



Theme: Plants (Grades 9-12)

Pre-Visit Activity #2 My Tree?

Overview:

Students will listen to the article “Julia Butterfly Hill, From Treetop to Grass Roots,” the story of a young woman that lived up in a tree for 738 days in order to save it from being cut down. Students will think about how the story inspires them.

Objectives:

- Students will recognize the importance of protecting our environment.
- Students will understand that one person can make a difference.
- Students will look at ways to be of service.

Materials:

- Copy of “Julia Butterfly Hill, From Treetop to Grass Roots” for each student
- Pictures of redwood trees

Activity:

1. Have the students read the article “Julia Butterfly Hill, From Treetop to Grass Roots” (the article can also be found online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A40230-2004Sep21.html>). You may choose to show them pictures of redwood trees.
2. Discuss the article with the students. Ask:
 - What do you think about Julia’s actions?
 - Why do you think Julia stayed up in the tree?
 - Would you have chosen to do this? Why or why not?
 - What do you think the outcome might have been if Julia came down after only a week?
3. Individually assign them the topic ‘What is Your Tree’?
4. Write the following questions on the board.
 - What is your passion?
 - What is your life in service of?
 - How can you make a difference?
 - Do you believe we are the solution?

5. After thinking about the four statements above, have the students write an essay about the story from the point of view of the tree, Julia Butterfly Hill, the logging company, or themselves.
6. Students can share their essays or opinions about the story with the class.

Julia Butterfly Hill, From Treetop to Grass Roots

By Don Oldenburg

Washington Post Staff Writer

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<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A40230-2004Sep21.html>

You can take the girl out of the redwood, but you can't take the redwood out of the girl.

Speaking Sunday at the D.C. Green Festival, Julia Butterfly Hill takes only a few minutes to get around to the redwood tree -- the one she made famous, the one that made her famous.

Hill, you might recall, was the hippie waif who became an international story in the late '90s when she lived 180 feet up an ancient redwood for 738 days to stop a lumber company from cutting it down.

By going out on that limb for more than two years, she saved the venerable tree she dubbed "Luna" and the surrounding three acres of redwoods. And she raised unprecedented awareness of the threat to old-growth trees. With that memorable stunt of activist endurance for the environment, she became the world's best-known tree hugger.

"I never thought that I was going to live in a tree," Hill tells the audience of more than 1,000 at a weekend-long exposition of environmental and social activism at the Washington Convention Center. "If I had seen what was coming, I would've went screaming in the other direction. But life doesn't give it to us that way; it just gives it to us moment by moment, day by day. We show up and give it the best that we can."

Although the audience is a mixed bag of students, green entrepreneurs, latter-day hippies and Birkenstockers, Hill's all-natural aura shines like a sunbeam. It has been five years since she climbed down, and now at age 30, she looks more like a fashion model than an earth mama. Her clothes are California beat -- simple black top, black boots, form-fitting black pants. The flowing black hair of tree-sitting photos is cut pixie-like. At 5 feet 10, she moves onstage with the grace of a dancer.

"We live in a world that is full of problems, and we are the solutions to those problems," says Hill, microphone in hand, moving nonstop onstage, stopping at the podium only to sip a yerba maté tea and soy milk mixture from a Mason jar. "After I came down from living in that tree, I started realizing how literally every moment we make choices and every single choice changes the world -- every single one of them."

Her 40-minute talk, "Making a Difference in Troubling Times," is familiar ground Hill has covered in her many speaking engagements -- most, like this one, without a fee.

She receives more than 500 speaking offers a year. She has written two books, "The Legacy of Luna" and "One Makes a Difference," both carrying her make-a-difference message on 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper with soy-based ink and chlorine-free processing, with all proceeds donated to causes, she says. Her group, the Circle of Life, which she created while in the tree, spreads her message from tree-planting elementary school students to mainstream skeptics to veteran activists.

Like her life since emerging from those branches in 1999, Hill's vibe onstage is high-octane. If positive energy fueled automobiles and heated homes, oil companies would line up to tap Julia Butterfly Hill.

"We're here to talk about how to be awake in a time that's trying to make us fall asleep, how to have our hearts wide open in a time that's beating us into a pulp, how to have our spirits soar and fly when so much feels like it's holding us down," she tells the audience, her words eclipsing into the kind of consciousness poetry of her blog.

Hill preaches doing activism out of love of life, being conscious of the connection we have with all living things, from microorganisms to mountains. She says she learned that among Luna's lush leaves: Lumber crews harassed her from below and with helicopters from the air. The angrier she got, she says, the more she heard the answer: "You gotta love, you gotta love, you gotta love."

Big applause, hollers of amen. The audience is her choir.

Hill holds up a plastic water bottle, a plastic spoon and a paper cup and calls them weapons of mass destruction. "More water is wasted and polluted in making this plastic bottle than is actually held inside the plastic bottle," she says. "This is a paper cup that destroyed a forest somewhere."

Hill shows the audience the Mason jar she uses instead of bottled water. A vegan, she carries a metal eating container and metal utensils everywhere for meals. Proudly, she tells the audience she's "car-free," relying on walking, bicycling and public transportation at home in Oakland and on the road.

She says she has decided to be part of a "revolutionary movement" -- do-it-yourself activism in which "every moment of every day we are looking for ways to be living examples of all that is beautiful and humble and just and incredible about our world."

After the talk, Hill stands scissor-legged in the exhibition hall signing books. A hundred or so fans wait in line as long as 90 minutes to meet her. They ask for hugs, they take photos. She spends time with each one. They walk away beaming with beatific smiles.

Rachel Bosch and her 10-month-old, Samantha Bosch-Bird, drove in from Morgantown, W.Va. "When Samantha was born, I felt more of a responsibility to start

getting involved in things I believed in and make the world a better place," says Bosch, calling Hill "awe-inspiring."

Madelene Elfstrom, 15, a vegetarian and student at the nontraditional Washington Waldorf School who worked awhile on the Free Tibet campaign, says, "I find her a really incredible person."

Holding her 5-year-old daughter, Isabel, by the hand, Melissa Walker of Frederick says: "She's the main fan of Julia Butterfly Hill. Isabel just loves trees . . . and she's really into composting."

As two guys walk by, one says, "That's her, man! That's Butterfly!" They stare. Three women are getting books signed. Walking away, one says, "I think I knew her in a past life."

After the Green Festival crew rolled up the green carpet on the last of her admirers, Hill is sipping a glass of water with lemon slice and orders chardonnay at a nearby restaurant. "I make eye contact with every one of them," she says. She explains she doesn't want fans thinking she's more special than they are.

Hill was a backdoor activist, after all, almost not chosen to sit in that tree because of her lack of activist experience. The daughter of a traveling evangelist, her family dirt-poor, she lived in a camper trailer touring the East Coast from age 8 until 15. Her father preached, she and her brothers put on puppet shows. Home-schooled until high school, she graduated at 16, then majored in business at a community college in Arkansas. She opened her own bar and restaurant for a year in Jonesboro, Ark., then was a restaurant consultant focused on making money without a thought of making the world a better place, she says.

A car wreck in Arkansas in 1996, followed by 10 months of recuperation, got Hill, then 22, thinking about living a meaningful life. "The steering wheel in my head, both figuratively and literally, steered me in a new direction in my life," she says.

A chance road trip to California and a reggae fundraiser to save the forests put her in the right place at the right time. A group of "front-liners" had been rotating tree sitters in and out of giant redwoods in Humboldt County every couple of days to stave off Pacific Lumber Co. loggers who were clear-cutting. Organizers wanted someone to stay in the tree a week. "Nobody else would volunteer so they had to pick me," says Hill.

Once up the tree, Hill vowed not to come down until she had made a difference. Clinging to her mattress through violent storms, supported with food and necessities by a ground crew, she stayed two years and eight days. She climbed down barefoot and wobbly only after Pacific Lumber agreed to spare Luna and the trees in a buffer zone of company-owned land for perpetuity.

Thirty-six hours after descending the tree, she was in New York doing network TV interviews. She figured her 15 seconds of fame would last six months. But she has been a reluctant celebrity ever since.

Folk singer Joan Baez dedicates songs to her. A documentary, "Tree Sit: The Art of Resistance," recounts her story. The California State History Museum's year-long exhibit "California's Remarkable Women" is honoring her this year. Rocker Neil Young pays tribute to her in his 2004 fictional film "Greendale."

The "Butterfly" in her name only adds to her celebrity. She got the nickname at 7 hiking the Blue Hills of Pennsylvania. A butterfly landed on her hand and stayed close the entire day, she says. When she went up the redwood, she used Butterfly as her "forest name," which activists use to protect their identities. She kept it.

Active in many issues, her commitments keep her hopping. She's working with the "Activism Is Patriotism" campaign to counteract right-wing efforts to equate activism with terrorism. This summer she lobbied the California Legislature to ban all logging of old-growth trees. Last year she was arrested in Ecuador for protesting the destruction of Amazon forests by the oil industry.

Donating much of her time and work to activist causes, Hill says she draws a modest salary from her nonprofit group but is committed to living a simple life that's not driven by money.

All this affords little time for a personal life, says Hill. Staying vague on details, she insists she's getting better at personal relationships, though two years in the tree upset her equilibrium in such matters. "Like I said tonight, I have to live a sustainable life if I'm going to create a sustainable world," she says. "On a personal level, I'm looking to find what does that mean and who would that bring into my life."

But Hill wants to be known for more than being the woman who lived in a tree. "I don't want that on my epitaph," she says. "What I want is, 'This is a person who cared enough about the world to try to make it a better place.'"