

Readers' Theater:
*Using drama to understand experiences
with environmental health issues*

Lost: Sanctuary

Written by Richard Robeson



Exchange Project

BECAUSE OUR ENVIRONMENT AFFECTS OUR HEALTH

This script is intended to be a dramatic representation of a community experience. As such, some statements by the characters may represent controversial beliefs that warrant further examination in discussion sessions. Whenever possible, to further inform the dialogue, the Exchange Project will provide additional information on the issue or links to other sources via the website: www.ExchangeProject.unc.edu

The Exchange Project is designed to increase understanding of the social, legal, and ethical implications of environmental health issues and facilitate dialogue among stakeholders from communities, government agencies, and professionals about these complex issues. The Exchange Project was established with funding from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and is a collaborative effort among researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, community organizations such as the North Carolina Environmental Justice Network and North Carolina Fair Share, and attorneys from the Land Loss Prevention Project.

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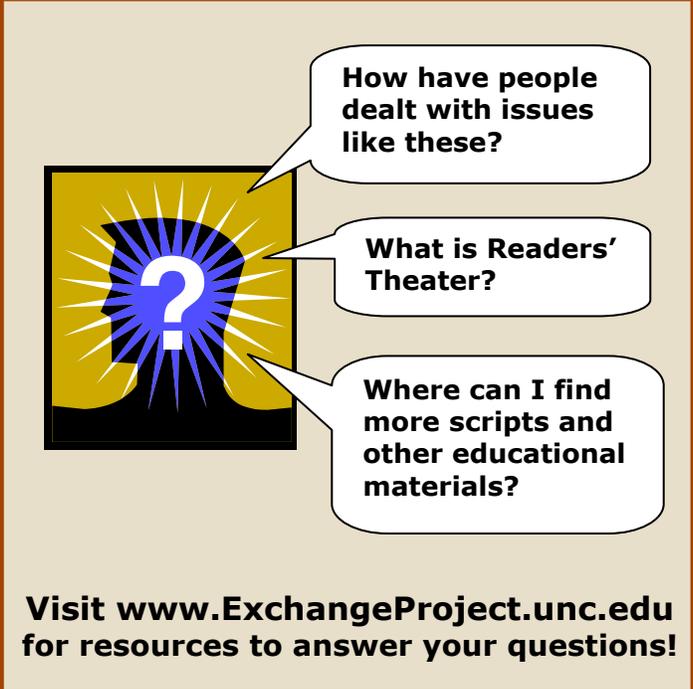
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Background

This script is based on an actual situation in Washington County, North Carolina from 2003 to 2007. Names are fictitious and characters are composites representing those people involved in the real situations.

Lost: Sanctuary presents the perspectives of various people confronted with construction in rural North Carolina of an outlying landing field (OLF) for Naval air carriers to practice landing and taking off. Environmental groups and residents of the area express their concerns about how the OLF will impact their lives and the surrounding wildlife. A navy representative and a resident of the area discuss the impact on national security of not building the OLF. Audience members are left to decide how they feel about the issue.



How have people dealt with issues like these?

What is Readers' Theater?

Where can I find more scripts and other educational materials?

Visit www.ExchangeProject.unc.edu for resources to answer your questions!

To learn how different communities in North Carolina have dealt with concerns about environmental concerns and disagreement within their communities, see the list of "Real People, Real Stories" in the Related Links page at the back of this booklet.

Check out the discussion questions after the script!

Take 5 minutes to get people thinking about the issue before the performance

- Have you ever lived near an airport or landing field? What was it like?
- What should the government think about before taking land for a project?

LOST: SANCTUARY

RICHARD ROBESON
Exchange Project

LYNETTE JONES – Host/moderator of “Speaking Of...,” a radio call-in program.

In-studio guests:

CAPTAIN WILLIAM ROBINSON – U.S. Navy spokesperson.

DR. ADAM DAVIS – Biologist, member of Defenders of Wildlife.

Callers:

BRENDA – A citizen in favor of the Outlying Landing Field (OLF).

ANNE – A citizen against the OLF.

PATRICIA – A county commissioner.

BERNADETTE – A member of a military family.

KEISHA – A realtor.

JANEEN – A farmer.

Suggested props: Tables and chairs set up as “studio” for radio call-in show, telephone set off in a corner that people “calling in” can use

Scenes: Studio where “Speaking of...” radio call-in show is being recorded

SCENE – “Speaking Of...,” a radio call-in program

[Lynette, the Captain, and Dr. Davis sit at a table (their studio). Other callers to the radio program can use a phone off to one side]

LYNETTE

This is “Speaking Of...” and I’m LYNETTE JONES. Today, we’re speaking of the Navy’s plans to build an outlying landing field, or OLF, in Eastern North Carolina. There’s been quite a bit of controversy since the Navy announced its intention to build a practice landing site down east. With us today to discuss the OLF issue are CAPTAIN WILLIAM ROBINSON, Navy pilot and spokesperson for the Navy, and DR. ADAM DAVIS, a biologist with Defenders of Wildlife. Welcome to you both.

CAPTAIN, tell us: what is the OLF and why do we need it?

CAPTAIN

Well, as I’m sure you and your listeners know, Navy and Marine pilots, unlike aviators in the Air Force or the Army, have to take off from and land on aircraft carriers. It takes vast amounts of time, money, and – let’s face it – real estate, to train our pilots to do the job they have to do. They’re the best in the world; and in order for them to remain so, their training has to be best.

LYNETTE

DR. DAVIS, your organization is opposed to the OLF and is actively seeking to prevent its being built. Do you disagree with CAPTAIN ROBINSON's point about the need for this type of practice for Navy and Marine aviators?

DR. DAVIS

No, LYNETTE. Nobody I know believes that pilots don't need practice. We do question, however, their claim that the area they want to use, which will take up 23,000 acres of Washington County, and 7,000 acres of Beaufort County, is the best of all possible choices. In fact, we think it's the worst choice they could've made . . .

LYNETTE

[interrupting] Really – the worst? Why?

DR. DAVIS

It would devastate that part of North Carolina in so many ways, I have trouble imagining why the Navy thought it was a good idea in the first place. It would destroy migratory habitat for, literally, hundreds of thousands of tundra swans, geese and other waterfowl. Basically, they want to build a landing field right next to a wildlife sanctuary.

LYNETTE

CAPTAIN, why does the Navy think this location is the best one available?

CAPTAIN

Several reasons, LYNETTE. The area, which the Navy calls Site C, is ideally located between Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where the majority of the new F/A 18 Super Hornet aircraft are based; and Cherry Point Marine Air Station, in Havelock, North Carolina, where the remaining two squadrons will be based. This site is also better for bird strikes.

LYNETTE

[interrupting] Bird strikes? What is a bird strike?

CAPTAIN

A bird strike is a mid-air collision between an aircraft and a bird. Such a collision is obviously bad for the bird, but it can also be life-or-death for the aviator. A jet engine doesn't perform very well when a bird gets sucked into it, and a malfunctioning engine is a pretty serious situation for a pilot.

LYNETTE

So, there's less of a problem with bird strikes at Site C?

CAPTAIN

Yes. That's what our studies indicate.

LYNETTE

DR. DAVIS, CAPTAIN ROBINSON says there's a lower probability of bird strikes at Site C than at the other locations the Navy has been considering. Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't one of your group's main objections that bird strikes will be a bigger problem here than at other possible sites?

DR. DAVIS

Exactly, LYNETTE. I don't know where the Navy got the study the CAPTAIN just referred to. But all of our own studies -- not to mention what the Navy would learn if they just looked out the window -- tell us just the opposite. The part of North Carolina the Navy wants to seize is within five miles of the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, which is the winter home of well over 100,000 tundra swans, snow geese, and other waterfowl. It's not at all clear to me how the Navy can say that bird strikes aren't an issue.

LYNETTE

Let's bring some of our listeners into the discussion. Our number is 1-800-S-P-E-A-K-O-F; 1-800-SPEAK OF. Let's go first to ... BRENDA, in Plymouth, North Carolina. Hello, you're on the air.

BRENDA

Hello...

LYNETTE

Yes, you're on the air, BRENDA. What do you think about what you've heard so far?

BRENDA

Well, I don't see why a few ducks should stand in the way of having our military as prepared as possible to defend our way of life.

LYNETTE

So you say, BRENDA, "So what if some birds get inconvenienced?"

BRENDA

That's right. Better them than us. If terrorists get past our military because we're unprepared, some unhappy birds will be the least of our problems.

LYNETTE

But what about DR. DAVIS' argument, BRENDA? We're not talking about "a few ducks," after all, but a huge population of tundra swans....

BRENDA

[interrupting] It doesn't make any difference how many there are. People would come first if there were a million of them.

LYNETTE

Thanks for your call, BRENDA. *[pause]* What about BRENDA's point, DR DAVIS – that your group wants to put “a few ducks,” as she puts it, ahead of the national security interests of this country.

DR. DAVIS

As you pointed out, LYNETTE, we're talking about more than a few ducks. And we're just as patriotic as the caller. But we don't believe that concrete and progress are always the same thing. Besides, our way of life, in my view, includes being responsible stewards of the environment. We're the most advanced civilization in the history of the world. Surely a wildlife sanctuary isn't the difference between winning or losing the fight against terrorism. Our state has 70 to 80 percent of the entire Atlantic coast population of tundra swans, and 25 percent of them winter at Pocosin N-W-R.

LYNETTE

Pocosin N-W-R – that's Pocosin National Wildlife Refuge.

DR. DAVIS

Right – Pocosin National Wildlife Refuge.

LYNETTE

CAPTAIN ROBINSON, what about these immense populations of birds? How can the risk of bird strikes be minimal with the Navy competing with so many animals for air space?

CAPTAIN

Well, we've concluded that even though the populations are quite large, the problem of bird strikes at Site C would be manageable.

LYNETTE

How is a problem like that manageable?

CAPTAIN

First of all, the animals don't live there year-round; so for half the year, the problem solves itself. Second, they're attracted to the crops that are grown in the area. Once the Navy acquires the land, those crops won't be planted.

LYNETTE

Is it as simple as that, CAPTAIN – just roll up the Welcome mat, and the problem is solved?

DR. DAVIS

[breaking in] Nothing is that simple, LYNETTE, and this certainly isn't. The consensus of expert opinion – pretty much everybody except the people working for the Navy – is that bird strikes will be a serious problem that will endanger not only the birds, not only the pilots, but the people on the ground who'll be at risk from plane crashes. And even if it were just a matter of "rolling up the Welcome mat," as you put it, we believe that the Navy's plan, if implemented, would violate a number of federal environmental regulations.

LYNETTE

Speaking of the people in the area, CAPTAIN – is Site C the best choice in human terms?

CAPTAIN

It was the best when we looked at all the factors. One of the most important was the low population density in Site C, compared to other sites.

LYNETTE

Fewer people, you mean?

CAPTAIN

Yes – the number of households that would be affected is lower.

LYNETTE

Let's bring in another caller – ANNE, you're on the air.

ANNE

Hello, LYNETTE. Thanks for taking my call. I agree with the last caller that people come first. But I certainly don't see how she got from that to, "We need to let the Navy steal our land and pave it over."

LYNETTE

So you think, ANNE, that the main issue isn't the wildlife refuge, but ...

ANNE

[interrupting] I think the Captain is giving us a good example, LYNETTE, of how loose the Navy is with the facts. To the people who live there, what the Navy calls Site C, they call home. "Low population density" sounds like code for "Nobody lives there, anyway".

CAPTAIN

I don't believe I said, "Nobody lives there, anyway." Low population density means just that. For an area of this size, the number of families who would be displaced is relatively small.

ANNE

Well, the way I see it, “only” a hundred families getting ruined is just as bad as if it was a thousand, or ten thousand. And I can’t believe your nature expert there hasn’t talked more about them.

LYNETTE

Thanks for your call, ANNE. Our number is 1-800- SPEAK OF. Next up.... PATRICIA. Hello, you’re on the air.

COMMISSIONER

Thanks, LYNETTE.

LYNETTE

My producer tells me you’re a county official, PATRICIA, correct?

COMMISSIONER

That’s right, LYNETTE. I’m a commissioner for Washington County, and my family’s roots run pretty deep here.

LYNETTE

And you’re opposed to the OLF?

COMMISSIONER

Yes. Strongly opposed. I tuned in to your program just as DR. DAVIS was talking about how devastating the OLF would be for the birds. CAPTAIN ROBINSON is certainly right about one thing: for half the year the birds get to live somewhere else. We have to live here -- we have nowhere to go.

LYNETTE

So, you're saying, COMMISSIONER, the tundra swans and snow geese get off easy by comparison?

COMMISSIONER

I'm saying we live in an agricultural region, and "Site C" is the most productive farmland in North Carolina. The Navy wants to take away our ability to support ourselves, which pretty much eliminates our tax base, which means local government doesn't have the resources to provide the services our people need – and deserve. I never thought I'd hear myself say this, but the Navy – the federal government – seems to want to take on all the earmarks of a natural disaster.

LYNETTE

A natural disaster?

COMMISSIONER

Yes; like a hurricane or a flood – it's coming, and there's nothing you can do to stop it. Except that with a genuine natural disaster, we could at least hope to get relief from the government. And we could also hope to bounce back eventually. We won't be able to bounce back from this – we'll be ruined for good.

LYNETTE

Thanks for your call, COMMISSIONER. *[Pause]* CAPTAIN, that's some pretty strong language from the COMMISSIONER, comparing the Navy to a natural disaster. How do you respond to the COMMISSIONER's comments?

CAPTAIN

Well, LYNETTE, to the enemies of the United States of America, the Navy is, and will always be, the worst disaster they can imagine. With all due respect to the COMMISSIONER, it's grossly unfair to say that we want to do anything other than help our people and serve our country.

LYNETTE

1-800 SPEAK OF. I suspect, CAPTAIN, that our next caller agrees. *[pause]* Hello, BERNADETTE – in Cherry Point – you're on the air.

BERNADETTE

I can't believe that an elected official would stoop so low as to say such things about our men and women in uniform.

LYNETTE

You favor the OLF, don't you BERNADETTE?

BERNADETTE

Absolutely. I know it'll be tough on some people, but we're at war, and we have to make sacrifices....

DR. DAVIS

[interrupting] I'd like to say something, here, LYNETTE, if I may. We are at war, and sacrifices are being demanded, but the government is being very selective about who's being asked...

BERNADETTE

[interrupting] If they say they really need this particular piece of land, I believe them. Besides, the construction and the two new squadrons will mean a boost to the local economy....

DR. DAVIS

[interrupting] Maybe in Cherry Point ...

BERNADETTE

[interrupting] Well, I've got a daughter over there...

LYNETTE

[interrupting] Over there – Iraq? Afghanistan?

BERNADETTE

Iraq. And I want her to come home with every body part she had when she left. We should be standing together, instead of standing against our government.

LYNETTE

Thanks for your call, BERNADETTE. 1-800-SPEAK OF. *[pause]* Hello, you're on the air.

KEISHA

Thanks for taking my call. I'm a realtor, LYNETTE, and if there's an economy that will benefit from the OLF, it certainly isn't in Washington or Beaufort Counties.

LYNETTE

You don't see any economic benefit at all from the OLF, KEISHA?

KEISHA

I didn't say that – I can see a great deal of benefit to the people in Virginia Beach, who want to get all that noise out of their fancy neighborhoods.

LYNETTE

Let me make sure I understand you, KEISHA. You're saying we're back to talking about convenience again; but it's...

KEISHA

[interrupting] The convenience of the upper crust. They want all that noise somewhere else, and they've got the money and the lobbyists to make it happen.

DR. DAVIS

She's right, LYNETTE. The Navy is projecting 31,650 Field Carrier Landing Practice operations – known as F-C-L-P – annually...

LYNETTE

[interrupting] Is that so, CAPTAIN? Thirty-one thousand six hundred fifty F-C-L-P operations a year?

CAPTAIN

As I said before, LYNETTE, to be the best takes lots and lots of practice. There's just no way around that...

DR. DAVIS

[interrupting] So that's – depending on how you figure the working year of the squadrons from both bases – anywhere from 85 or –6 to over 130 F-C-L-P operations per day. Per. Day.

KEISHA

Not what I'd call the best situation for buying or selling real estate, unless all the negotiating is done with hand signals.

LYNETTE

Thanks for your call, KEISHA. We've only got time for one more call. Let's go to . . . JANEEN. Hello, JANEEN, you're on the air.

JANEEN

I'm with the COMMISSIONER.

LYNETTE

The COMMISSIONER said she thought the OLF would be as bad as a flood or a hurricane . . .

JANEEN

[interrupting] Or a plague of locusts. I'm a farmer. My family has fertilized this land with our own sweat and prayers for 10 generations. And now the government – our own government – wants to just take it from us. I don't even know what's the worse insult – that they want to steal it, or that they feel like they have to condemn it first, condemn the richest soil in North Carolina. And leave us with nothing. I never – ever – thought my own country would do something like this.

LYNETTE

But the Navy is offering to buy the land, aren't they? I mean, it's not like they'll just come in and . . .

JANEEN

[interrupting] The price they're offering is just another insult. The land is worth a lot more than that. Besides, it's not about money. There are some things you just can't put a price on. *[pause]* They're threatening to destroy us.

LYNETTE

I'm afraid that's all the time we have. Thanks for your call, JANEEN. Thanks to our guests – CAPTAIN WILLIAM ROBINSON, U.S. Navy; and DR. ADAM DAVIS, Defenders of Wildlife . . .

CAPTAIN & DR. DAVIS

Thank you.

LYNETTE

I'm sure we'll all be watching with great interest, to see how this story unfolds. I'm LYNETTE JONES and you've been listening to, "Speaking Of..."

THE END

Discussion questions

Performing the script is just the beginning! Readers' Theater scripts are designed to get the audience and performers talking about environmental health issues. For more detailed instructions on how to lead a discussion, download our free facilitation guide at www.ExchangeProject.unc.edu

We have provided two sets of questions to use after the reading. Choose whichever set seems more appropriate to your audience.

Question set 1

Spend 5 minutes "warming up" the discussion.

- What images or words from the performance stick in your memory?
- Was there anything in the performance that you don't understand or that was confusing?

Spend 15 minutes exploring the different perspectives and possible solutions.

- Who did you identify with most strongly in this story? Why?
- The real estate agent who called said that the OLF was being moved out of an area with wealthy residents to a poorer area. How do you think that the wealth of an area should affect where the OLF is built?
- What do you think about Bernadette's opinion that people who opposed the OLF were being unpatriotic?
- Janeen – the farmer – is angry that the government can take away her farmland. When do you think that government should have the right to take land?
- What do you think the title means? What kinds of sanctuaries are being lost?

Take 10 minutes to bring the discussion to closure and look toward the future.

- What do you think could happen next in the plans to build the OLF?
- If you could make a suggestion to any of the characters, what would it be?
- When you reflect on this story, what does it make you want to change about your own life or work?

Take 5-10 minutes to wrap up the discussion and conduct an evaluation.

Summarize key points and action steps that arose from the discussion. Thank the readers and audience for their participation! Refer readers to additional resources and related Readers' Theater scripts that cover other aspects of how the environment affects our health. Suggest that they continue the dialogue by asking other people in their lives what they think. Finally, ask readers and observers to complete an evaluation of the event before they leave.

Question set 2

Spend 5-10 minutes on Observations & Reflection

- What one word would describe what you saw?
- What characters or issues did you feel most strongly about?

Spend 10 minutes on Interpretation

- Why do you think that the Captain felt the way he did? Dr. Davis? The callers?
- Why do you think that situations like this happen?

Spend 10 minutes on Decisions (Awareness → Action)

- If you could make a suggestion to any one of the characters, what would it be?
- When you reflect on this story, what does it make you want to change about your own life or work?

Other related materials

Other materials available through www.ExchangeProject.unc.edu

Real People, Real Stories

How have real people dealt with concern about environmental issues and disagreement in their communities?

Glenola (Randolf County): In 1997, Trinity American Corporation, Inc., a foam and fiber manufacturer was closed after community members began reporting health problems and noxious fumes. After the company closed, workers picketed the health department.

Salisbury (Rowan County): Residents of Milford Hills got help from local, state, and federal officials to pressure the local asphalt industry to control odors and to examine the health effects of the industry. Research studies concluded that there were no health effects of the asphalt plan fumes, but some community members felt that these studies were not well done.

Aquadale (Stanly County): After 12 years of investigation, litigation, and community pressure, Carolina Solite, a manufacturer of concrete blocks, was forced to stop burning hazardous waste as fuel. Local residents believe that emissions from the plant are associated with health problems they have observed; however, these suspicions have not been confirmed.

Research on outlying landing fields

Learn more about research into outlying landing fields and health effects of noise pollution.

Facilitation guide

Need a hand planning how to lead a Readers' Theater performance and discussion? Check out our easy-to-read guide!

Links

Find links to governmental and community organizations to see what they have to say about outlying landing fields, and find links to relevant news.