

CRYING EARTH RISE UP!

VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



From left to right, clockwise: 1) Laila (Lakota) is hospitalized for an infection in her dialysis port. 2) Debra White Plume (Lakota) on a site visit to the Cameco mine in Crawford, Neb., which sits at the base of sacred Crow Butte (in distance). 3) Elisha Yellow Thunder (Lakota) prepares her ore samples for testing at a lab across the state.

Photos by Suree Towfighnia.



Program Synopsis

A Lakota mother studying geology seeks the source of the water contamination that caused her daughter's critical health problems. Meanwhile, a Lakota grandmother fights the regional expansion of uranium mining. *Crying Earth Rise Up* exposes the human cost of uranium mining and its impact on Great Plains drinking water.



Pictured Left: Map of U.S. Aquifers

Image courtesy of "Groundwater." Mission 2012: Clean Water. N.F., 15 Nov. 2008. Web. 22 Mar. 2015

Pictured Right: Map of Ogallala Aquifer.

Image courtesy of Adams, Mike. "America's Breadbasket Aquifer Running Dry; Massive Agriculture Collapse Inevitable." *NaturalNews*. Natural News, 10 Mar. 2011. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.

In Their Words

"Someday the Earth will weep. She will beg for her life. She will cry tears of blood. You will make a choice—if you will help her or let her die, and when she dies, you too will die."

— John Hollowhorn (Lakota), 1932



Producer's Notes

Suree Towfighnia



We first became aware of contaminated drinking water on Pine Ridge during the making of the documentary *Standing Silent Nation*. Alex and Debra White Plume were concerned when their

water tested high for radiation and contaminants. At the time, we had been working and living with the family on and off for over 8 years and we were concerned about their future welfare.

When you look around at the beautiful land and witness the ways water creates and connects life, it's easy to understand the impact that contaminated water has on life. I would ask Debra questions—"What if we boil it?" And, she would respond, "If you boil it, the radiation is released in the air." "What about a filter?" "You can't filter out the alpha emitters." The situation seemed grave.

As we finished editing *Standing Silent Nation*, we kept abreast of the water story. Then Debra discovered a uranium mine that was tapping into their aquifer to extract raw uranium. People were getting sick and dying quickly of illnesses previously uncommon. Someone I knew, who worked at the local college and made videos, died of kidney disease. I couldn't believe a man so young was taken so quickly. And then, I found out his water tested high for contaminants.

I never intended to start a documentary about uranium mining, or to tell the story of people fighting to protect their water, but the film called to us. Particularly when I met Elisha Yellow Thunder, a very driven and articulate geology student. We went to an ore outcrop to test uranium content. When asked what motivated her to research uranium, she

shared her story. During her pregnancy she drank contaminated water. This resulted in birth defects and medical abnormalities that threatened her daughter Laila's life from day one. My commitment to the film solidified. We recognized we were in a unique position to tell an important story and couldn't leave it behind.

While *Standing Silent Nation* documents a family's dream to live sustainably through industrial hemp cultivation, *Crying Earth Rise Up* chronicles a uranium nightmare enhanced by mining companies who threaten our most precious resource—water.

A documentary pulls both the heart and mind toward the story, making it impossible to let it go until it is wrapped and shared with audiences to create change. We live in a world where 40-50% of our energy comes from nuclear sources, so uranium mining impacts all of us. Flipping a switch powered by nuclear energy makes you wonder where that uranium comes from. Mines in Nebraska and South Dakota?

As Bruce Ellison clearly states in the film, until companies can prove that mining is safe, they should not be allowed to operate in our communities. Our humble hope is to help reset the energy compass to focus the people over profits. And more specifically and urgently, *Crying Earth Rise Up* aims to increase awareness about the timely and critical need to protect the water. *Mni wicozani*, through water there is life. We hope our characters inspire audiences to recognize that each of us can make a difference—it is up to all of us to generate positive change.



Cameco's uranium mine sits at the base of Crow Butte, a sacred Lakota site.

Photo by Suree Towfighnia.

By the Numbers

1. Cameco is the largest uranium mine in the world.
2. The uranium mining field in Crawford, Nebraska, has 8,000 wells.
3. The mining near Crawford recovers an average of 2,800,000 pounds per year producing yellow cake. It is shipped to conversion facilities in Illinois and Canada for further refinement. The converted uranium is used to supply 16 percent of the electricity in nuclear electric generating facilities worldwide.
4. Recent test results on the Pine Ridge Reservation show high levels of arsenic, lead, and radiation in the water.
5. An aquifer is like an underground lake. The name of the aquifer serving the Pine Ridge Reservation is the Ogallala Aquifer.
6. The uranium taken from the mines is processed into what is known as yellow cake.
7. The Cameco wells in Crawford, Nebraska, pump more than 9,000 gallons of water per minute.
8. Once an underground aquifer is contaminated it cannot be returned to its original state.
9. Two 55 gallon drums of uranium "yellow cake" contain the same energy as 120 railcars of coal at 200,000 pounds per car.
10. About 700,000 pounds of uranium is produced each year at the Crawford mine.
11. The letters NRC stand for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.
12. Recent health reports show a sudden rise in cancer patients over the past 20 years on the Pine Ridge Reservation.
13. The process by which the uranium is extracted from the earth is called In Situ Leach mining.
14. Without water there is no life.
15. The Cameco Corporation in Crawford, Nebraska, is just 30 miles from the Pine Ridge Reservation.
16. Many people in Crawford, Nebraska, support the mining industry because it provides jobs.

Discussion Questions

1. *Crying Earth Rise Up* opens with the Lakota prophecy (John Hollowhorn, Lakota, 1932): “Someday the Earth will weep. She will beg for her life. She will cry tears of blood. You will make a choice—if you will help her or let her die, and when she dies, you too will die.”

As a group or class, explore and discuss what each person feels as they hear this prophecy. What does John Hollowhorn mean when he says, “You will make a choice.”?

2. As a class or group, explore both our personal and societal dependence on and relationship with water. Do you think we take clean water for granted? Do you think “water” can be owned? How long would life continue without water? What eco systems would be affected by spoiled water?

3. Do you think our planet earth is a living organism? Explore and discuss why you think the way you do.

4. In the film, we learn that much of the uranium drawn from the Earth is used to generate electricity in nuclear power plants. We use it to turn on our lights, power our houses and businesses, and charge our cell phones. Do you think we overuse electricity? Explore and discuss the many ways that we could cut our use of electricity.

5. Debra White Plume, Alex White Plume, Bruce Elison, Tantoo Cardinal, and many others featured in the film are environmental activists and concerned citizens who believe that the practice of in situ leach mining poses a threat to our water systems. They do not feel that a foreign company has the right to endanger the lives of local residents. The people of Crawford and the mining companies feel it is their right to enjoy the economic benefit (jobs and profit) of the mining operation. What do you believe? Discuss and support your ideas and thoughts.

6. Elisha Yellow Thunder’s quest is personal. She wants to know how the water she drank when she was pregnant which could have caused her daughter’s multiple medical complications became contaminated. Was the contamination a result of naturally occurring processes or a result of human activity? How do you think her quest for answers and solutions differs from the people discussed in the previous question?



Graphic artists Lance Martin and Reuben Cruz discuss images for *Crying Earth Rise Up*.

Photo by Suree Towfighnia.



A sign across the street from a local rancher warns passerby at the boundary of Cameco’s Crow Butte mine in Crawford, Neb.

Photo by Suree Towfighnia.



The Oyuh’pa Singers of Manderson, S.D., sing for the protection of water.

Photo by Kent Lebsock.



Debra White Plume (Lakota) addresses frontline activists prior to her arrest following a White House sit-in in 2011.

Image still from *Crying Earth Rise Up*.

Suggested Activities

- Use the following *Crying Earth Rise Up* coverall activity with your group or class. Print copies of the table below and hand it out prior to viewing the film. Challenge participants to fill in the blanks as they watch the film. Add extra fun by providing prizes to those who correctly fill in the blanks. The answer key is in the “By the Numbers” section.

Crying	Earth	Rise	Up
_____ is the largest uranium producer in the world.	The uranium mining field in Crawford, Nebraska, has _____ wells.	Recent test results on the Pine Ridge Reservation show high levels of _____, _____, and _____ in the water.	An aquifer is like an underground lake. The name of the aquifer serving the Pine Ridge Reservation is the _____.
The uranium taken from the mines is processed into what is known as _____.	These wells pump more than _____ gallons of water per minute.	Once an underground aquifer is contaminated it (circle one: can/ can't) be cleaned again.	Two, 55-gallon drums of uranium “yellow cake” contain the same energy as _____ cars of coal that have 200,000 pounds per car.
About _____ pounds of uranium is produced each year at the Crawford mine.	The letters NRC stand for _____.	Recent health reports show a sudden rise in _____ patients over the past 20 years on the Pine Ridge Reservation.	The converted uranium is used to supply _____ percent of the electricity in nuclear electric generating facilities worldwide.
The process by which the uranium is extracted from the earth is called _____.	Without water there is no _____.	The Cameco Corporation’s mine in Crawford, Nebraska, is just _____ miles from the Pine Ridge Reservation.	Many people in Crawford, Nebraska, want to keep the mining because it provides _____.

- Is your water safe to drink? As a group or class, find out how to get water samples tested—a) How is the testing done?; b) Where is the testing done?; c) Does the testing cost money?; If you have the resources, have each person test their own drinking water plus collect a sample of rain water and have it tested.
- As a class or group, write a letter to Mother Earth and post it on the Love Letters to the Earth website at <http://lovelettertotheearth.com/letters.php> or to <http://www.cryingearthriseup.com> and post a story about your relationship to water.
- What can you do to help? Explore the *Crying Earth Rise Up* website and learn more about how you can help preserve our water for future generations.

Resources

About the Film

- www.cryingearthriseup.com
- www.facebook.com/cryingearthriseup
- twitter: @cryingearthriseup
- www.oweakuinternational.org

About the Tribe

- www.oglalalakotanation.org

Research Information & Education

- Nuclear Regulatory Commission Archive:
<http://adams.nrc.gov/wba>
Type in "Docket # 40-8943" into "Content Search" to view links to inspection reports, testimonies, and hearing documents.
- www.powertechuranium.com
- www.cameco.com/usa
- *Uranium Frenzy: Saga of the Nuclear West*. August 1, 2002, by Raye Ringholz
- *Yellow Dirt: A Poisoned Land and the Betrayal of the Navajos* (paperback). July 5, 2011, by Judy Pasternak.



Powertech's Mark Hollenbeck listens as residents near the Black Hills question the safety of a proposed uranium mine.

Image still from *Crying Earth Rise Up*.

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Crying Earth Rise Up is a co-production of Prairie Dust Films and Vision Maker Media in association with Owe Aku with major funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a Master's in Human Development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books along with one novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written over 70 documentary programs including Public Radio's landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

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