

What's Done to the Land Happens To the People

“You Got to Move” Shorts Discussion Guide ([view the film here](#)).



This guide is designed for in-person & online post-film conversations in community settings. In keeping with the popular education approach used at the Highlander Center (a thread in the film's story), facilitators are encouraged to start with the group's own experiences & select from the questions below (and add to them), Consider utilizing small groups for some of the discussion and encourage announcements related to current organizing. The resources listed in the “Learn More” section may be shared with participants during or as follow-up to the discussion. Additional curricula for middle & high school teachers are in development.

Background

Cranks, Kentucky is an unincorporated community in the southeast of Harlan County, near the Virginia state line. Harlan County, as many familiar with U.S. labor history know, experienced over a century of union struggle, including a pivotal strike in 1973. In the late 1970s, the community was severely damaged by a series of floods related to strip-mining abuses.

Rebecca (Becky) Simpson was one of the people impacted by these floods. She was born in 1936 in Cranks and lived there until she passed in 2013. Becky was the founder and director of the Cranks Creek Survival Center for 36 years, feeding thousands of families and hosting college, school and church groups who visited the area to help rebuild family's homes. After the floods, Becky knew she wanted to create lasting change and led her life in the service of community organizing and mutual aid. She worked tirelessly to get damage payments for people in her area and successfully fought to have reclamation work begun on the mountains around Cranks Creek.

Jean Ritchie was a folk singer from Viper in the Cumberland mountains of Kentucky, not too far from Cranks. You can hear the lyrics from her song *Black Waters* in the film:

*I come from the mountains, Kentucky's my home
Where the wild deer and the black bear so lately did roam
By the cool rushing waterfalls the wild flowers bloom
And to every green valley there runs a clear stream.
Now scenes of destruction on every hand
And there are only black waters run down through the land*

Learn About These Topics in the Film

- More than anything, "What's Done to the Land Happens to the People" is about how one woman-- Becky Simpson-- moved forward from a place of powerlessness to recognizing that her own experiences mattered. She came to see that her community had a right to a healthy environment and that they already had the tools needed to make change.

The film also touches on:

- Cranks Creek, Kentucky & Appalachia
- Environmental Health & Justice
- Land Destruction & Strip Mining
- Community Organizing & Popular Education

Continuing the Conversation

1. Becky shares that “me and four of the children were almost killed that day. The bridge washed out.” *What is the relationship between what is done to the land, such as strip mining, and the personal experiences of people who live on that land?*
2. We learn in the film that there were a few environmental laws in place, yet Ollie “Widow” Combs sat on her destroyed land and refused to move. What is the role of people in making sure that laws are enforced? How did the Cranks Creek community do this?
3. Becky saw the damage after the floods (strip mining causes destruction of trees that hold down topsoil) and said she wanted to *do* something. What did she do?
4. Becky and others in Cranks felt a sense of powerlessness. How did they overcome this?
5. At the first meeting with her neighbors, Becky shared her perspective on the community’s demands. Who was responsible for what had happened and what remedies did she think they deserved?
6. Becky was an ‘organizer.’ What does this mean? How did she get other people involved? Was this easy?
7. Becky credits much of her own development to time at the Highlander Center, a place in Tennessee where adults learn how to be leaders in their own communities. What was Becky’s experience like at Highlander and what did she learn about herself and others while there?
8. Becky shares that “Black people don’t have justice and poor people don’t have justice.” Why did Becky connect her understanding of racism with her own community’s struggles? Why was this important?
9. *Care* is something that Becky mentions a few times in the film. How did she and others organizing in Cranks Creek view the relationship between justice and community care?

Connecting The Past & Present

1. Does the story of Cranks, Kentucky story remind you of any present-day struggles?
2. People in Cranks were told things by the strip mining company and others that they realized weren't true. Where does your own truth come from and how do you know what to believe?
3. Becky talks about the need to "build up" and to gather with others in order to work to full capacity. How are you and other organizers doing this during the challenges presented by the pandemic?
4. The songs in this film play an important role in telling the story. What songs come to mind that are connected to environmental or climate justice movements today? How is music used as a tool in organizing, if at all?
5. If you could ask Becky Simpson one question, what would it be?
6. What lessons from the film could you apply to your own organizing, education and/or mutual aid work?
7. What is something you'd like to learn more about?
8. Who else might you share this film with?

Additional Resources

[Highlander Center Research & Education Center](#)

[Cranks Creek Survival Center](#) (Facebook Page)

[A Survival Center Tries to Survive the Pandemic](#) (New Yorker)

[I Love Mountains](#) (End MountainTop Removal Coal Mining)

[Harlan County](#) (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth)

[Jean Ritchie](#) (KET Education)

[Voices from the Mountains](#) (Guy and Candie Carawan, University of Georgia Press)

[Cranks Creek, KY](#) (Chasing the Dream, PBS)

[Cranks Creek Survival Center Oral History Project](#)

[Life After Coal in Harlan County, USA](#) (In These Times)

[Citizens Begin Reclaiming Coal Country After Decades of Corporate Land Grabs](#) (Yes! Magazine)