



2014 • 8 minutes • Directed by Kalyanee Mam • Distributed by Migrant Films

# Lost World

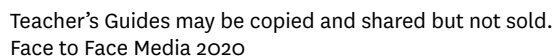
2018 • 17 minutes • Directed by Kalyanee Mam • Distributed by Migrant Films

As Singapore dredges sand out from beneath Cambodia's mangrove forests in Koh Sralau, an entire ecosystem, a communal way of life, and one woman's relationship to her beloved home are faced with the threat of erasure.

**THESE TWO FILMS MAY BE USED TOGETHER OR SEPARATELY**

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questions and activities begin on page 11





#### CURATORS:

##### **Rajashree Ghosh**

*Resident Scholar, Women's  
Studies Research Center,  
Brandeis University*



##### **Miriam Morgenstern**

*Social Justice Educator,  
Curriculum Consultant*

“*First the land gives way,  
and then the people,  
and soon the entire  
fabric of a culture and  
identity is lost.*

—Kalyanee Mam, director

## WHY WE SELECTED THESE FILMS

*Fight for Areng Valley* and *Lost World* shed light on the environmental destruction caused by sand mining and dam construction in Cambodia, along with the more general threat posed by “development” projects to the culture, heritage, and livelihoods of indigenous peoples globally.

The challenges facing the communities in these films are extraordinary, but so too are the people. They are strengthened by a proud heritage and a belief in a better future for their children and homeland.

Taken together, these stories, beautifully filmed by Cambodian-American director Kalyanee Mam, provide a vivid and thoughtful meditation on humankind’s relationship to the natural world.

## SUGGESTED SUBJECT AREAS

Agriculture	Environmental Studies
Anthropology	Gender Studies
Asian Studies	Legal Studies
Biology	Marine Science
Economics	Sociology

## THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOCUS OF THESE FILMS

Since the sand dredging began, every family in Vy Phalla’s community at Koh Sralau has experienced a family member being forced to migrate to other places and even other countries for work. “First the land gives way,” the director writes, “and then the people, and soon the entire fabric of a culture and identity is lost. Land was once considered the most secure and sacred ground we could stand on. Now even land, like people and commodities, can move and shift, smuggled and bartered for profit.”

## KEY LOCATIONS AND PEOPLE

**Areng Valley** – a remote valley in southwest Cambodia

**Koh Sralau** – an island off the southwestern coast of Cambodia

**The Lost World** – a Universal Studios theme park in Singapore

**Stung Tatay dam site** – a hydroelectric project on the Mekong River

**Reem Sav See** and her husband, Vann Lat, and their infant

**Venerable But Buntenh** – a Buddhist monk and activist

**Community members** – living in the Areng Valley

**Vy Phalla** – fisher



## FIGHT FOR ARENG VALLEY:

### SYNOPSIS

Reem Sav See and her family, members of the Chong ethnic minority, depend on the unspoiled river and forest environment in the lush Areng Valley for their livelihoods. The Areng Valley is home to 1,700 people, mostly Chong, who live in close-knit communities that are deeply connected to the land by local conservation and belief systems.

The Chong consider the surrounding forests and the pristine Areng River to be sacred, inhabited by spirits, and the source of life. However, with support from China, the Stung Tatay dam is being constructed on the river, threatening to flood large swathes of forest and farms and displace 1,500 people. Given the threats to the sacred forests, rivers, and to their lives and livelihoods, Reem Sav See and other community members join Buddhist monks from Phnom Penh to oppose the dam and protect the forests.

### BACKGROUND

There are an estimated 18 to 24 different indigenous groups in Cambodia that comprise just 2% to 3% of the population. The [Chong people](#), the focus of *Fight for Areng Valley*, reside mainly in Koh Kong province in southwest Cambodia. They have their own spoken language and particular cultural traditions. Today, Chong speakers number fewer than 2,000, and most young Chong people do not speak the Chong language.

The Areng Valley in southwest Cambodia, which overlaps the Central Cardamom Protected Forest, is one of the country's most sensitive ecological zones. The valley is a rich matrix of evergreen forest, grasslands, swamps and lakes, and associated riparian forest.

The valley is home to some 500 families, mostly Chong. These residents live in harmony with nature, protecting the wildlife and habitat, and many have ancestors who have occupied the Areng Valley for centuries.

But flooding by dams, illegal logging, rubber production, and conversion of forests into palm oil plantations—as also seen in Kalyanee Mam's film *A River Changes Course*—are depleting the forests. In the last 20 years, Cambodia has lost approximately 25% of its forest cover. In turn, this alters the ecosystem, [resulting in the loss of biodiversity](#). Since the lives of the Chong are intricately interwoven with the natural surroundings, the imposed change due to dam construction is met with much grief and trepidation.

The Venerable But Buntenh, a Buddhist monk who is a well-known leader in a movement of monks to preserve what remains of Cambodia's forests, makes a brief appearance in the film.





**Dawn in Koh Sralau**  
*In the early morning, the egrets, geese, brilliantly befeathered kingfishers, and other wild birds come to feed along the forest edges. Monkeys leap across branches and otters wade through the narrow waterways. At night, silvery fish skip and fly above the glassy water while fireflies glow in the forest like brilliant cobwebs of silk and gossamer.*

## **LOST WORLD:**

### **SYNOPSIS**

Near Koh Sralau, off the west coast of Cambodia, sand dredging is ravaging the ecosystem of the mangrove forests that thousands of families depend on for their livelihoods. Eighty million tons of sand have been extracted and transported to Singapore to expand its landmass and build a theme park. Dredging machines and sand barges also dump their waste directly into the river, causing steep declines in fish and crab catches. Vy Phalla and members of her village have borne the brunt of the mining operations. While residents of Koh Sralau grapple with the threat of erasure, a ravaged natural landscape, and ruined livelihoods, Singapore thrives in its veneer of sustainability in artificial “cloud forests” constructed in a greenhouse that showcases an exotic “lost world.”

### **BACKGROUND**

The mangrove forests along Cambodia’s southwestern coastline, near the island of Koh Sralau, are extensive and spectacular. The forests stretch for miles in a network of small islands, waterways, channels, and ecologically diverse estuaries. They provide a home for people who have lived on the coast for generations and depend on the ecosystem for their livelihoods.

But sand dredging has plunged the fishing community into a life of scarcity and poverty. The dredgers are undermining the mangrove forest by ripping out its trees, further destroying wildlife habitat and the populations of fish and crab. Villages are emptied as women leave their children to search for a daily catch; previously, they could find fish and crab around their homes. The threat of loss and marginalization is real, but the people of Koh Sralau are still holding on to the hope that their island will survive.

Cambodian celebrations, such as the water festival, continue to honor the centrality of water, rivers, and fishing to Cambodian life. Traditional Cambodian songs, like the one sung by Vy Phalla, depict the gifts of nature, fishing, and the rice harvests that have sustained the population.

**Marina Bay Sands hotel and casino (top), and the Universal Studios Lost World theme park (bottom) are both built on sand**

“Never before have I witnessed the mass movement of land from one country to another, not for farming, not for housing or economic development, but for pure unadulterated entertainment.

—Kalyanee Mam, director



“Singapore imported over 80 million tons of sand, worth more than \$740 million, from Cambodia. Marina Bay Sands—a 55-story hotel, resort, and casino valued at \$6.6 billion, which includes the land cost—is considered the most expensive stand-alone casino property in the world.

“Gardens by the Bay, a billion-dollar garden theme park, is built on top of 250 acres of sand or reclaimed land. The theme park purports to introduce its visitors to ‘a mysterious world veiled in mist,’ where they can ‘learn about rare plants and their fast-disappearing environment’; a world grounded on ‘the principles of environmental sustainability.’

“It is ironic that a place that aims to teach concepts of environmental sustainability is literally built on a foundation that is not environmentally sustainable.”

—Kalyanee Mam, writing in [The Global Oneness Project](#)



## FILM SEQUENCES: *FIGHT FOR ARENG VALLEY*

### Setting the scene (0:00–2:00)

Reem Sav See and her family pick mushrooms in the lush forests of the pristine Areng Valley. On board a dugout, they follow a stream in the mangrove forest and retrieve a fishing net.

The Stung Tatay dam in southwest Cambodia will flood 26,000 acres of forest and farmland and displace over 1,500 people.



### Buddhist monks (2:00–3:25)

Buddhist monks in saffron garb travel through the countryside to meet with villagers.

### Women speak out (3:26–4:50)

Reem Sav See says, “The government claims to bring us progress. If we are relocated, we will suffer beyond compare.” Another villager says, “We don’t know when the dam will be built. ... We don’t dare say anything. ... We are too afraid.” A third woman gestures and says, “Even if they piled money a meter above my head, I wouldn’t want Chinese money.”

Following the meeting with the villagers, monks tie saffron sashes around trees and chant.



### A demonstration (4:50–5:22)

Community members proclaim, “All of us are together. We are the Chong community from Areng Valley. We don’t need the hydroelectric dam ... We must protect our land and inheritance [we received] from our ancestors.” A banner reads: “Areng Hydro-Electric Dam Destroys Ethnic Minority Cultures.”

### Return to the Areng River (5:23–8:20)

Reem Sav See says, “Nature cannot be valued in terms of gold and diamonds. The peace and love that nature provides cannot be compared to anything. Our lives are united with birds and animals. If they are destroyed, we will be too. If trees are cut, the land will be empty and desolate. And if we are banished, I will be filled with grief.”





## FILM SEQUENCES: *LOST WORLD*

### Sand mining introduction (0:00–3:54)

We see images of sand mining and piles of sand. Vy Phalla exclaims, “Wow, I’ve only heard people talk about it.” She and two children pick mussels.

### A song (4:03–5:30)

Vy Phalla sings softly, “The beauty of the mangroves rivals palace gardens. It’s a place where pure love grows. The more I gaze, the more I crave to see. A true and rare beauty is revealed to me. The ocean leans forward, embracing the mangrove forest—stunning and exquisite—a golden paradise. Fishing boats small and large gather, filled with families, fishing in the forest.”



### "Women are the most affected" (5:30–6:44)

Vy Phalla joins a group of women sitting together to clean crabs. Grandma Yi says, “Before, we could catch fish near our houses. We could catch fish, cast our nets, and even set crab traps. But since they started mining, there are no more islands, no more crabs.

“And here, women are most affected. They leave their children and their homes to work. If you want to see, just walk around the island. The houses are empty.”



### Observing the dredgers (6:45–8:50)

Vy Phalla and several villagers approach the dredgers. The color of the water changes as sand spills from the dredging. As they approach, the dredgers speed up.

Vy Phalla says, “Here we have to sit and shed tears and witness the destruction of our grandchildren’s home, our village, our way of life.”

### Singapore and the Lost World theme park (8:50–15:02)

Looking at an artificial waterfall, Vy Phalla says, “If this were real, imagine how beautiful it would be.” Seeing people on the street in Singapore, she says, “I want to tell them that this land is my land. But I can’t express it because I don’t speak their language. I don’t know what to do so they will understand.

“Without land, we are without identity,” she says, “like refugees without a homeland.”



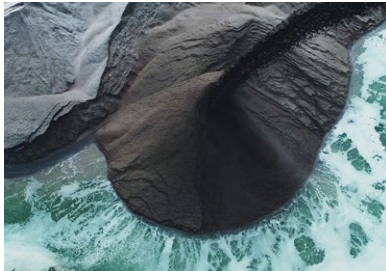
## COLLEGE LEVEL

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

#### Questions for *Fight for Areng Valley*

1. Discuss the struggles of individuals and communities in this film as they fight against the construction of dams.
2. What are the particular environmental features of the Areng Valley in southwest Cambodia?
3. Indigenous communities such as the Chong live in harmony with their natural surroundings. Why do they feel threatened?
4. How will the Stung Tatay dam impact the Areng Valley and its people?
5. The Cambodian government is constructing dams on the river. Why do some speakers say this is not progress?
6. At 04:24, a woman says, “I wouldn’t want Chinese money.” What did she mean by that?
7. Which two Chong women do you think articulate their protest the best?
8. Why does the Venerable But Buntenh, a Buddhist monk, say at 02:51, “There will be no forest for spirits to live in”?
9. Refer to other indigenous peoples’ struggles over land rights as described in other videos in this collection (e.g., *5x5: Voices for Change from the Forests of Indonesia*; *Waking the Green Tiger*; *Homeland*; *Tar Creek*; or *Yindabad*). Draw comparisons with the situation of the Chong community.
10. The monks from Phnom Penh call for united voices. Did the Chong community agree? How might they work together?
11. Reem Sav See says, “We love nature, and nature loves us.” Describe her feelings about the impending dam construction and the changes it will bring.
12. In their fight to protect their land and inheritance, do you think the Chong may be able to stop or stall the dams from disrupting their lives and environment?
13. What conditions are necessary for people’s movements to be successful? Give examples from other countries.





#### COLLEGE LEVEL (cont.)

#### Questions for *Lost World*

1. The opening aerial view shows giant excavators dredging huge amounts of sand from under the water. What kind of message does this evoke for you?
2. Rapacious capitalism and environmental degradation: How are the two linked in the film?
3. Describe how Singapore transports sand from Cambodia. What is the purpose of taking the sand? Name other countries that export or import sand.
4. How are fisherfolk dependent on sand?
5. How is Vy Phalla's peace being disrupted?
6. Vy Phalla sings a song about her land and the bounties it offers. Speaking on her behalf, what do mangrove forests mean to her?
7. Are men and women equally affected when ecosystems they depend on are damaged? At 6:15 in the film, one woman says, "The women are most affected." Discuss.
8. What immediate changes in their surroundings do residents of Koh Sralau talk about, and what reasons do they give for them?
9. What does Singapore's cloud forest exhibit signify to the residents of Koh Sralau?
10. At 12:40 in the film, Vy Phalla says while in Singapore, "This land is my land." Discuss what this means to her.
11. For the residents of Koh Sralau who are losing their land and identity, the sign directing visitors to "The Lost World" in Singapore seems ironic. How does it relate to the title of the film? Discuss.

#### Questions for both films

1. Reem Sav See and Vy Phalla are similar yet different in their approaches to preserving their environment. Discuss the commonalities and differences using a Venn diagram.
2. In both films, women play a vital role in their respective communities. Do you think there is an overlap between environmental justice and women's issues?



#### COLLEGE LEVEL (cont.)

3. In the Areng Valley, monks are shown supporting the Chong community in grassroots environmental activism to protect their sacred forests. In Koh Sralau, however, Vy Phalla and her community appear to be on their own. Do you think they would benefit from support for a campaign against sand dredging?
4. What are the negative processes that have put these communities at risk?
5. Because of the paradox of energy needs, local environmental burdens are borne by the poor. Discuss.
6. How have industrialization and capitalist enterprises contributed to environmental crises?



#### Activities for *Fight for Areng Valley*

1. Learn more about [the Chong community](#).
2. Read about the [Areng Valley](#) and [biodiversity in Cambodia](#).
3. Read about indigenous peoples in the [United States](#), [Canada](#) and [globally](#).
4. Research other stories about [dams and indigenous communities](#).
5. Develop a map of the [dams on the Mekong River](#) and their impact on neighboring countries.
6. Research organizations like [Cultural Survival](#) that work with indigenous populations and their work in [Cambodia](#).
7. Where possible, research and contact an indigenous people's organization and interview key individuals who can discuss their concerns about land rights, marginalization, and other issues.

#### Activities for *Lost World*

1. Explore the [World Atlas of Mangroves](#).
2. Research or join organizations such as [Mangrove Action Plan](#) that work with communities living in coastal areas.
3. Participate in community-based ecological mangrove restoration through organizations like [EcoViva](#).
4. Explore how gender needs to be integrated with natural resource management. Read about [available toolkits](#).



## GRADES 8–12

### Alignment with national standards

For grades 8–12, these films are in alignment with the (U.S.) National Council for the Social Studies and Next Generation Science Standards, as follows:

#### Standard 3 - People, Places, and Environment

The study of people, places, and environments enables us to understand the relationship between human populations and the physical world. Students learn where people and places are located and why they are there. They examine the influence of physical systems, such as climate, weather and seasons, and natural resources, such as land and water, on human populations. They study the causes, patterns and effects of human settlement and migration, learn of the roles of different kinds of population centers in a society, and investigate the impact of human activities on the environment. This enables them to acquire a useful basis of knowledge for informed decision-making on issues arising from human-environmental relationships.

#### Dimension 3: Core Ideas Life Sciences

A complex set of interactions within an ecosystem can keep its numbers and types of organisms relatively constant over long periods of time under stable conditions. If a modest biological or physical disturbance to an ecosystem occurs, it may return to its more or less original status (i.e., the ecosystem is resilient), as opposed to becoming a very different ecosystem. Extreme fluctuations in conditions or the size of any population, however, can challenge the functioning of ecosystems in terms of resources and habitat availability. Moreover, anthropogenic changes (induced by human activity) in the environment—including habitat destruction, pollution, introduction of invasive species, overexploitation, and climate change—can disrupt an ecosystem and threaten the survival of some species.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

### Questions for *Fight for Areng Valley*

1. In *Fight for Areng Valley*, what resources do the Buddhist monks and the Chong people use to protest the construction of the Stung Tatay dam?
2. In one part of *Fight for Areng Valley*, activists hold up protest signs written in both English and Khmer. Why do the protestors use English as well as Khmer? Who is the target audience for these protests?
3. How do the Buddhist monks contribute to Chong activism? Why do they tie saffron-colored sashes around the trees?
4. Corruption and illegal logging are causing widespread damage to Cambodia's forests and wildlife. How might corruption affect the Chong and other minorities who depend on forest resources? Read about [activists who are risking their lives](#) to expose the logging.





## GRADES 8 12 (cont.)

### Questions for *Lost World*

1. Describe how Singapore transports sand from Cambodia. What is the purpose? Can you find other countries that export and import sand?
2. In *Lost World*, what is Vy Phalla's reaction to Singapore? Could you imagine another Cambodian tourist in Singapore having a very different reaction?



### Questions for both films

1. Before either of the films begins, ask students to close their eyes and listen. What sounds do they hear? How would they describe them? Ask students if they can guess the location of the film.
2. How do Reem Sav See and Vy Phalla describe the trees and nature? How do they ascribe human feelings to nature?
3. What do you imagine the future will be for the families of the women depicted in the film? Will their livelihoods still come from the same source?
4. Does a government have a responsibility to protect the interests of the individual, or should it prioritize the collective good? Is the Cambodian government abandoning its responsibilities to the forest and indigenous people? Does the construction of the dam or the export of sand benefit the Cambodian people as a whole?



### Activities for both films

1. Students can prepare a mapping project that focuses on rivers, urban centers, and peripheral areas, identifying the flow of people within and across Southeast Asia, as well as any structures built by any foreign entities.
2. China and Singapore are not the only countries buying land, building structures, and dredging sand in Cambodia. Students can research which countries and/or foreign entities are purchasing land in Cambodia. Students can graph their findings to measure foreign influence. This [website](#) will help with this activity.
3. Students can research the environmental activism of Buddhist monks in Cambodia and other Southeast Asian countries. What is the motivation of these monks? Is protecting the land their only interest?
4. Fishing rights and water rights are very complex issues for communities. Students can investigate what makes fishing and water rights so problematic.

5. Students can explore the impact of commercial logging and mining on minority populations (Karen, Chin, Kachin, Rohingya) in neighboring Myanmar.
6. Solve the problem: Is there a solution that includes economic development and environmental justice in this particular situation?



### Extension Activity: Looking through lenses

What evidence can you find of Reem Sav See’s and Vy Phalla’s connections to the environment? View their connections through several “lenses” to better understand their points of view. The same lenses could be used to explore the viewpoints of other stakeholders, including the Buddhist monks, the dam builders, and even the filmmaker. How do they “see” the Areng Valley?

The following lenses, and others, can be used:

- **The lens of PEOPLE:** family relationships and how people get along with each other as individuals or groups
- **The lens of CULTURE:** tradition, language, religion, beliefs, food, music, health, medicine, media
- **The lens of ECONOMICS:** how and why we get the things we need to live and the choices we make to get those things
- **The lens of TECHNOLOGY:** how people use science for practical purposes
- **The lens of POWER:** politics, competition, struggle, war
- **The lens of ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:** seeking to resolve conflicting interests in a way that respects human rights and protects the environment

### Extension Activity: Looking at three structures in Cambodia (for grades 8–12 but older students might like them too)

1. When do you think each structure was built?
2. What is/was the purpose of each structure?
3. What can we learn about Cambodia from looking at these structures?
4. How do these structures relate to the films?



**Image 1:** Angkor Wat, built in the 12th century, is the most famous temple in the Angkor Temple Complex, Siem Reap, Cambodia



**Image 2:** Modern house with pool in Siem Reap, Cambodia



**Image 3:** Traditional dwellings on the Tonle Sap River, Cambodia



**Extension Activity: Using a cognitive organizer**

After viewing the film or films, complete the cognitive organizer below and be prepared to explain your responses.

In these films, you can see the convergence of traditional life and modern life in Cambodia. As you complete the cognitive organizer, predict which of these aspects of traditional and modern life will change for the children in the films when they become adults.

**Cognitive organizer example:**

I noticed...	Traditional	Modern	Change +20 years
Clothing	✓	✓	Most of the people wore modern clothes, this will stay the same.
Fishing methods	✓	✓	People use nets for fishing today, but the boat seemed very old and maybe will be modernized in the future.
Foraging for mushrooms	✓		This will probably continue
Building materials	✓	✓	Newer, better materials may be used.
Building equipment	✓	✓	Maybe there will be new machines that use alternative energy, old equipment might be in a museum!
Banners/signs		✓	They will be the same
Dwellings	✓		Old houses might be destroyed. People will live in modern apartments
Religion/beliefs	✓		They could stay the same.
Mangrove forest	✓		It will be destroyed.

### Cognitive Organizer

In these films, you can see the convergence of traditional life and modern life in Cambodia. As you complete the cognitive organizer, predict which of these aspects of traditional and modern life will change for the children in the films when they become adults.

I noticed...	Traditional	Modern	Change +20 years

## SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Learn more [about the films and filmmaker](#).

Watch another film by this director in this collection: *A River Changes Course*, a full-length documentary also directed by Kalyanee Mam, highlights the experience of a Cham Muslim family impacted by the changing environment of the Mekong River and Tonle Sap Lake.

[Why care about Cambodia's forests?](#) This website explores the importance of Cambodia's forests to Cambodia, and the devastating impact of forest destruction for the rest of the world.

[“When Your Land Is Stolen From Beneath Your Feet.”](#) Emily Buder. *The Atlantic*, March 11, 2019. This article provides background information about sand dredging.

[“Hostile Takeover.”](#) Global Witness, July 2016.

[“Why land rights matter in Cambodia.”](#) IRIN, March 15, 2013.

[“What's Happening in Cambodia's Forests?”](#) Kresek, Kai. GlobalForestWatch.org, September 26, 2019.

Download [Mangroves for coastal defense](#). Wetlands International and The Nature Conservancy, 2014.

Download [Mangroves: Where Land Meets the Sea](#). USAID, December 31, 2016.

Download [“Asia's hunger for sand takes a toll on endangered species.”](#) Christina Larson. *Science*, March 1, 2018.

Read about [sand dredging and environmental impacts in different countries](#).

Read about [Sand mining: the global environmental crisis you've probably never heard of](#).