Festival's Grand Prize.

Leanne and Karsten met over thirty years ago in Calgary, Alberta. Eventually they married and set off to honeymoon with the herd during the making of '*Being Caribou*.' They now live in Canmore, Alberta. More here: www.beingcaribou.com/necessaryjourneys/whoarewe.html

THE STUDY GUIDE

Shaped around the message of raising awareness for disappearing natural habitat, the guide offers chapters, timing notes and sample discussions that explore how individuals can make a positive impact on the environment, culture and species conservation.

CONTEXT AND OUTCOMES

Referencing chapters of the documentary film, '*Being Caribou*,' the award-winning environmental film about threatened natural habitats for caribou herds in the north, teachers and students will understand the process of migration, the impact of disturbances to natural order, and the interconnectedness of species alongside the challenges posed by industry, development and politics.



CONTENTS AND TIMING

CHAPTER 1:

Part 1: Interconnectedness and Creating Public Awareness - 4 mins. [0:00-4:35]

Part 2: Interconnectedness and Creating Public Awareness - 6 mins. [45:20-51:30]

CHAPTER 2:

Cultural Awareness and Aboriginal Setting - 5 mins. [4:40-9:45]

Note: Teachers please be aware that a caribou is shot and skinned in this segment.

CHAPTER 3:

Part 1: Policies and Development - 2.30 mins. [30:00-32:30]

Part 2: Policies and Development - 12 mins. [1:02-end]

CHAPTER 4:

Exploration and Discovery - 8 mins [22:10-30:00] and - 12 mins. [32:30-45:20]

CHAPTER 5:

Relationships and Communication - 10 mins. [41:30-52:00] and - 8 mins. [22:10-30:00]

CHAPTER 6:

Habitat and Ecology - 12 mins. [9:45-22:00] and - 8 mins. [22:00-30:00]

Credits (3 min.)



THEMES AND RELATED TOPICS

CHAPTER 1

PART 1 AND 2: INTERCONNECTEDNESS

As the filmmakers journey alongside the caribou, and their understanding for the land grows, they pose a critical question about how we fit into the balance. Humans are a part of the ecosystem, as are the fox, bear and chickadee. Systems, equilibrium and balance are all found in nature in interconnected ways.

PART 1 AND 2: CREATING PUBLIC AWARENESS

The filmmakers have chosen the documentary medium to help tell the story of the migratory caribou herds and their threatened natural habitat. They feel strongly that something is at stake for these animals and this land.

Discussion questions before screening:

- What is an ecosystem? What is an example of an ecosystem?
- What is controversy? What does it mean to say something is “at stake?”
- What is activism? What do we hear about activism in the news?
- Who is an activist that we have known through history? Current day?
- What makes us care about something?
- What are caribou and what do you know about them?
- Find out more about the filmmakers, Leanne Allison and Karsten Heuer here: www.beingcaribou.com. When did they make this film? How did they become interested in outdoor activities and disappearing wild spaces?



Discussion questions after screening:

- How did the film show us that humans and animals are connected?
- How has life for Randall’s community changed? How will it change if the caribou don’t survive?
- Do the filmmakers change during the making of the film? How, why?
- What is the outcome of this documentary? What are some of the impacts?
- How are the filmmakers trying to change people’s minds?
- What are some things you can do in your community to help a cause that you care about?



Sample activities:

- In small groups, research any information you can find about the Caribou. Where do they live? Trace their migratory routes on a map of Canada and the USA and present it to class.
- Explore the predator and prey relationship starting with some scenes in the film. What animals are at the top of the food chain? Which are near the bottom? Why do they rely on each other for balance?
- Like the rock cycle and it's loop of cause and effect, how could you apply this to the relationships between humans, animals and landscapes? Demonstrate with a diagram.
- There are many people in British Columbia who have stories to share about their perspectives on the environment or on activism and development. Invite a guest to class, or via video conferencing, or conduct an interview with a family member of someone who remembers growing up in your community about changes they have seen in the environment or ways that they have changed their mind about something. Use some means of recording this interview and share it at a school event.
- In groups, develop a project on 'cultural perspectives' or on the meaning of 'land' combining images and sound in a multi-media presentation and present it to the class. After the presentation, reflect on the decisions that were made in shaping this presentation, and evaluate your presentation.
- There are many examples of interconnected ways humans and animals have relationships to the land in the film.
 - o Individually or in small groups, create a painting, drawing, or other work of art that represents some aspect of biodiversity, ecology or interconnectedness and present it to the class.
 - o After the presentation, reflect on the decisions that were made in shaping this presentation, and evaluate your presentation.



CHAPTER 2: CULTURAL AWARENESS AND ABORIGINAL SETTING

The filmmakers begin and end their journey with the Gwich'n Nation in Old Crow, Yukon. Through elders and locals we learn how to track the caribou, and about the traditional ways that caribou are used for food, shelter and clothing.

Discussion questions before screening

- Where is Old Crow? Identify it on the map.
- What do you know about the Aboriginal community's relationship with the caribou?
- What are other examples of people's connections to the land or sea animals of their regions?
- How do these communities show respect for nature and the cycles of life?
- What has changed about how traditional peoples gather food and build their homes?

Discussion questions after screening

- What are traditional uses and ceremonies around caribou hunting for the Gwich'n?
- Randall teaches the filmmakers about listening to their dreams. What are some ways that the filmmakers learn to apply his advice?
- What were some of the ceremonies that the filmmakers experienced in Old Crow?
- What is significant about the seasons changing in the North?

Sample activities:

- Communities like Randall's live on the land and have been reliant on migrations for thousands of years to exist. Explore these ideas through interviewing elders or having a guest speaker.
- "Be prepared!" is Randall's warning. In small groups discuss ways that the main characters prepare for and adapt to the environment. What are ways that you adapt to changes in your environment?
- Randall also advises the filmmakers to be prepared for the unexpected and stay calm! Think of a time in your life when something unexpected happened and how you responded to it. Could you have used his advice?
- In small groups, research any information you can find about traditional uses for the caribou. What are they used for? Make a multimedia presentation using artifacts from traditional communities and their uses.
- Find out more about aboriginal filmmakers, such as Alanis Obomsawin at <http://nfb.ca/webextension/alanis-obomsawin/>. Watch the interview clip called "The Filmmaker's Life and Works" [5mins]
 - o How did she get started in filmmaking?
 - o What significant Canadian award was presented to Alanis Obomsawin? Why?



CHAPTER 3: POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENT

This film was made in 2003, during the Presidency of George W. Bush. Throughout the film, the filmmakers refer to this political figure as having power to make decisions about the outcome for the caribou. During the film we learn that development of endangered habitat is a global issue, linked to industry relations, drilling for oil and human demand for resources.

Discussion questions before screening

- How are policies on land use developed?
- What kinds of decisions do presidents and prime ministers make?
- What is sustainability? What does it mean?

Discussion questions after screening

- What do we learn about the significance of borders?
- How do the filmmakers use humour to tell their story?
- How can we plan for the future in ways that are balanced?
- What are some ways that the caribou and the oil industry might live together?



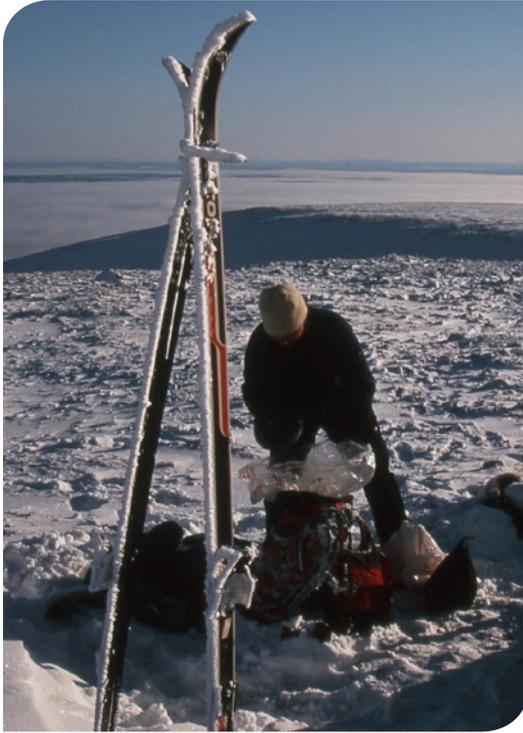
Sample activities:

- Sometimes leaders are disliked by people because often leaders have power to make decisions, and not everyone agrees with them. This film is about such a situation. The filmmakers believe that the decision to drill for oil is going to devastate a wild population of animals, and they want to make an impact and influence events. Can you think of a time that you wanted to influence your parent or teachers of something you wanted or believed in? What was the outcome? How did it feel?
- The filmmakers are disappointed when they don't feel heard in Washington. In small groups do a research project to find out ways that the film has had an influence on the environmental movement since the film was released.
- In small groups, find out what has happened with the caribou herd today? What is happening with the oil fields in this area and other areas of Canada. Present a multimedia project indicating different areas of Canada that have natural resources and share this land with animals and humans.



CHAPTER 4: EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY

The filmmakers travel overland for 1,500 kms and spend over 100 days in the wild. Along the way they are observing the caribou, and trying to learn from the land and the people. They also learn about themselves.



Discussion questions before screening

- What is an explorer?
- What are the ways people discover new things?
- What do you know about the northern area of BC/Yukon?
- What do you know about the caribou?

Discussion questions after screening

- What are some of the ways that the filmmakers practice non-intrusive field exploration? Journals, documenting.
- What does it take to survive a trek with the caribou? Think of a time when you have done physical activity and pushed yourself to your limit. What is the experience like?
- Could you imagine 'being' a caribou?
- The filmmakers discover that they are "becoming caribou" – almost becoming part of the ecosystem. They have a run in with bears and they get swept into the migration of the massive caribou herd. How would you have reacted to these challenges? Is it thrilling or scary? What kinds of inner resources have the filmmakers developed to help them survive, such as listening, calmness, trust?

Sample activities:

- If you could explore anywhere in the world, where would it be? In small groups prepare a list of supplies and an itinerary for 5 days and present it to the class.
- What different people have contributed to the development and exploration of your community? See the NFB Across Cultures web site at <http://www.onf.ca/duneculturealautre/index.php?lg=en>, which identifies some NFB films that document contributions made to Canada by different ethnocultural communities.
- What multiple perspectives have contributed to the development of your community? Discuss examples in your community where tradition has been blended with modern culture.
- Consider the impacts of globalization on communities and regions.
 - o Using a variety of research methods, identify and view a number of films that present some aspect of the effects of globalization on individuals and/or communities.
 - o Then, individually or in small groups, select one film or a clip from a film to present to the class, and lead a discussion about the similarities and differences of the effects in the film to those in your community or your life.
 - o After the presentation, reflect on the decisions that were made in shaping this presentation, and evaluate your presentation.



CHAPTER 5: RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION

The filmmakers are a married couple who set off together to trek with the caribou through severe conditions, isolation and great distances. They are both passionate environmentalists and have great tenacity for the challenges they face.

Discussion questions before screening

- Identify an awareness that there are various different types of people in the community.
- How can respect for others be demonstrated?

Discussion questions after screening

- What are some of the challenges the filmmakers face during this segment? How do they handle it? Describe what kinds of characteristics they have that help them to endure this adventure. Who would you choose to be on an adventure with you and why? Imagine spending 100 days with one other person? What kinds of communication skills would be useful?
- How do the filmmakers 'embody' the concept of 'being' something else?
- What are some funny ways that the filmmakers deal with their fears and the unknown?

Sample activities:

- Using drama activities, in small groups, have students learn about trust with each other.
- Using drama activities, in small groups, have students practice listening activities as they communicate information in different styles. Discuss and debrief the experiences.
- Using drama activities, have a potluck party but instead of bringing food each person comes with an emotional state that effects everyone else there. Work with the range of emotions and notice the impact that one person's emotional state can have on others.



CHAPTER 6: HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Evolution over thousands of years helped determine caribou routes and calving grounds. We can learn a lot from nature about interconnectedness and the delicate balance of our ecosystems.

Discussion questions before screening

- What is a migratory route? Why do animals migrate?
- What is biodiversity? What are species?
- What are some species that are extinct or endangered? Why?
- What are some ways that we have witnessed the power of nature and its elements?
- What are some ways that humans have protected themselves from nature? What are some ways that humans have tried to change nature's natural patterns?

Discussion questions after screening

- What is special about the porcupine caribou herd?
- What is the land area that is being threatened in the film? Why is it important?
- What are some other habitats that are being threatened in the world?
- How do we learn respect for nature in this film?
- What are the current plans for the land and why does this concern the filmmakers?
- What are some of the threats to animals in the natural world? Development, human encroachment, urban sprawl, population growth, reliance on natural resources.

Sample activities:

- Biodiversity is a new word in our culture and we now recognize May 22 as "International Day of Biological Diversity." What can your class or school do in your neighbourhood to raise awareness for biodiversity on this day?
- Check out the NFB Citizenshift Biodiversity page at <http://citizen.nfb.ca/biodiversity> which has resources on 'Being Caribou,' including extra interviews with the filmmakers and about how you can get involved in social change.
- Project Caribou is an educator's guide all about the wild caribou of North America. http://www.taiga.net/projectcaribou/support_materials.html#clicking and here: <http://publications.wildbc.org/products/project-caribou-an-educators-guide-to-wild-caribou-of-north-america>
- Throughout the journey, the filmmakers need to carry the food they consume everyday. They live lightly and pack their garbage out. What would you have to change if all the garbage cans were removed at your school? What are 5 things you would do to cope? In small groups present on recycling of a single plastic water bottle or other typical item.



ONLINE CONTENT

NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA WEB SITES

<http://www3.nfb.ca/collection/films/fiche/?id=51499>

RECOMMENDED NFB FILMS WITH ABORIGINAL CONTENT

<http://www3.nfb.ca/enclasse/doclens/visau/index.php>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<http://www.beingcaribou.com/necessaryjourneys/whoarewe.html>

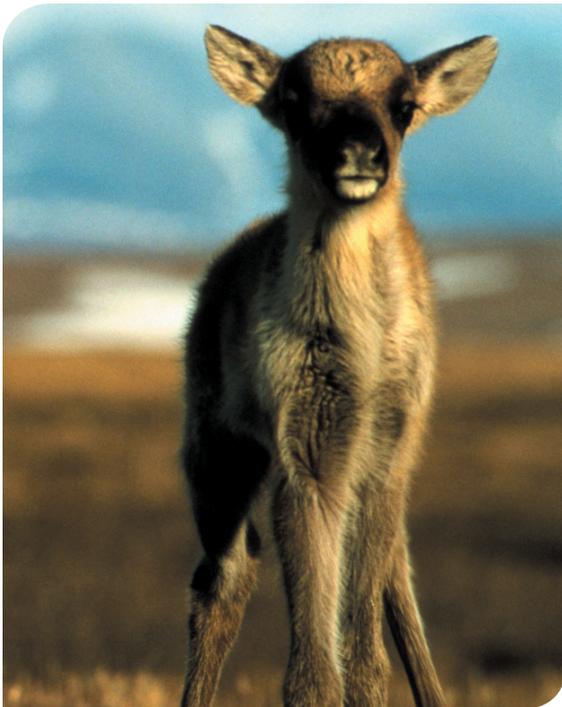
<http://www.beingcaribou.com>

<http://www.onf.ca/duneculturealautre/index.php?lg=en>

<http://citizen.nfb.ca/biodiversity>

http://www.taiga.net/projectcaribou/support_materials.html#clicking

<http://publications.wildbc.org/products/project-caribou-an-educators-guide-to-wild-caribou-of-north-america>



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