

Killing Coyote: A Film Analysis and Role-Play Case Study

by

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Part I – Introduction

We will be watching a film in class. *Killing Coyote* is an award-winning, but controversial, film examining the role of coyote control programs in the west. One of the themes of the film focuses on an Arizona Fish and Game Commission public hearing to decide whether or not to ban hunting contests for sport or economic gain.

Before watching the film, discuss how your group feels about predator control and hunting contests. Prepare answers to the following questions and keep notes of your discussion so that you can summarize when called on in class.

- How would you define predator control?
- How do you define “hunting contests?”
- What is their role in hunting culture and wildlife management?

Part II – Role Play

After watching the film, you will take on one of five personas—local politician, wildlife biologist, hunter, animal rights advocate, or homeowner. Your task is to write a position statement (2 to 4 paragraphs) in the first person from your persona’s point of view to be read at a fictional town hall meeting. The purpose of the town hall meeting is to help the state’s fish and wildlife agency decide whether or not to ban hunting contests for sport or economic gain. Be sure to state and support your position clearly.

- Janet Ellis—Politician
- Curtis Whithome—Hunter
- Jeff & Elaine Lee—Homeowners
- Peter Smith—Animal Rights Advocate
- Jonas Conrad—Biologist

Janet Ellis



You are a first-term state congresswoman from Arizona. You won your district overwhelmingly after scandalous pictures of the incumbent were published in several local newspapers. You like to think of yourself as fresh and idealistic, and try to make all your decisions based on fact. However, you are also a shrewd politician and are afraid of wasting your current popularity by rocking the boat too much. You are keenly aware that you have constituents that include ranchers, animal rights activists, and avid hunters.

Curtis Whithome



You have been a sportsman and marksman your entire life. You raised all four of your children to enjoy hunting, fishing and trapping—two of them have gone on to have professional careers in the wildlife management field. You and your oldest son and daughter have decided to enter a coyote hunting contest together. While you typically only hunt deer for meat and small game for sport, you have been interested in joining one of the hunting contests for some time.

Jeff and Elaine Lee



You own land and a small ranch in a rural part of the state. You typically have low loss of your sheep stock, a small percentage of which are regularly lost to coyote predation. However, you are feeling pressure from an increase of larger corporation-owned ranches and the sale of surrounding land for condos and strip malls. Property taxes have skyrocketed and therefore every sheep counts. Last year you had someone from Wildlife Services trap coyotes on your property, but you have also looked into additional control and protection methods.

Peter Smith



You are a third-generation Arizonan. You have always felt a strong connection with the land and wildlife in the desert southwest and have been a strict vegetarian since your teen years. After majoring in biology in college, you took a job as an Animal Handling Technician for a major biological laboratory. You didn't like the conditions at the lab so you soon quit. Later you became employed by the Arizona Humane Society researching cases of animal cruelty and have recently started testifying at related hearings and trials.

Jonas Conrad



You have been employed by the Arizona Fish and Game Commission for almost fifteen years. Although you haven't been an active sportsman for several years now, you grew up hunting, fishing, hiking, boating—enjoying almost anything outdoors. You have a strong passion for wildlife and tend to pay close attention to the health of populations and communities as a whole rather than as individual animals. People tend to trust your judgment and you have worked hard to build a reputation of being fair and a good scientist.

Part III – Analysis

After watching the end of the film, in your groups, address the following:

- What was the committee’s final decision? Were you surprised by the outcome and why?

Next, as a group, write a brief (1-page) analysis of the film and its content. Questions to explore include:

- What is the goal of the film? How effective is the film in achieving this goal?
- List the arguments presented in the film for and against predator control.
- Examine the balance or bias of the film.
- Does the lack of a narrator help or hurt the film? Why?
- What were your group’s personal (real life) feelings about coyote and predator control and hunting contests prior to the film? How did the film impact your position on these topics (i.e., strengthen it, change it) and why?

Generate two alternatives to management of coyote populations through hunting (and hunting contests).

- What are the pros and cons of these techniques relative to hunting? How would your character feel about these alternatives?

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