

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

The Wind from the East

Written by Erin Byrd



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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Background

This script is based on actual events that occurred in Glenola, in Randolph County of North Carolina from 1996 to 1997. Names are fictitious and characters are composites representing those people involved in the real situations.

The Wind from the East tells the story of Harriet Perry, a longtime Glenola resident who cares for her grandson. The story conveys a sense of entrapment experienced by victims of industrial pollution. In addition to her own disappointment, Harriet experiences the frustration of her grandson, who cannot play outside due to air pollution that aggravates his asthma. When would-be buyers visit her home, Harriet is faced with the dilemma of whether to be completely honest about the environment surrounding her home.



What really happened in Glenola?

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!

Check out the discussion questions after the script!

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

- What do you think it would be like to live in a place with environmental pollution?
- What kinds of affects do you think industrial pollutants have on people's lives?

THE WIND FROM THE EAST

ERIN BYRD
Exchange Project

CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

HARRIET PERRY – A homeowner, grandmother and longtime resident of Glenwood.

SAMUEL – Grandson of HARRIET PERRY, 13 years old.

LINDA FAYE – Realtor and daughter of HARRIET PERRY.

MR. & MRS. WILLIAMS – Potential homebuyers.

Suggested props: Radio, Water Pitcher and Glass, Two chairs,
Two knitting needles (or pencils)

Scenes: Harriet Perry's home

NARRATOR

It's a hot day. HARRIET is knitting, waiting on her daughter LINDA FAYE. We are in HARRIET'S living room. She has lived in Glenwood, North Carolina, for 74 years. If you don't know Glenwood, it's a small rural town outside of High Point, the furniture capital of America. We'd love to see you sometime.

[HARRIET sits center stage in a chair. She knits when she is in the chair. The water pitcher and glass sit next to her. SAMUEL'S chair is behind and to the left facing the back of the stage. The radio is playing in the background.]

SAMUEL

Grandma, can I go outside?

HARRIET

Not right now.

SAMUEL

Why not?

HARRIET

I went outside earlier. The fumes are strong today.

[HARRIET and SAMUEL freeze.]

NARRATOR

An hour passes.

[HARRIET and SAMUEL unfreeze.]

SAMUEL

Grandma, can I go outside?

HARRIET

Which way is the wind blowing?

[SAMUEL sucks his breath.]

HARRIET

[Louder.] Which way is the wind blowing?

SAMUEL

[Walks to the look out the window, rolls his eyes.]

From the east.

HARRIET

Well then, you know the answer.

[SAMUEL sucks his breath.]

HARRIET

You know your asthma acts up when the wind comes off that factory. Plus, it's hot outside. You're just asking for trouble. Why don't you go read a book?

SAMUEL

I've read all my books.

HARRIET

Then go work on your room. It's a mess anyway, go work on that.

SAMUEL

[SAMUEL returns to his chair, sits, and mutters under his breath.]

I hate having asthma.

[SAMUEL and HARRIET freeze.]

NARRATOR

A half hour passes.

[SAMUEL and HARRIET unfreeze.]

SAMUEL

[SAMUEL rises and joins HARRIET center stage]

Grandma, can I go outside now?

HARRIET

Which way is the wind blowing?

SAMUEL

[Walks to the look out the window, looks, and then sucks his breath.]

From the east.

HARRIET

No, not right now, wait till a little later.

SAMUEL

[Sucks his breath.]

But Grandma, I want to ride my bike.

HARRIET

Later.

SAMUEL

It's not like it smells any different in here than it does outside.

HARRIET

[Looks at SAMUEL and frowns.]

Don't you get started.

SAMUEL

I hate this. Why can't we just move?

HARRIET

We can't move until we sell the house.

SAMUEL

I hope I don't have to wait that long to go outside.

HARRIET

[Louder] Boy, I said later.

[SAMUEL returns to his chair.]

[The NARRATOR makes a knocking sound.]

[HARRIET turns off the radio goes to the right side of stage to open the door. LINDA FAYE and MR. & MRS. WILLIAMS walk in.]

LINDA FAYE

MR. and MRS. WILLIAMS, this is my mother, HARRIET PERRY. MR. and MRS. WILLIAMS are from Connecticut and are looking for a home outside of High Point. ***[To MR. and MRS. WILLIAMS]*** Please take a look around.

HARRIET

Welcome to our home.

LINDA FAYE

[Whispers to Harriet] We're going to try again to sell this house today. Are we in this together?

HARRIET

[Whispers back] You know I would love to sell the house, but I won't bend the truth. We've been through this before.

MRS. WILLIAMS

How many rooms do you have?

LINDA FAYE

This house has four bedrooms and two and a half baths. Living room, dining room, family room, attic, and basement, two fire places and it sits on two acres of land. Let's take a look around.

[HARRIET sits back down to knit. LINDA FAYE leads MR. & MRS. WILLIAMS in a circle around HARRIET'S chair and ends a few feet from HARRIET.]

MRS. WILLIAMS

MRS. PERRY, you have a lovely home. The rooms are so spacious. I love all of the walk-in closets ... such a beautiful kitchen with great sunlight. The bathrooms, they are beautiful with large tubs. It's just beautiful everywhere I look. I can tell that you put a lot of love in this place.

HARRIET

Thank you, you're too kind. My late husband, Hal, God rest his soul, was a master craftsman. We built this house together. It took us nearly three years.

MR. WILLIAMS

I have to agree with my wife. My favorite part was the barn transformed into a place for a man to chill out and relax.

HARRIET

That's where my husband hid out from me. He had the nerve to get the electricity company to wire the whole yard.

MRS. WILLIAMS

We have been waiting to have children until the right time. We believe we are ready now. I can see raising a family here.

[They are interrupted as SAMUEL walks in.]

SAMUEL

Hi, Auntie.

LINDA FAYE

Hi, SAMUEL, this is MR. and MRS. WILLIAMS.

SAMUEL

Hi, MR. and MRS. WILLIAMS.

MR. WILLIAMS

Hello, SAMUEL, you sure have a lovely home. I know you appreciate that tree house.

SAMUEL

I sure do, when I can go outside.

MR. WILLIAMS

What do you mean by that? Why can't you go outside? Excuse me, but do you smell something?

SAMUEL

That's foam and fiber factory funk.

HARRIET

[Gets up and grabs SAMUEL by the ear and pulls in the direction of his chair.]

SAMUEL, go to your room!

[SAMUEL returns to his chair and HARRIET sits back down.]

MRS. WILLIAMS

I am feeling a bit faint and sick to my stomach. It must be the heat. Do you think I can have a glass of water?

LINDA FAYE

Sure, this North Carolina heat will do that to you. Mom, can you get MRS. WILLIAMS a cold bottle of water?

HARRIET

We don't have any bottled water. She can drink out of the faucet like we do.

[HARRIET reaches over and pours a glass of water.]

MRS. WILLIAMS

Thank you. I do love fresh country water.

[HARRIET gets up and starts to hand the glass to MRS. WILLIAMS.]

MR. WILLIAMS

Thank you, but should fresh country water look like that?

HARRIET

No it shouldn't.

[HARRIET shrugs, sits back down, puts the glass on the floor and continues to knit.]

LINDA FAYE

That's just some sediment we get in the water from time to time. We are expecting the water lines to extend from Ashton soon. That should clear up the water.

HARRIET

Not according to Ashton City Council. They voted down extending the water lines.

LINDA FAYE

[Shocked and angry]

Turned us down? Those sons a....

HARRIET

[Interrupting]

Watch your mouth LINDA. Yes, they turned us down. I got the word this morning. They said we need more evidence.

MR. WILLIAMS

Why do you need water lines to extend from Ashton?

HARRIET

[HARRIET puts the needles down.]

Listen, MR. and MRS. WILLIAMS, I have to be honest with you. The water has a little more than sediment in it. Trinity Foam and Fiber Factory is a half mile east of here. They were producing foam cushions until recently. They have been releasing methylene chloride and TDI into our air and water. We have been complaining for years about the fumes, fires, and other nonsense they've had going on there. A health worker lost consciousness while conducting an investigation. That's how bad it was.

MRS. WILLIAMS

What is TDI?

HARRIET

Toluene diisocyanate. All I know is that it can make you very sick.

SAMUEL

[Yells] Also known as Terribly Dangerous Ingredients.

HARRIET

It's also gotten into our ground water, so that's why our water is messed up. We have had a hard time proving it to the City Council.

MR. WILLIAMS

We appreciate your honesty.

HARRIET

You would have found out.

MR. WILLIAMS

Well, thank for opening your house to us. I will be honest with you: it would be a beautiful home for raising a family, but I can't see paying for the location.

MRS. WILLIAMS

My heart really goes out to you. I know this house was a labor of love.

LINDA FAYE

Well, let me show you out.

[MR. and MRS. WILLIAMS walk out.]

[HARRIET turns the radio back on and continues knitting.]

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.

- How do you think the people in the story felt?
- Toward which characters did you have positive feelings? How about negative? Why?
- Why do you think people find themselves in situations like Harriet is experiencing?

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

- What would you change about any of the characters to give this story a different ending?

- When you reflect on this story, what does it make you want to change about your own life or work?

Take 5 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 Harriet acted as she did? How about Linda?
- Why do you think people find themselves in situations like Harriet is experiencing?

Spend 10 minutes on Decisions (Moving Awareness to Action)

- What would you have done differently if you were one of the people in the story?
- 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

Glenola (Randolf County): *The Wind from the East* was based on this community's story. In 1997, Trinity American Corporation, Inc., a foam and fiber manufacturer was closed after community members began reporting health problems and noxious fumes.

Aquadale (Stanly): 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 experienced; however, these suspicions have not been confirmed.

Salisbury (Rowan): 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 plant fumes; however, some people believed those studies were not well done.

Shiloh (Wake): Residents were successful in getting the help of government to investigate water and soil contamination by chemicals from a nearby wood treatment plant and forcing the polluter to provide an alternate water supply to the community.

Research on industrial pollution

Learn more about research into industrial pollution and its health effects.

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 industrial pollution, and find links to news related to industrial pollution.

About the scriptwriter

Erin Byrd serves as the director of Southerners for Economic Justice (SEJ), a social justice organization committed to strengthening the voices and improving the quality of life of the most economically vulnerable persons in our state. Erin served for three years as the Director of Voters for Clean Elections, the North Carolina campaign finance reform coalition that was instrumental in the passage of the state's Judicial Public Financing reform bill. In addition to her duties at SEJ, Erin facilitates a parenting class for Prison MATCH, a program that works to strengthen bonds between incarcerated mothers and their children.

Erin is the Treasurer of the NC Black Leadership Caucus. She serves as the Board Chair of Democracy South, a regional multi-issue coalition of progressive organizations across the south. She also serves on the Southeast Raleigh Assembly, an advisory board to the Raleigh City Council. She has recently completed the Community Builders Learning Project.

A graduate of the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, Erin has two sons, Hausson & Jai.