

Teaching Ideas to use with  
Cassandra Radcliff's  
*Saving Upper Newport Bay. How Frank and Frances Robinson Fought to Preserve One of  
California's Last Estuaries*  
Newport Bay Conservancy, 2020

Commissioned by the Newport Bay Conservancy, Radcliff's informative and accessible book relates the story of a decades-long struggle to prevent the destruction of Upper Newport Bay through private development. It recounts the legal, political, organizational, and ecological dimensions of this effort and highlights the contributions of key participants in it.

Education is one of NBC's central goals. While we hope that people of all ages will find, read, enjoy, and spread the message of *Saving Upper Newport Bay*, we are especially hopeful that the book will be useful for teachers and students. This book could find its way into courses in environmental studies, ecology, political activism, law and the environment, California history, English and journalism, urban planning, geology and earth science, and many interdisciplinary curricula. High school and undergraduate college students may be the most appropriate audience for Radcliff's work, but it might also be accessible to advanced middle school or junior high students. With the freedom to build extensive, multidisciplinary projects, home school teachers will find much to work with here. The following are sets of questions for discussion and writing, and ideas for research, onsite exploration, and activist projects.

### **Responses**

1. What surprised you about *Saving Upper Newport Bay*? Were you already familiar with any parts of this history?
2. Name one thing you learned about environmental protection, ecology, state law, or activism from reading this book.
3. Can you imagine yourself in this story? How might you have reacted at various points along the way?
4. If someone who hasn't read the book asks you about it, what might you highlight in your account and evaluation of the book? Who should read it and why?

### **Pinning down the facts**

1. What was the event that got the Robinsons started on this long battle?
2. What is The Irvine Company and what were some features of Orange County that contributed to their actions at this moment? How were people using the bay during this period?
3. What is the Orange County Board of Supervisors, and what role did they play early in the conflict?
4. What is the California State Lands Commission, and what role does it play in the battle for the bay?
5. What are "tidelands"? How are they determined? What does Article X, Sections 3 and 4, of the California State Constitution have to say about tidelands? (You may want to use the internet to help with this question.)
6. What organizations were formed to assist in the struggle to save the bay and when did they come into being?

7. When did the Santa Barbara oil spill occur, and what was its effect on the struggle to save Upper Newport Bay?
8. What are Friends Tours and what is their purpose?
9. Who were the parties to the “friendly” lawsuit initiated in 1969? What outcome did the Robinsons and the Orange County Foundation for the Preservation of Public Property hope for?
10. What features of the 1970 trial stand out in your mind? What was the decision?
11. What is California Proposition 20 and how did its passage affect the battle for the bay?
12. In 1973, the Fourth District Court of Appeal reversed the 1970 decision. Why did the court decision not mark the end of the controversy? Why was Frank Robinson displeased with the final outcome?

### **Analyzing the conflict**

1. Radcliff is careful to point out that the Robinsons and those who joined them were motivated by a series of different purposes over the course of the years they spent seeking to “save the bay.” What were those purposes and why did they come forward at various different times?
2. At the core of this dispute are two important values: private property and public access. Discuss the virtues of each.
3. Political activism requires multiple strategies—ways of getting the message across. Mention several ways the Robinsons and their collaborators sought to persuade people in power to save the bay.
4. Activist struggles require different abilities and professional credentials. What kinds of people got involved in the struggle to save the bay and how did their accomplishments and connections come into play?
5. In his reflections on the struggle, Frank said that, from the beginning in 1963, “it was like a stone dropped into water” (97). What do you think he means by this figure of speech? What impressions does it evoke for you?

### **Environmental/ecological issues**

1. What is an estuary and what ecological functions do estuaries serve?
2. What is the status of wetlands in California at present?
3. What are threatened and endangered species? What are some examples from Upper Newport Bay? Why is it important to preserve them?
4. What is an “ecological reserve”? How is it different from a park?

### **Activities**

1. Walk through the Muth Interpretive Center and pay attention to the ways it tells the story of the bay. What did you learn from your tour? Does the material there give a full (enough) picture of the history? What might you add or subtract if you were in charge of the exhibits? What would you point out to visitors if you were a volunteer?
2. Take a walk on the West Bluff and read all the signs there. What did you learn?
3. Take the Friends Tour (January to March, starting at Vista Point on the east side of the bay) and take notes. What are the five stations of the tour? What did you learn at each station? What surprised you? What would you like to learn more about?
4. Participate in an event sponsored by Newport Bay Conservancy, for example the Clean Up Day every September. How did your participation change your view of the bay?

5. Spend some time in the bay with a journal, a sketchbook, or a camera. Record your thoughts, feelings, impressions, and visions of the bay.
6. Check your local news sources to find out whether there are current conflicts in your region between developers and those who want to preserve a natural space. Are the environmental advocates using any of the tactics you read about in *Saving Upper Newport Bay*? What's your opinion on the issue? Is there a way you can get involved?

### **Further research**

Locate another case in which private property concerns came into conflict with public access to tidelands in California (e.g., Huntington Beach; Malibu). What brought about the conflict? How was it resolved? How did the legal challenges work out? What persuasive tactics came into play? What were the key environmental issues at stake?

Frank Robinson always said, "You can never win a conservation battle, but you can always lose it. ... To preserve [the bay] takes full-time attention" (99). What did he mean? In what ways does Newport Bay Conservancy live up to his urging to pay full-time attention? In what ways do you pay attention to the environment? Are there other things you hope to do in the future?

Is it easier or more difficult to engage in struggles to preserve the natural environment these days? Look into changes in the law at the federal and state level that influence the conservation and preservation of natural resources. Do you find successes? Setbacks? Who is involved in these struggles? What role might you play in the future?

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