



# AWE: Awesome Women Environmentalists





# FILMMAKERS GO TO SCHOOL



## ABOUT THE FILM SERIES

**AWE: Awesome Women Environmentalists**  
Nancy Kelly & Kenji Yamamoto | US 2021-2024 | 15 min | Grades 5-12

This series of five, short documentaries highlights awesome (as the title references) environmentalists in various occupations, including marine ecology, native American cultural burns, and program director at San Francisco Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The films (3 minutes each) include: *THE BIRD WOMAN OF ALCATRAZ*, *YES!*, *ACRES OF MAGIC*, *I'M A BURNER*, and *SARAH SQUARED*.

## IMPACT

What does it mean to be an environmentalist today? The Awesome Environmentalists short documentary series shines a spotlight on diverse, passionate individuals working across the Northern California landscape to protect and restore the natural world in unique and inspiring ways. Each story underscores how environmental care is deeply personal and professionally varied, whether it's introducing urban youth to gardening, reviving Indigenous cultural burning practices, or tracking elephant seals on the coast, these five, three-minute portraits celebrate environmental leadership in all its forms. The series encourages students to see themselves as potential changemakers—no matter their background or future profession—and to recognize that protecting the planet starts with local action and heart-felt commitment.

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

For more than twenty-five years, independent filmmakers Nancy Kelly and Kenji Yamamoto have been making critically-acclaimed films that have screened in theaters, film festivals, museums, and communities worldwide and aired on PBS, Showtime, Sundance, and Britain's Channel Four, (among others). Their filmmaking philosophy is to take alternative looks at stories, themes and characters and to tell specific stories from which audiences can generalize universal truths.





"My parents are originally from Argentina. I'm the first in my family to go to college. They were supportive, but I felt like a fledgling. So they're very proud that I made a career out of this. I think they still don't quite understand exactly what I do. I think they have some idea that I work with animals, or play with animals, or something like that."

## ***The Bird Woman of Alcatraz***

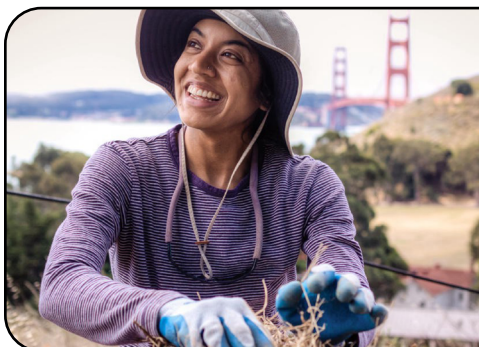
7/30/2024 | Lidia D'Amico monitors tens of thousands of birds that nest on Alcatraz Island. (3m)



"I wasn't that immigrant girl, that stereotype, that people put on me when they see me. Instead, I had aspirations to be someone of purpose in this world, in this life. I want that experience that happened to me, happen to everybody that is a part of YES."

## ***YES!***

5/30/2024 | Meet Blanca Hernandez, Director of Programs & Partnerships for "YES! Nature to Neighborhood." (3m)



"The vision is to inspire everyone to fall in love with the natural world. So how do we think about all these magical things that are happening in the natural world and make those accessible to our diverse Bay Area communities?"

## ***Acres of Magic***

4/26/2023 | Yakuta Poonawalla gives city folk the special experience of planting their first plant. (3m)



"Because of the neglect of our landscapes, and the importance of cultural burning and the urgency, there's a new awareness about that now. We're in a new paradigm and we have other people that aren't native but care just as much."

## ***I'm a Burner***

4/26/2023 | Trina Cunningham, a Mountain Maidu, continues the wisdom of her elders about fire. (3m)



"We have this shared passion for the ocean. Our team here is largely female, and it's pretty exciting that we're leading the way now."

## ***Sarah Squared***

4/26/2023 | SARAH SQUARED shows how dangerous and fun monitoring humongous elephant seals can be! (3m)

# VIEWING GUIDE: WOMEN ENVIRONMENTALISTS FROM DIVERSE CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

Film	Personal Story Who is the woman featured? What's her background? Where is she from?	Environmental Issue What specific issue or cause is she addressing?	Cultural Connection How does her cultural background influence her approach to nature or activism?	Obstacles and Strengths What challenges does she face? What strengths does she bring from her culture or migrant experience?	Community Impact How is she impacting her local or global community?	Personal Response What inspired or surprised you about her story? What would you ask her if you could?
The Bird Woman of Alcatraz						
YES!						
Acres of Magic						
I'm a Burner						
Sarah Squared						



# ROUNDTABLE REFLECTION

## IF I HAD FIVE MINUTES WITH THE FILMMAKER

### How to Use this Thinking Routine:

This activity asks students to imagine they've been invited to a small Q&A session with the filmmaker. Below are short, thoughtful questions to reflect their experience and challenge the filmmaker to reflect on their choices.

**Partner Prompts:** In pairs, answer these questions. Write your answers below.

- **One thing you'd praise.** What's a storytelling, visual, or emotional choice that really worked - and why?
- **One thing you'd question.** What part of the film raised confusion or critique? What would you ask the filmmaker to explain or rethink?
- **One thing you'd add.** If the filmmaker gave you 30 more seconds of film time, what would you want to see - and why?

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**Roundtable Simulation:** Students take turns sharing their "5-minute audience member" statements or questions in a roundtable format (either whole class or small group). If the filmmaker is not present, students speak as if the filmmaker were listening.

**Exit Ticket:** Write a message to the filmmaker (1-3 sentences) in the Exit Ticket.

- "If the filmmaker heard me, I'd want them to know . . ."

