



LESSON PLAN

Ancient and Modern Worlds



RELATED FILM

A Thousand Suns

BY GO PROJECT FILMS



Key Idea

In an age of rising populations and climate change, global food security is a major concern. New farming technologies and market-based agriculture provide one answer while traditional farming practices and natural resource management provide another.

Background

A Thousand Suns, filmed in Ethiopia, New York, and Kenya, tells the story of the Gamo Highlands and the unique worldview held by the people of the region. Perched high above the African Rift Valley in southwestern Ethiopia, this isolated area is one of the most densely populated rural regions of Africa. Its people have been farming sustainably for 10,000 years. It has remained biologically and culturally intact because of a unique traditional food system that interweaves a diverse number of tree, root, cereal, and vegetable crops with forestry and livestock production.

The defining aspect of land use in the Gamo highlands is a set of intricate and well-enforced traditional laws called *Wagas*. These laws stem from the belief that everything is connected and bound in a delicate balance. Together they form a natural resource management system that dictates everything from interpersonal relationships to the conservation and preservation of pasture, forest, soil, and water. Because the *Wagas* are interconnected, if one aspect is denied or imbalanced, the whole system is at risk.

Threats to the Gamo include outside religions and the “new” Green Revolution. The Evangelical Protestant Church is changing the traditional animist social structures that have, until now, bound the people of the Gamo to each other and the environment. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) initiative is moving farming away from household food security and into an external market-based agriculture. The Gamo’s unique agricultural system and the worldview that sustains it provide valuable clues as to how it may be possible to support a growing human population while coexisting with the natural environment.

*For an in-depth background on the history of the Gamo, see the [Gamo Fact Sheet](#).



Film: 27 minutes

Class: 120 minutes

SUBJECT AREAS

HIGH SCHOOL

- Anthropology
- Environmental Science
- Modern World Studies

COLLEGE

- African Studies
- Cultural Anthropology
- Environmental Studies
- Geography

THEMES

- Cultural diversity
- Traditional knowledge
- Effects of modernization
- Value of old versus new

MATERIALS

- Online access to the film
- Equipment for showing film

PREPARATION

- (Optional) Make copies of the Gamo Fact Sheet



Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. SL.11-12.1.b. Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2.Geo.9-12. Evaluate the influence of long-term climate variability on human migration and settlement patterns, resource use, and land uses and local-to-global scales.

Next Generation Science Standards. HS-LS2.6. Evaluate the claims, evidence, and reasoning that the complex interactions in ecosystems maintain relatively consistent numbers and types of organisms in stable conditions, but changing conditions may result in a new ecosystem.

Lesson

SETTING THE STAGE

Introduce the film by telling students that they will be watching a film about the Gamo people who live in the African Rift Valley of southwestern Ethiopia who have been farming sustainably for 10,000 years. Show the isolated area on a map.

Modern farming today, in the U.S., is managed by huge machinery on many acres of land. Ask students what they think farmers did before these technologies were available? What might be some benefits and drawbacks of technology? Ask students to think about the impacts technology has in their lives. In what ways can technology provide opportunities? In what ways can technology, like the continuous use of cell phones, get in the way of a humanistic perspective?

ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Direct students to note as they watch the film to pay attention to the Gamo way of life and the positive and negative influences of the modern world.



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The African Rift Valley is home to over 4 million people whose culture has remained intact in the face of colonialism and globalization. The landscape is roughly 62 miles long and 18 miles wide. Devoid of roads, the region is unique in its resistance to the food shortages and famines that have devastated much of the country.

Delving Deeper

1. After watching the film, explain that students will conduct a mini-debate around the following question: Does the modern world negatively or positively influence the traditional Gamo culture?
2. Divide the class into three teams.
3. Ask the first team to **take the side that the modern world negatively influences** the traditional Gamo culture and way of life. Ask students what they noticed from the film to back up this view. The following questions may assist students in forming their opinions:
 - The Gamo Highlands have tremendous biodiversity, hundreds of varieties of agricultural species, which has made the area more resilient over 10,000 years. Do you think this could be threatened by outside influences? If so, how?
 - Kapo Kansa, a Gamoan elder featured in the film said, “It is not permitted among Gamos to take out whatever he likes from the ground. There is a limit. You are taking grasses, which you need. You don’t destroy others. You are taking trees for your consumption. Not to destroy others. You want to pass a resource for the coming generation.” What do you think of this statement? How does the Gamo’s indigenous view have a practical view on sharing and ownership? How does this view compare to the views in the Western world?
 - In what ways does being closer to the land contribute to the Gamo culture? In the first three minutes of the film, an Ethiopian elder said, “I can’t see any land or fields. There is nothing. These people just live on concrete surfaces.” How might his observation, and perplexity, be an insight into the modern world’s connection with nature and the land we live on?



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- What are the cons of introducing a new belief system into the Gamo?
 - The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), mentioned in the film, aims to bring a new green revolution to Africa with its \$262 million budget. Do you think the genetically modified seeds and chemical pesticides, provided by AGRA, can aid the farmers in the Gamo towards a better future? Do you think there is a role for science and technology in places like the Gamo? Why or why not? Who decides?
4. Ask the second team to **take the side that the modern world positively influences** the Gamo culture and way of life. Ask students what they noticed from the film to back up this view. The following questions may assist students in forming their opinions:
- Roads are being developed into the most remote areas. Do you think this could help the Gamo people? Why?
 - What are the pros of introducing a new belief system into the Gamo?
 - The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), mentioned in the film, aims to bring a new green revolution to Africa with its \$262 million budget. Do you think the genetically modified seeds and chemical pesticides, provided by AGRA, can aid the farmers in the Gamo towards a better future? Do you think there is a role for science and technology in places like the Gamo? Why or why not? Who decides?
5. Ask team three to act as a council of judges and prepare to hear arguments from both teams. While teams one and two are developing their arguments, ask team three students to think about how they will base their decision. Would they base their decision on opinion or on the interests of the Gamo people? Before hearing both sides, give team three questions to use during their evaluation. These questions will show no bias to either side: What are the advantages of both sides? What are the disadvantages of both sides? What advantages outweigh the disadvantages?



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6. Give teams one and two 5-10 minutes for discussion.
7. Two volunteers from each of the debating teams will present their findings and arguments. Team volunteers will speak for 3-5 minutes.
8. Team three will discuss their ideas for 5 minutes openly with the class and make their decision.

Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the story. (Note for teachers: Just as quotes from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the film to justify their reasoning.)

1. If you were a cultural anthropologist working with a team to create a museum exhibition titled, “The Value of the Ancient World,” what would you include of the Gamo people and culture in the exhibit? Would you display photos, quotes from the Gamoan elders, or documentation of the Gamo’s farming practices, etc.? If so, which photos or quotes would you choose and how would it be displayed?
(C3.D2.Geo.9.9-12)
2. What can we do as cultural anthropologists to learn from the traditional Gamo culture? What parts of the Gamo culture did you find valuable? Do you think we can learn from their unique traditional food system? If so, how? (NGSS.HS-LS2.6)
3. What peer comment made you see things differently? Why?
(CCSS.ELA.SL.11-12.1.b)

Resources

[“Gamo Fact Sheet.”](#) Global Oneness Project.

Francis Lappe, Joseph Collins and Peter Rosset with Luis Esparza, *World Hunger: Twelve Myths*, 2nd ed. (New York: Food First Books, 1998).

[“Discussion Guide: A Thousand Suns.”](#) Global Oneness Project.