

Teacher's Guide

let my people go surfing

The Education of a
Reluctant Businessman

Yvon Chouinard

patagonia®





introduction

In a business world commonly characterized by greed, obsession with short-term gain, and environmentally destructive practices, Patagonia is undoubtedly unique. While it is a successful company with a robust annual profit, it is driven not by an addiction to profit but rather by a mission to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis. In *Let My People Go Surfing*, Yvon Chouinard discusses the origin of his company, the uncompromising vision sustaining it, and the philosophies that continue to inform its practices. Like his company, Chouinard's memoir is distinct. He blends autobiographical writing with a larger discussion of business philosophy and sobering, yet hopeful, environmental commentary. As such, his text is applicable to a variety of curricular areas, including English language arts, ecology, business strategy, management theory, environmental sustainability, and more. This book also appeals to a wide range of learners, such as high school students, college students, and adult learners, including those in executive development programs.

This teacher's guide was designed with this variation in mind; it has an interdisciplinary focus and features a range of questions and activities appropriate for use with many different students. This guide contains five sections: discussion and writing questions, thematic questions and activities, service learning projects, research topics, and a related resources section. The activities and questions featured here can be easily modified and scaled, as they were constructed with flexibility in mind. Also, students are encouraged throughout to utilize technology and work collaboratively as they engage in a study of Chouinard's text. Finally, this guide should provoke meaningful reflection and action as it supports several of Patagonia's guiding philosophies: lead an examined life, clean up our own act, do our penance, support civil democracy, do good, and influence other companies.

Discussion and Writing Questions

These questions can be given to the entire class to generate discussion, or students can respond individually through writing, in small groups, in online discussions, etc.

Foreword

- 1 In her foreword, Naomi Klein writes, “Moreover, at a time when our economic system is failing us so profoundly, the virtuous practices of any one corporation aren’t going to make much of a dent in the problem” (p. viii). Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your reasoning.
- 2 According to Klein, what are some practices that separate Patagonia from other so-called socially responsible companies?
- 3 “These various projections are the equivalent of every alarm in your house going off simultaneously. And then every alarm on your street going off as well, one by one by one” (p. x). What projections is Klein referring to here? What is truly at stake?
- 4 What is the nature of the conflict between our economic system and the planetary system? What must happen to resolve this conflict?



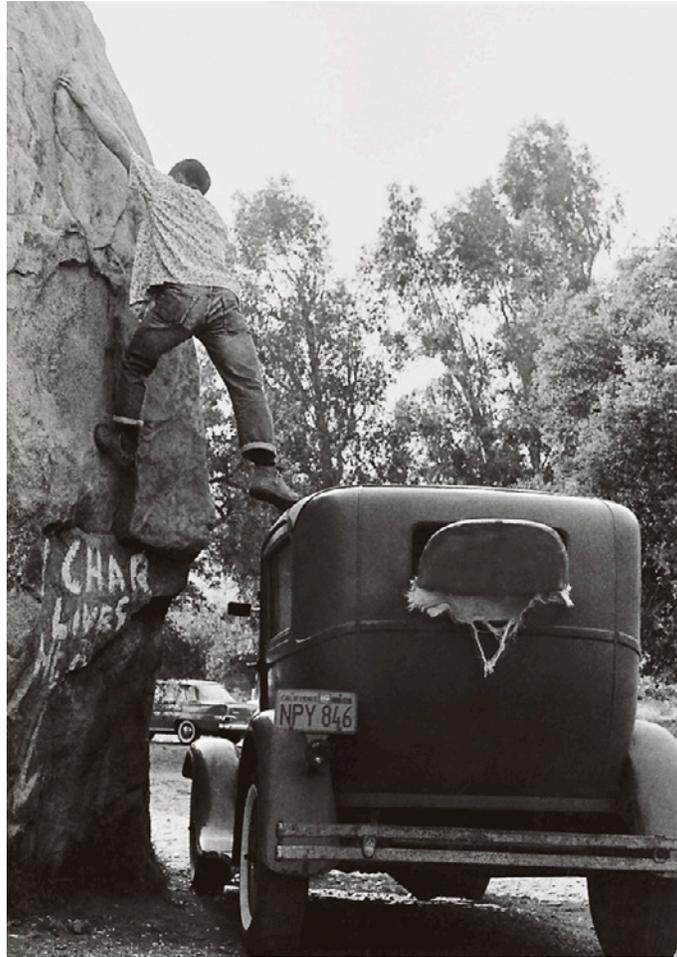


Preface to the Second Edition

- 1 What is the significance of the quote from Wang Yang Ming that frames this section of the book?
- 2 Based on the preface, what do you believe is one of Patagonia's central missions?
- 3 In the preface, Chouinard references Gallup polls from 2007 and 2008 that reflect public opinion about global warming. Perform research and see if you can locate additional, more recent polling data. What do the data reveal?

Introduction

- 1 Why is it difficult for Chouinard to call himself "a businessman"? What does this reveal about him?
- 2 What is Chouinard's take on capitalism? Do you agree or disagree with his view? Why?
- 3 Why does Chouinard refer to Patagonia as "an experiment"?



History

- 1 How did Yvon Chouinard's early life experiences influence his values and lead to some of his later pursuits? Think about your own childhood and explain how some of your early experiences shaped you in fundamental ways.
- 2 "We American climbers were brought up reading the transcendental writers like Emerson, Thoreau, and John Muir" (p. 10). What do you know about these writers? How did their works seem to influence Chouinard's climbing practices and business philosophies?
- 3 What is Zen? How did it impact Chouinard? Are there any Zen principles that you particularly appreciate?
- 4 What placed Chouinard Equipment on "the path to becoming an environmental villain" (p. 26)? How did this actually produce innovation?

- 5 Why do you think the excerpt from the *American Alpine Journal* (p. 34) is included in the text? What sort of relationship with nature is conveyed through this short passage?
- 6 Why was “Patagonia” chosen as the company name?
- 7 “One of my favorite sayings about entrepreneurship is: If you want to understand the entrepreneur, study the juvenile delinquent” (p. 38). What do the two have in common? Is this saying applicable to Chouinard himself?
- 8 According to Chouinard, what does it mean to be an “80 percenter”? How does this concept apply to both Chouinard and Patagonia? Do you find the idea of being an “80 percenter” appealing? Why? Why not?
- 9 “Despite our own growth at Patagonia, we were able, in many ways, to keep alive our cultural values as we grew” (p. 49). What practices and priorities allowed the company to do so?
- 10 While practicing his “MBA theory of management, management by absence” (p. 51), Chouinard notices changes in the natural environment. What does he see? How do these observations (and his related research) help evolve Patagonia and its focus?
- 11 What are some of the business challenges that Chouinard discusses in this section? How did he and his colleagues confront these challenges? What lessons can you learn from this discussion?
- 12 What particularly strikes you about the company values statement on pp. 61–62?
- 13 “But I did know that we had become unsustainable and that we had to look to the Iroquois and their seventh-generation planning, and not to corporate America, as models of stewardship and sustainability” (p. 64). What is the seventh-generation principle? How is this philosophy evident in Patagonia’s business practices and activist work? As a philosophy, how does the seventh-generation principle differ from belief systems commonly embraced by corporate America?
- 14 What does Chouinard finally say is his purpose for being in business? What are your thoughts about this?
- 15 Overall, how do you describe Chouinard’s writing style and focus in this section of the book?

Product Design Philosophy

- 1 The philosophy section begins with a discussion of how the company's philosophies are interpreted as guidelines instead of rules. What is the difference between these two? Why is this distinction important?
- 2 Why does Chouinard assert that quality must be “absolutely objective and definable” (p. 77)?
- 3 In what ways does a durable, multifunctional product also serve as a sustainable product?
- 4 Why is repair considered to be a radical act? Related to this, what is the difference between a consumer and an owner? Which one are you?
- 5 What is the Patagonia Ironclad Guarantee? How does such a guarantee likely affect customer perception of the company?
- 6 Examine the cotton pesticides table on pp. 98–99 and choose one pesticide to research in detail. How widely used is the substance? What are its most dangerous environmental effects? Overall, how important do you believe it was for Patagonia to embrace the use of organic cotton?





Production Philosophy

- 1 Why do you think this section is framed by a quote from an unknown author about Irish women knitting sweaters?
- 2 “Again, the key word is *discovering* instead of *inventing*” (p. 110). What argument is Chouinard making here? Do you agree or disagree?
- 3 What is a “concurrent approach” (p. 112)? How is this approach evident in Patagonia’s business practices? Compare and contrast this approach with assembly-line manufacturing.
- 4 What does it mean to be Fair Trade Certified? Why is this important?
- 5 Which principle do you believe is most important in this section of the book? Why?

Distribution Philosophy

- 1 Why is it important for a company to have a diverse distribution system?
- 2 What strikes you about the discussion of the environmental cost of transportation on p. 122? In addition to Chouinard’s recommended ways to help minimize the environmental impact of transportation, are there other recommendations/solutions you can think of?

- 3 How does Patagonia’s “Philosophy of Architecture” (p. 127) reflect central tenets of the company’s overall philosophy?
- 4 What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the four means of distribution discussed in this chapter?
- 5 What exactly is the “Walmartization of retail” (p. 131)? What are the larger consequences of this phenomenon? How are small retailers especially affected by it?

Marketing Philosophy

- 1 What does Chouinard mean when he states, “Patagonia’s image is a human voice” (p. 136)? In general, how does this idea compare to mainstream corporate imaging/branding?
- 2 How do the many images in this chapter complement and reflect the content of the “Photography” section on p. 137? What are some specific narratives that are transmitted through these photographs?
- 3 How is Patagonia’s catalog an unconventional one? What are its different purposes?
- 4 If more companies had promotional guidelines similar to those listed on p. 152, what larger business trends do you think would change/emerge?

Financial Philosophy

- 1 The section of text that frames this chapter states that businesses are fundamentally responsible to their resource base. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
- 2 How important is profit to Patagonia? In general, how important do you think profit should be to a company?
- 3 What makes the “Don’t Buy This Jacket” ad on p. 157 both unconventional and powerful? Cite specific aspects of the advertisement in your answer.
- 4 “We are a privately owned company, and we have no desire to sell the company or to sell stock to outside investors...” (p. 158). What are the advantages, financial and otherwise, of maintaining private ownership?



Human Resource Philosophy

- 1 “Corporate life did not appeal; it was regarded as inauthentic, illegitimate, and toxic” (p. 162). In what ways do the practices and policies outlined in this chapter contrast with the perception of corporate life depicted in the quote above?
- 2 Who is the ideal Patagonia employee? How would you characterize the company’s hiring practices?
- 3 What is the *Let My People Go Surfing* flextime policy? In general, how does it compare with flextime policies of other businesses?
- 4 Overall, how does Patagonia’s workplace culture compare to yours or that of your parents?
- 5 Describe Patagonia’s child care system. How does an on-site corporate child care center benefit both families and the business itself?

Management Philosophy

- 1 What are the advantages and disadvantages of hiring independent-minded employees? If you were in charge, what type of employee would you prefer? Why?
- 2 “No one has a private office in our company, and everyone works in open rooms with no doors or separation” (p. 172). How can such a physical layout democratize a workplace?
- 3 What is the difference between a manager and a true leader?
- 4 What does company size have to do with bureaucracy or the lack of it?
- 5 Compare and contrast a more top-down style of management with one that is more collaborative/democratic. Which one do you believe is better? Why?

Environmental Philosophy

- 1 “If government, the private sector, and science don’t begin to cooperate immediately to address issues of environmental degradation, the earth will lose its ability to regenerate” (p. 179). What do you think is currently preventing these three entities from working in conjunction with each other?
- 2 Yvon Chouinard describes himself as being pessimistic about the fate of the natural world. Do you feel the same or different? Explain.
- 3 The “Warning” statement on p. 180 indicates that a significant segment of the scientific community recognized the precarious state of the natural world in 1992. Are you surprised that despite the age of this warning, we still face the same situation today?
- 4 “I’ve always believed that the key to the government’s doing the right thing is to base its planning on the premise that the society will be around for a hundred years” (p. 182). If our government actually did this, how do you think it would change our environmental reality?
- 5 “Much of what I know about achieving any measure of sustainability in an economic activity, I learned in trying to grow my own garden” (p. 184). How do you think such a connection can be made between sustainability, economic activity, and gardening? If you have any experience with gardening, can you identify with Chouinard’s statement?



- 6 In what ways can Patagonia, as a company, be compared to a healthy natural environment?
- 7 What are the six elements of the Patagonia environmental philosophy? Are they all equally important, or do you think one or several should be prioritized?
- 8 What does Chouinard mean when he says that “*sustainable manufacturing* is an oxymoron” (p. 194)? What are the implications of this statement?
- 9 What strikes you about the image on p. 199? What, if anything, do you think is preventing other companies from pursuing similar environmentally supportive innovations?
- 10 What is Patagonia’s Worn Wear program? How is it an environmentally supportive practice?
- 11 How did Patagonia assess its own environmental impact? What changes did this examination provoke?
- 12 “In the early days of our country and until the end of the nineteenth century, we had three powerful social forces: the federal government, local government, and civil democracy. And now we have one more, corporations” (p. 212). What factors allowed corporations to become a powerful social force? How can their power and influence be controlled and used to do good?

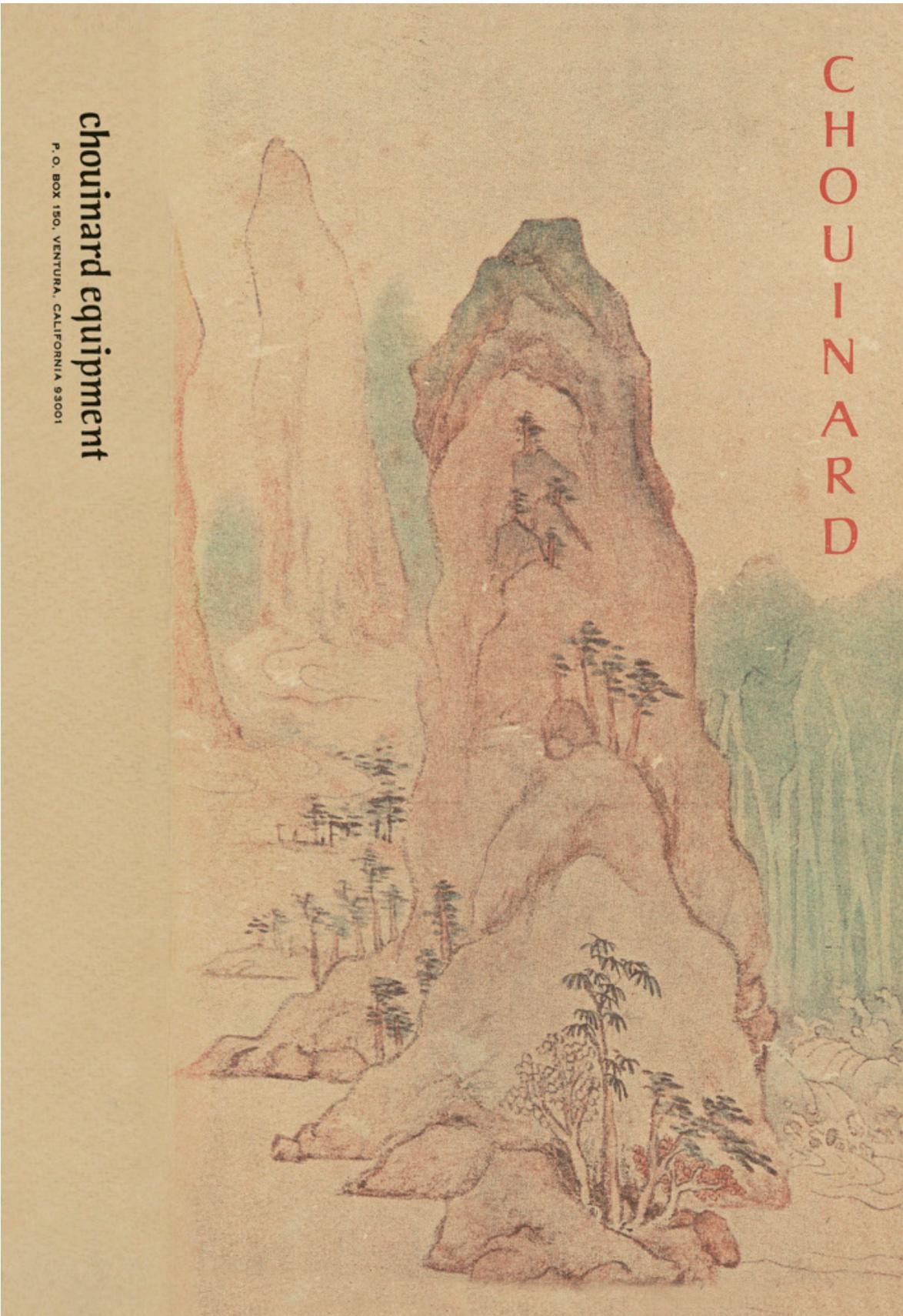
- 13 Why are small grassroots citizens' organizations so important? What has Patagonia done to support them?
- 14 "Modern food production is one of the main culprits in the destruction of our planet" (p. 218). Why is this such a significant problem? How should it be addressed?
- 15 What are the goals of Patagonia Provisions? In what ways does the company help guide the food revolution?
- 16 How exactly does "1% for the Planet" work? What kind of impact do you think this organization could ultimately have?



Turn Around and Take a Step Forward

- 1 "The original definition of consumer is 'One who destroys, or expends by use; devours, spends wastefully'" (p. 231). Given this definition, would you call yourself a consumer? Why? Why not?
- 2 What does Chouinard mean by his statement, "We can turn around and take that step forward" (p. 234)?
- 3 "I believe the way toward mastery of any endeavor is to work toward simplicity; replace complex technology with knowledge. The more you know, the less you need" (p. 235). How can you work toward this form of simplicity in your own life?

LET MY PEOPLE GO SURFING



CHOUINARD

chouinard equipment

P. O. BOX 150, VENTURA, CALIFORNIA 93001

Thematic Questions and Activities

This section features a variety of questions and activities that connect to several of the book's central themes.

Navigating the Tension between Growth, Profitability, and Environmental Sustainability

- 1 One of the central points in the text is that there exists incredible tension between nature and our present economic model because of the way each operates. For example, the natural world is characterized by a careful balance of growth and decline, but our economic model demands unlimited growth. Use a simple T-chart (one is located here: http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/pdf/tchart_eng.pdf; include the headings “Natural Environment” and “Economy” on opposite sides) to explore the differences between these two systems. On each side of the chart, record different characteristics and demands associated with each system. After you complete the chart, consider if the two systems are fundamentally incompatible. Does a middle ground exist, or does our economic system require a complete overhaul?
- 2 In her foreword to the book, Naomi Klein writes, “After all, Patagonia keeps on growing, and we keep buying more of its products” (p. ix). How concerned are you by this fact? Despite everything that Patagonia has done to become an environmentally responsible entity, does the company's continued manufacturing and selling of products worry you? Is the fact that Patagonia is ultimately a product-driven business a threat to its environmental mission?
- 3 “We believe the accepted model of capitalism that necessitates endless growth and deserves blame for the destruction of nature must be displaced” (p. 1). Work with your classmates to deepen your understanding of capitalism. Work with two or three other students in a small group. Give each group member a sheet of paper, and have each group member write down specific words he or she associates with capitalism. Then, collect all of the word lists and create a Wordle, a digital “word cloud.” To do so, head to <http://www.wordle.net>. After inputting all of the words your group members associated with capitalism, the website will create a digital word poster. The poster

will give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in your source list. Present your Wordle to the class and discuss these questions: Which words appear more frequently than others? Are the words mostly positive or negative? What overall interpretation of capitalism is created through this activity?

- 4 “The word ‘sustainable’ is another of those words—like ‘gourmet,’ and ‘adventure’—that has been so overused and misused as to become meaningless” (p. 182). What do you think about Chouinard’s statement? What does it mean to truly be “sustainable”? How can the word become meaningful again?
- 5 Take a closer look at Patagonia’s “Don’t Buy This Jacket” ad on p. 157. What do you notice about the advertisement? What makes this both an effective product advertisement and a striking environmental statement? Using traditional artistic methods (pens, paper, etc.) or digital tools (one such free tool is <https://www.canva.com/create/posters/>), create a similar advertisement for a product of your own creation. Like Patagonia’s ad, your image needs to highlight and promote your product while also making an environmental statement. Be prepared to present your work to the class.

DON'T BUY THIS JACKET

It's Black Friday, the day in the year retail businesses tend to make and waste the most raw materials. But Black Friday, and the culture of consumption it reflects, puts the economy of natural resources that we depend on at risk. We're not using the resources of our world as fast as we can use and lose them.

Because Patagonia's mission is to create the best gear possible, we need to do the opposite of what Black Friday teaches. We ask you to have and to reflect before you spend on things that pollute or degrade the planet.

Environmental leadership, we will continue to develop, can happen one person, one act at a time. This is what we have chosen to do: to show, from within the company, that taking care of both people and planet, business and nature, are not mutually exclusive systems and resources that support business and the industry as a whole.

The environmental cost of everything we make is staggering. Consider the 100 cotton shirts, one of our best sellers. To make it required 100 tons of water, enough to feed 100 people for three glasses a day for 100 years. The process from the origin to 100% recycled polyester. To cut these shirts we generated nearly 20 pounds of carbon dioxide. To finish the weight of the finished product, the jacket left behind, on the way to store, has to be the weight of a cow.

As with a 100% recycled polyester jacket, and even more in a high-strength, it is remarkably durable, so you won't have to replace it so often. And when it comes to the end of its useful life, take it back to recycle into a product of equal value. But, in most of the things we can make and you can buy, this kind of sense with an environmental cost higher than its price.

There is much to be done and plenty for us all to do. Don't buy what you don't need. Think twice before you buy anything. Or, in preparation for your purchase of your new Patagonia jacket, take the Common Threads Initiative pledge, and join us in the 100% "1" to reimagine a world where we take only what nature can replace.

COMMON THREADS INITIATIVE

REDUCE
We will make smaller gear that lasts a long time.
YOU don't buy what you don't need.

REPAIR
We help you repair your Patagonia gear.
YOU bring us to your's broken.

REUSE
We take old a jacket for Patagonia gear.
YOU give it to your friend.

RECYCLE
We will take back your Patagonia gear.
YOU bring us to help you get rid of it.
YOU bring us to help you get rid of it.

REMAINE
TOGETHER we reimagine a world where we take only what nature can replace.

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The Importance of Social Advocacy and the Role of Company as Activist

- 1 What does it mean to be an activist? Have you ever participated in activism? What environmental issues would you defend or protest? Why?
- 2 In a small group, identify one environmental issue that your group feels strongly about. This could be an issue that affects your state or a larger problem that affects the country as a whole. Compose a letter to the President describing the issue and demanding specific actions from the government in response to the environmental problem/threat you have selected. Compose several drafts of the letter, proof-read and revise, and then submit the final draft according to the guidelines located here: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/mobile>. Additionally, present your letter to the class and invite your fellow students to discuss it.
- 3 In what ways can Patagonia itself be considered an activist? Perform research and identify several other “activist companies.” Who are they? What causes do they support? Share your findings with the class.
- 4 “If you read a newspaper on any given day, you will see that most of the gains we are making as a society are still being done by activist citizens’ organizations. These activists are taking politicians and CEOs to court for their malfeasance. They are forcing corporations to clean up sweatshops, sell only sustainably harvested wood, recycle

their computers, and cut down on toxic wastes” (p. 212). Take a look at what some environmental activists are doing by accessing Patagonia’s “The Cleanest Line” blog (<http://www.patagonia.com/blog/activism/page/1/>). Choose a blog entry, read through it, and present a summary and analysis of it to the class. Use these questions to frame your presentation: What environmental issue(s) is featured in the piece? What forms of activism are discussed? What, if anything, can you and your classmates do to assist?

- 5 “Among our other programs and in-kind assistance Patagonia holds a Tools for Grassroots Activists conference every eighteen months, where we teach activists the organizational, business, and marketing skills small groups need to survive in a competitive media environment” (p. 214). Access Patagonia’s SoundCloud page (<https://soundcloud.com/patagonia1973>) and listen to one of the recordings from past conference speakers. Provide a summary of the speech and discuss the speaker’s commentary on activism and environmental advocacy. What do you think are the most significant takeaways from the speech?



The Connectedness of Customer, Company, and the Natural World

- 1 Patagonia is a company that is tied closely to the natural world. How do you characterize your own relationship with the environment? What memorable experiences have you had in the wild? Do you have outdoor hobbies that you pursue? Explore these questions through writing and be prepared to share your responses with others.

- 2 What are some of Patagonia’s specific policies/practices that promote a positive customer experience *and* support the natural world? While collaborating with at least one other person, draft a basic description of your own imaginary company and create several policies that would ensure good customer service and also support the environment.
- 3 Patagonia’s mission statement reads, “Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.” If you started your own business today, what would its mission statement be? Using Patagonia’s mission statement for inspiration, craft your own statement that indicates a commitment to both the customer and the environment. Share your mission statement with your classmates via the website <http://www.padlet.com> (after this site is accessed by a teacher, it will allow all students to post their responses in a shared virtual space).
- 4 In what ways does Patagonia Provisions reflect a deep commitment to both the customer and the natural world? What particular environmental crisis does it address? How does it do so?
- 5 In his book, Chouinard mentions Zen philosophy, the Iroquois and their seventh-generation planning, and other ways of thinking/being that reflect balance, connectedness, and foresight. What are some other similar belief systems you can identify? How would corporate America change if it adopted these philosophical frameworks?



Confronting Consumerism and the Environmental Crisis

- 1 To what extent do you consider yourself to be part of the environmental problem? Do you blindly consume, or are your own consumption practices informed by an awareness of their environmental consequences? Apply these questions to your family members as well.
- 2 Patagonia established its Worn Wear program to keep clothing in use for a longer period of time and subsequently reduce waste and resource consumption. Take a look at “The Stories We Wear” blog at <http://wornwear.patagonia.com>. Read several of the entries for inspiration. Next, look through your own wardrobe and locate an older item of clothing that you have successfully kept out of the landfill. Either bring in the item or a picture of it and share its story with the class. If your item of clothing is made by Patagonia, consider submitting its story here: <http://wornwear.patagonia.com/submit>.
- 3 “As it stands now, worldwide we are using up the resources of one and a half planets—a consumption level that is far from sustainable. And yet by 2050, that level is projected to rise to somewhere between three-and-a-half and five planets” (p. 234). Consider not only how rapidly we are using up our resources, but also reflect on how much waste our consumption practices generate. Are our consumption habits also creating a waste crisis? Do research to find out and share your thoughts with the class.
- 4 What does the term “planned obsolescence” mean? Do you think most consumers are aware of this term? How does this phenomenon contribute to the environmental crisis? Bring in an item you own that you believe has intentional obsolescence built into it and present it to the class.
- 5 Regarding the climate crisis, Chouinard writes, “The climate change deniers who think they are smarter than 99 percent of the world’s climate scientists are either crooks or dumb asses” (p. 188). Who are some of these climate change deniers? What are their central arguments? Examine their arguments and refute them.

Service Learning Projects

This section includes activities/projects that are designed to connect student learning to the larger community.

1 Become a Grassroots Activist

“People may be afraid of the term ‘activist’ because they associate it with ecosabotage and violent protests, but I’m talking about normal citizens who want the government to live up to its obligation to protect our air, water, and all other natural resources” (p. 212).

Have students work in small groups to identify a local environmental issue that could benefit from their group’s activist efforts. First, have them research the issue to determine the history of the problem, its main contributors, and other important related issues. Next, direct students to take action. Some suggested forms of activism include:

- Use a website such as <http://www.change.org> to start an online petition.
- Write op-ed articles and send letters to the editors of local newspapers.
- Staff an information booth on campus to educate students and the academic community about the issue.
- Use resources such as <http://www.weebly.com> or <http://sites.google.com> to design a website related to the issue. Promote it through social media to publicize the issue and connect with other activists.
- Use resources such as <http://www.canva.com> or <http://docs.google.com> to create fliers and brochures that can be distributed to the public.
- Contact local legislators about the issue and related laws and policies.
- Show related films to the community.

Lastly, have students visit <https://www.patagonia.com/environmental-grants.html>. Here, they can read about what other activists are doing, view an interactive map to find environmental groups in your region, and learn about grants that Patagonia offers to support grassroots organizations.



2 Compose a Field Report

Patagonia’s Field Reports (<http://www.patagonia.com/field-reports.html>) offer glimpses of “nature’s front lines.” First, have students access the website above and read several reports. Next, have them answer the following questions as they prepare to compose their own field reports (encourage them to think locally as they reflect):

- 1 Is there an environmental location that you are particularly drawn to? Why?
- 2 Is there an outdoor activity that you are particularly drawn to? Why?
- 3 Is there a particular story associated with the location and/or activity worth sharing?
- 4 Are there aspects of environmental activism you can mention in your story?

Ask them to use their answers to the questions above to help them draft a coherent field report on a specific location and/or outdoor activity. Encourage students to frame their writing with images (like Chouinard did in his book). Alternatively, students could deliver their field report in video form by including narration and real footage of their selected location/activity. Useful resources for this include iMovie and WeVideo (<https://www.wevideo.com/>). Regardless of the format, encourage students to publish and share their field reports through social media to engage the larger community.

3 Become an Upcycler

Chouinard writes, “We have to dig deeper and try to make products that close the loop, clothing that can be recycled infinitely into similar or equal products. We have to accept the responsibility for what happens to each product when it reaches the end of its life cycle” (p. 202).

This activity is designed to introduce students to upcycling, the practice of converting waste materials into something new and useful. Ideally, have students visit a local landfill (if a landfill visit is not possible, students can use their own waste items for this activity). During this visit, ask them to take note of the different waste items they see and to describe any waste trends they observe (i.e., what are some common items that the community is trashing?). Next, ask students to imagine how some of these trashed items could be reimagined and upcycled. If the tools and skills are available, have them acquire (if permitted) and reinvent the trashed item.

Finally, have students answer these questions as they reflect: How could individual consumers benefit from these “new” upcycled items? How could the community as a whole benefit from the removal of these goods from the waste stream?

Invite students to share their upcycled item and related thoughts with the class, and if possible, the larger community.

Lastly, have students visit the following two websites to learn more about upcycling:

- <http://www.upcyclethat.com/>
- <http://www.viralnova.com/upcycled-products/>





4 Blog about Nature

“We are the last generation that can experience true wilderness...We need to protect these areas of unaltered wildness and diversity to have a baseline, so we never forget what the real world is like—in balance, the way nature intended the earth to be” (pp. 188, 191).

Use this activity to help students remind themselves and the larger community about the natural world and its balance and purity. Encourage students to find three or four local, natural locations that are relatively unscathed by human activity (emphasize that students should consider their own personal safety when doing so). Instruct students to spend some time in each location and to answer the following questions in a journal while they are there:

- Where are you?
- What do you notice about your surroundings? Detail what each of your senses reveals.
- What living organisms do you notice?
- How do you feel in this setting?
- Compare/contrast this location with your daily surroundings.

Also, have students take several pictures and/or video of each natural setting.

Next, have each student create a blog by using a free resource such as <http://blogger.google.com> or <http://www.wordpress.com>. On the blog, ask students to create an individual entry for each location they visited. Then, have them import their related journal writing and media. After their blogs are finished, have students share their web addresses with their classmates

and encourage them to comment on each other's work. Also, promote their material to the larger community by posting links to their blogs on your school's website.

5 Volunteer with an Environmental Organization

“We need the river keepers, the bay keepers, the Forest Guardians, and the protesters who chain themselves to the front doors” (p. 214).

Encourage students to volunteer with organizations dedicated to environmental causes. To locate these organizations, have students consult the following resources:

- <https://www.volunteermatch.org/>
- <http://www.nature.org/about-us/volunteer/search-volunteer-opportunities/index.htm>
- <http://winterwildlands.org/take-action/volunteer/>
- <https://www.gooverseas.com/volunteer-abroad/environmental-conservation>
- <https://greenwire.greenpeace.org/usa/en>

Ask students to keep a journal during their time volunteering so that they can share their experiences with classmates and the local community when they return.



Research Topics

These topics are designed to provide students with opportunities for extended investigation and analysis. In response to these topics, students could:

- Write a research paper
 - Deliver a presentation
 - Construct a lesson plan and teach a class
 - Create a website (<http://www.weebly.com> and <https://sites.google.com> are excellent free resources for this)
- 1 “For our government leaders, the environment is barely on the political agenda. Voters say they want a healthy planet to live on, but it’s not proven at election time, when it takes a backseat to all the other issues like security, healthcare, the economy, and the loss of the middle class” (p. 207).

Scrutinize the voting records and campaign contributions of your local and state legislators. Do your findings reveal that these individuals are truly supportive of the environment? How do your findings differ in terms of the affiliated political parties? Is one party more environmentally supportive than the other? Extend your analysis to other political figures at the national level (such as the President) and share your conclusions.

- 2 “Since 2005 the health of our home planet has not been doing so well. The general public in the developed world is becoming increasingly aware that our planet is getting dangerously hotter through our own doing” (p. xii).

What exactly is climate change? How is it caused by human activity? How can it be combatted? Despite nearly worldwide consensus from the scientific community regarding its existence, why do some citizens and politicians continue to deny the reality of climate change and/or its connection to human behavior? Do you believe that governments around the world are doing enough to address climate change? Research these questions and explain your conclusions.

- 3 “Modern industrial forestry provides some of the best examples of non-sustainable agriculture” (184).

In what ways is Chouinard correct? Research and analyze modern industrial forestry practices. What are they? What does it mean to clear-cut, and what is its environmental impact? What evidence do you see of these



practices in your own location? What are some sustainable practices that the industry can and should utilize instead? More broadly, what are several other non-sustainable agricultural practices that need to be eliminated?

- 4 “Yet it pains me to bear witness to the sixth great extinction, where we humans are directly responsible for the complete destruction of so many wonderful creatures and invaluable indigenous cultures” (p. xiii).

What exactly is the sixth great extinction? Are humans primarily to blame for it? What are some specific species and habitats that have been wiped out? Research these questions in order to not only understand the phenomenon but to also conceive of ways to combat it. Is it too late? Is humanity ultimately capable of changing course?

- 5 Part of Patagonia’s mission is to serve as a model for other companies. What are some companies you can identify that have been influenced by Patagonia? In general, what other like-minded companies can you find? What makes these particular companies similar to Patagonia? Additionally, locate several businesses with philosophies and practices contrary to those of Patagonia. Would you say these companies are “successful”? Pay close attention to ownership, business practices, and philosophies as you research.
- 6 Perform research to learn about what it means to be a certified B Corporation and a member of the SAC (Sustainable Apparel Coalition). What exactly are these two things? In what ways does it make sense for Patagonia to be both a member of SAC and a certified B Corporation? What other companies are also affiliated with these movements? In general, how are these movements helping to change the practices and values of businesses?

Related Resources

These resources are useful for extending a study of *Let My People Go Surfing* and its themes and subjects.

Further Reading

Family Business: Innovative On-Site Child Care Since 1983

By Malinda Chouinard and Jennifer Ridgeway

Patagonia Tools for Grassroots Activists

Edited by Nora Gallagher and Lisa Myers

The Responsible Company:

What We've Learned From Patagonia's First 40 Years

By Yvon Chouinard and Vincent Stanley

The Fisherman's Son

By Chris Malloy

This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate

By Naomi Klein

Oil and Honey: The Education of an Unlikely Activist

By Bill McKibben

The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History

By Elizabeth Kolbert

Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash

By Edward Humes

Related Films

Damnation

<http://damnationfilm.com/>

180° South: Conquerors of the Useless

<http://www.180south.com/>

Unbroken Ground

<http://www.patagoniaprovisions.com/pages/unbroken-ground>

Jumbo Wild

<http://www.sweetgrass-productions.com/jumbo-wild/>

The Fisherman's Son

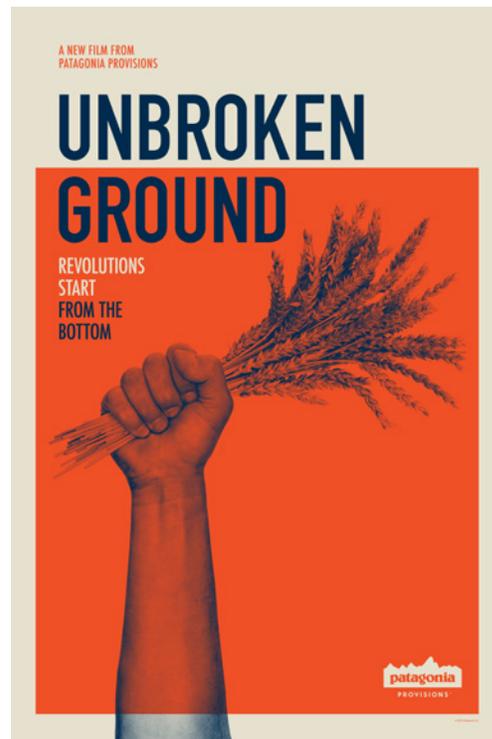
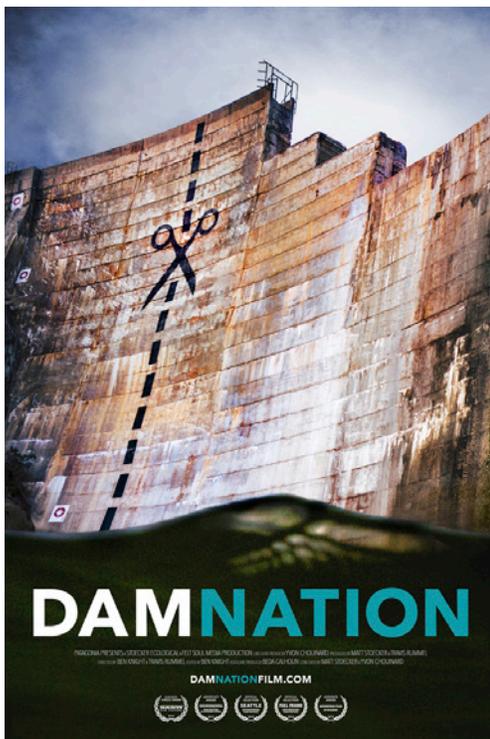
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VMMrUzOhIk>

Worn Wear: a Film About the Stories We Wear

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z20CjCim8DM>

The Story of Stuff

<http://storyofstuff.org/>

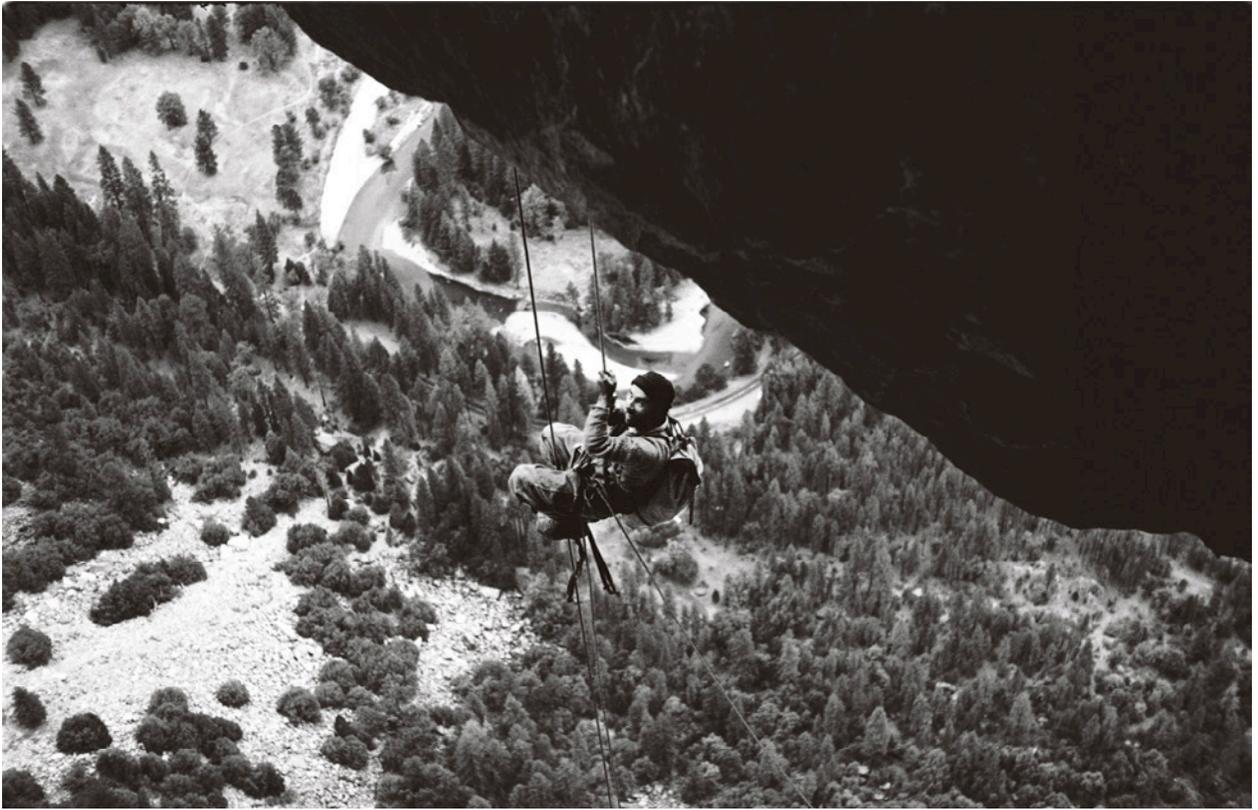


About the Author of This Guide

Chris Gilbert is a former high school English teacher and current doctoral student who lives in Hendersonville, North Carolina. He is also an avid writer. His work has appeared in *The Washington Post's* education blog, "The Answer Sheet," NCTE's (National Council of Teachers of English) *English Journal*, and he has also written a number of First Year and Common Reading Resource Guides for Penguin Random House. He is a 2013 and 2015 recipient of NCTE's Paul and Kate Farmer Writing Award.

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