

# Activism and the Environment in *Hard Road of Hope*

## About Hard Road of Hope

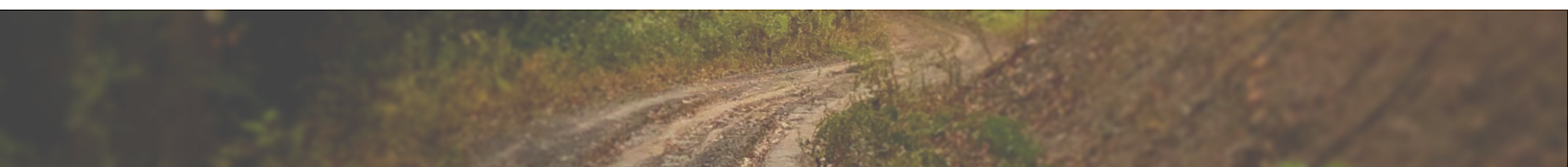
Once the home to the rise and reign of King Coal, West Virginia is now in the crosshairs of a transition of power: from coal to gas. In the midst of this ecologically violent shift, communities are being ripped apart physically, economically and emotionally. *Hard Road of Hope* examines the tumultuous past of the third poorest state in the nation, and amplifies the voices of West Virginians who are struggling to survive while fighting to protect their home. Filmmaker Eleanor Goldfield interviews many Appalachian-area activists including Paul Corbit Brown (President and Chair, Keepers of the Mountain), Chad Cordell (Coordinator, Kanawha Forest Coalition), and Jen Deerinwater (Executive Director, Crushing Colonialism). These activists are working to preserve the environment they love, and the resources their community needs to survive: clean water, air, and the plants and animals they farm and consume.

## Discussion Questions

1. Define activism in your own words. What is an activist? Who is an activist? In what ways are the Appalachians featured in *Hard Road of Hope* “activists?”
2. Near the end of the documentary, former coal miner, Terry Steele, says: “Everything that you do in your life every day, is political, whether you like it or whether you don't.” What does he mean by this? What are some elements of your life that are political, even if they don't seem so at first glance?
3. How does the film represent the relationship between the environment, the economy, and culture, and how these tensions play out locally in communities and families throughout Appalachia - and around the nation?

## Activities

1. Go to your local science museum and identify exhibits that deal with water, fracking, and mountaintop removal. Take note of what issues are and are not represented in the museum. Share what you find with your class, and write a letter to your representatives about what should be included in future exhibits.
2. Research one of the activist groups from the film: Keepers of the Mountain, Kanawha Forest Coalition, or Crushing Colonialism. With a group of your classmates, work together to raise awareness about the organization of your choice. Make a presentation to share with your classmates, start a fundraiser, or design your own project to bring attention to the issues the activist group is confronting.
3. Research how fracking impacts the environment. Consider people who rely on fracking as a source of income for their families - how could you change their perspective on the issue? Now research a form of renewable energy such as solar, wind, geothermal, or hydropower. Construct an argument for a community that relies on fracking to consider one of these forms of renewable energy instead. Tie this research into the narrative presented in the film *Hard Road of Hope*.





# Curriculum Standards

## *Common Core and Next Generation Science*

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### CCSS.ELA - Literacy RH. 9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

### CCSS.ELA - Literacy RH. 9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

### CCSS.ELA - Literacy RH. 11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

### HS-ETS1-1 Engineering Design

Analyze a major global challenge to specify qualitative and quantitative criteria and constraints for solutions that account for societal needs and wants.

### HS-ETS1-2 Engineering Design

Design a solution to a complex real-world problem by breaking it down into smaller, more manageable problems that can be solved through engineering.



# Identity and the Environment in *Hard Road of Hope*

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## Discussion Questions

1. In the opening of the film, there are two quotes offered side by side: "We are the keepers of the mountains. Love them or leave them, just do not destroy them." and, "Every male in the history of my family here, since we've been here on this land, has been a coal miner." What do these quotes imply about the culture and identity of West Virginia? How might this somewhat disparate culture impact the way that the environment is both protected, and exploited, in West Virginia?
2. A source of great cultural pride for many of the West Virginians featured in this film is the history of the "Rednecks" - organizers who crossed cultural, racial, and economic barriers to unionize the coal miners in the 1920s. How does this history reflect back on the identity of West Virginians in a positive light?
3. Discuss the following quote from Chad Cordell of the Kanawha Forest Coalition as it relates to identity, community, and culture in the film *Hard Road of Hope*: "We live in a culture here in Southern Appalachia... built on isolation and exploitation and abuse. We live in a culture that has, in almost every way possible, destroyed community."

## Activities

1. Analyze the lyrics from the 1877 West Virginian folk song "Only A Miner." What do the lyrics suggest about the region's culture? Whose story is this song telling? Who is this song "speaking" to? What can you learn about WV identity and culture, and the role that mining plays in it, by analyzing this song?
2. Choose 4 of the West Virginians featured in *Hard Road of Hope* and create a "Character Train" for each of them. On a piece of paper, make a line of 5 boxes, linked like boxcars in a train, one "train" for each person. Label each "car" as follows: 1- Self," 2- "Family", 3- "Community," 4- "Work," and 5- "Culture." In each box, list words that describe that aspect of the person's identity, until their entire "Character Train" is complete. Then, compare the trains. How are these character traits a reflection or a result of their West Virginian culture? What did you learn about West Virginia, its people, its industry, and its unique culture, by completing this exercise? If you have time, complete a "Character Train" for yourself. What does your train say about your own culture and identity?
3. Reflect on the way that the landscape of West Virginia is represented in *Hard Road of Hope* - both in images as well as words. How do the landscape and the environment interact with the people who live there? Then, consider the landscape and environment of your hometown. How are the people of your hometown inextricably linked to the landscape? What can you learn about your community from studying the landscape that surrounds it?

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### HS-ESS3-2 Earth and Human Activity

Evaluate competing design solutions for developing, managing, and utilizing energy and mineral resources based on cost-benefit ratios.

### D2.Civ.6.9-12 Civic and Political Institutions

Critique relationships among governments, civil societies, and economic markets.