



GREEN DREAM

EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

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About the film and the filmmaker

Green Dream

Directed by Maia Iotzova

2015/Canada/50 min

Green Dream is an author documentary film that contemplates nature's place within the city. The filmmaker, Maia Iotzova, takes the viewer on a journey from the wild fields of Sofia, Bulgaria to the manicured parks of Vancouver, Canada, the personal gardens of residents in Montreal and, finally, to a local community-managed park. Observing the cities where she has lived, the filmmaker tries to piece together the urban and the wild, two realities that have traditionally been seen as opposites. *Green Dream* is also a film about maturing as a person and living with one's roots spread between different cultures. The film takes some surprising turns as the author questions her own relationship with nature and searches for a sense of home in the fragmented experience of immigration.

Source: Maia Iotzova



Photo: Desislava Veselinova

The filmmaker

Originally from Sofia, Bulgaria, Maia Iotzova is an artist and a filmmaker now based in Montreal. She holds a BA in Fine Arts from the University of Guelph. Her work explores our intimate connections in a world fragmented by social and political forces. She has developed a cinematic style that draws on her intercultural perspective and mixes visual art, traditional documentary and experimental cinema techniques. Her first documentary *Grass through Concrete - The Struggle to Protect the Red Hill Valley* (72 min, 2004) screened widely in Canada. Her second film *Green Dream* (50 min, 2015) opened the Sofia Biting Docs Film Festival in Bulgaria, screened in Canada, Australia, Malaysia, Switzerland, and was awarded Best Feature Film at the 6th International Eco Fest, Romania, 2016. Maia Iotzova is also the founder of the Wild City Mapping Project.

Source: Maia Iotzova

OVERVIEW OF THE FILM'S BROADER THEMES

The film presents several interconnected themes:

The filmmaker introduces the concept of **wild green spaces**—those places in the city where nature is left to grow untouched by human activity or urban planning. The artist calls this a “laissez-faire approach to nature.” She compares those wild urban spaces to the manicured lawns and overly designed green spaces she sees around her when she first moves to Canada.

A closely connected theme is that of **urbanization**

and the dichotomous (“either-or”) way of thinking that we often adopt when we think about **the urban and the wild**. From the artist’s perspective, this leads to a more “ritualistic way” of approaching nature, where wild nature is confined to designated areas only, with stipulated rules of conduct for visitors. At the same time, the artist wonders if we do indeed need rules and regulations in order to protect wild spaces in the city, because otherwise they might be damaged or destroyed. She says: “I cannot look at (wild nature spaces in the city) without realizing that the same laissez faire attitude that allowed nature here to flourish, will also lead to its demise.”





As the artist reflects on this internal conflict throughout the film, she turns her attention to the different ways in which city residents maintain a **connection with nature** around them, how they **care about nature** and how nature helps create **a sense of community**. The film introduces us to people's personal gardens or their communal efforts to create green alleyways as well as to participate in annual counts of plants, insects and other species in wild green spaces in the city, such as the Champ des possibles in Montreal. This bioblitz activity reveals the great diversity of the **ecosystems** in such places and the importance of caring for and preserving **species native to the area**, which will ensure the ecosystem's survival and sustainability.

Wild urban nature also has a personal significance for the artist as it relates to her childhood memories and early encounters with nature in her native Bulgaria. It is part of her sense of **identity**, which is another thematic thread throughout the film. In *Green Dream*, the artist's changing connection to nature is also a reflection of her personal transformation as she is finding her own place and a sense of belonging in a new culture.

Curriculum themes and pedagogical approaches

Multiple Perspectives

Identity

Culture and Community

Community-Building and Participation

Appreciating the Natural World

Land Use & Natural Resources

Ecosystems and Biodiversity

Native and Invasive Species

Integrated Learning

Inquiry Learning

Experiential Learning

Cooperative Learning

Brainstorming

Research

Mapping

Creation and analysis of a media text

Action planning

Peer learning

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This guide is geared towards students in grades 9 to 12. The film presents a diversity of themes that can be integrated in a number of courses, such as geography, science, civics and citizenship, visual arts, media arts, etc. Through discussions and deeper reflection on its themes, as well as through creative hands-on activities, the film can enhance students' understanding of the social and cultural significance of nature, give them an opportunity to reflect on their own relationship to nature and hone their eco-literacy skills.

Examples of curriculum expectations

Course	Overall Expectations
Grade 9 Issues in Canadian Geography (Academic and Applied): Interactions in the Physical Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyse various interactions between physical processes, phenomena, and events and human activities in Canada describe various characteristics of the natural environment and the spatial distribution of physical features in Canada, and explain the role of physical processes, phenomena, and events in shaping them
Grade 9 Issues in Canadian Geography (Academic and Applied): Liveable Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyse impacts of urban growth in Canada analyse characteristics of land use in various Canadian communities, and explain how some factors influence land-use patterns analyse impacts of land use in Canada on communities and the natural environment describe patterns of land use in their local community
Grade 9 Science (Applied): Biology: Sustainable Ecosystems and Human Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyse the impact of human activity on terrestrial or aquatic ecosystems, and assess the effectiveness of selected initiatives related to environmental sustainability investigate some factors related to human activity that affect terrestrial or aquatic ecosystems, and describe the consequences that these factors have for the sustainability of these ecosystems demonstrate an understanding of characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, the interdependence within and between ecosystems, and the impact humans have on the sustainability of these ecosystems
Grade 10 Civics and Citizenship (Open): Civic Engagement and Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyse a variety of civic contributions, and ways in which people can contribute to the common good analyse a civic issue of personal interest and develop a plan of action to address it
Grade 11 Regional Geography (University/College Prep): Sustainability and Stewardship of Natural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyse issues associated with sustainability and stewardship of natural resources in the selected region analyse various issues associated with development projects, including, where applicable, megaprojects, in the selected region
Grade 11 Introduction to Spatial Technologies (Open): Spatial Geography: Concepts and Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use a variety of spatial technologies to collect and analyse information and field data for the purpose of assessing local geography and geographic issues demonstrate an understanding of the fundamental concepts and processes associated with the collection and analysis of field data using a variety of spatial technologies describe and use basic mapping conventions, various types of maps, and fundamental concepts of cartography, and apply that knowledge to analyse bias in the construction and use of maps
Grade 11 Introduction to Spatial Technologies (Open): Using Spatial Technologies to Support Sustainability and Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use a variety of spatial technologies to help them assess human activities and plan and promote the sustainable use of the natural environment, including natural resources, in their local community or area use a variety of spatial technologies to analyse the impact of human activity on the environment in their local community or area and beyond, and identify possible solutions

Grade 11 Biology (University Prep): Diversity of Living Things	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyse the effects of various human activities on the diversity of living things investigate, through laboratory and/or field activities or through simulations, the principles of scientific classification, using appropriate sampling and classification techniques demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of living organisms in terms of the principles of taxonomy and phylogeny
Grade 11 Biology: Plants in the Natural Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyse the roles of plants in ecosystems, and assess the impact of human activities on the balance of plants within those ecosystems investigate some of the factors that affect plant growth
Grade 11 Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrate an understanding of the effects of individual actions that are grounded in environmental awareness
Grade 12 Living in a Sustainable World (Workplace Preparation): Sustainability of Natural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assess the contributions of stewardship initiatives by groups and individuals to the sustainable use and management of natural resources, locally, nationally, and globally
Grade 12 Living in a Sustainable World: Ecosystems and Human Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyse impacts of human activities on ecological processes and on plant and animal species
Grade 12 Living in a Sustainable World (Workplace Preparation): Community Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assess the contribution of various individual, workplace, and community initiatives to reducing the human impact on the natural environment assess impacts of human behaviour on the natural environment
Grades 9 – 12 Visual Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> apply elements and principles of design as well as art-making conventions to create art works that comment and/or communicate personal perspective on issues related to social justice or the environment deconstruct the visual content and the use of elements and principles of design in their own art work and the work of others describe how creating and analysing art works has affected their personal identity and values and/or changed their perception of society
Grades 9 – 12 Media Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> design and produce original media art works on a specific theme by combining one or more of the principles of media arts and a variety of elements from the contributing arts identify and describe ways in which media art works can influence community or societal values communicate a personal message or an opinion on an issue of personal concern by creating and presenting media art works using a variety of techniques, tools, and/or technologies explore a variety of traditional and emerging technologies, tools, and techniques, and use them to produce effective media art works explain, using a variety of formats, how creating and presenting media art works has affected one's personal values and understanding of one's culture and community identify and describe skills and understandings acquired through the creative and critical analysis processes in the media arts, and explain how they can be applied in everyday life
Grades 9 – 12 English: Media Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrate an understanding of a variety of media texts identify some media forms and explain how the conventions and techniques associated with them are used to create meaning reflect on and identify strengths as media interpreters and creators, areas for improvement, and the strategies found most helpful in understanding and creating media texts

Viewing the film with students

PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS

What are your memories of nature when you were growing up?

How do you understand the expression “wild green spaces in the city”? What images come to mind?

Can you think of specific area in your neighbourhood, around your school or in your city more broadly where nature has been left to grow and develop without human intervention?

Do you think it is important to have such green spaces in the city? Why or why not?

What is the connection between culture and nature?

In what ways does the culture in which we have been brought up or in which we live affect how we see nature?

How would you describe the place of human beings in nature?





Photo: Chris Leon

QUESTIONS TO KEEP IN MIND WHILE WATCHING THE FILM

Who is the narrator?

What are the main conflicts in this film? Were they resolved by the end of the film? Why or why not? Encourage students to take notes while watching the film and to pay attention to the themes developed in the film, but also to the cinematic aspects of the documentary. For example:

- to notice any contrasts that the artist establishes visually (for instance, between scenes of nature in Sofia and in Vancouver) and to notice how the filmmaker has achieved that (for instance, through the use of camera angles or editing)*
- to notice the role of music throughout the film. How does it inform us about the filmmaker's relationship with nature?*



POST-VIEWING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

How would you summarize the main idea of this film?

How does the filmmaker describe and define wild green spaces?

How is her description similar or different from the way you described such spaces before viewing the film?

Explain in your own words how do you understand the conflict that the filmmaker feels regarding wild green spaces? What is the perspective she adopts later in the film?

What do you think about this statement by the filmmaker (starting at 8'36" in the film): "For as long as I can remember, I have felt that the best way to take care of nature is to leave it alone. I felt that if we stepped in and tried to manage it, we would interfere with its inherent way of being, with its perfection."

What, in your opinion, is the significance of the people featured in the film with their gardens? How do their gardens help us think about nature in the city?

Do you think that the film conveys a sense of community? In what ways? What kind of community does it describe? Think about the community you live in. What is the place of nature within it? Imagine a community where nature has greater presence. What would that community look like? How can we create such communities?

Watch again the scene with lawnmowers and grass cutters followed by scene with daisy: What do these two scenes symbolize? What is your interpretation of the juxtaposition of the images in these two scenes? What do you notice about the editing of these two scenes? What about the sound? How do the editing and sound in these two scenes help reinforce the message of the filmmaker?

What is the sense of the place of nature within urban environments that the film suggests? What kind of relationship between humans and nature does the film portray?

ACTIVITY 1

A NATURE WALK

In this experiential learning activity, have the class go on a nature walk around the area nearby the school and ask them to pay attention to whether or not there are any wild green spaces there. Ask the students to observe the plants, trees, flowers, birds, insects and other living things that they see and discover along the way. You can also give them some time for silent contemplation of the space so they can feel and experience the place. Have them take photographs of the living things they have found. When you return to the classroom, have students create drawings of these living things. Then exhibit the students' artworks in the classroom and initiate a discussion about their encounter with the nature that exists in close proximity to the school: What did the students notice during the walk that they haven't noticed before? How does that make them feel about the area where their school is located? How does that make them feel and think about their own place in this environment? Alternatively, have the students write an essay on their impressions from the nature walk and on the questions mentioned above and then share it with the class.

ACTIVITY 2

CREATE AN INTERACTIVE CLASS MAP

As a follow-up on Activity 1, have the class create an interactive map of wild green spaces around the school using digital tools such as Tripline or StoryMapJS, which allow for the combination of maps and stories. The students can also use programs to simultaneously take a photograph of a place and record an audio file of their observations and thoughts. These can then also be implemented as part of the map. The map can be expanded to include the larger neighbourhood or, even larger, the space of the entire city and can be continuously updated by the students throughout the year, as they continue to discover and become more familiar with nature around them in the urban environment.



ACTIVITY 3

CREATE YOUR OWN VIDEO ABOUT WILD GREEN SPACES

Have the students choose a topic inspired by the film—for example, do a portrait of someone's garden or focus on a part of their neighbourhood or city where nature has been left to grow undisturbed—and ask them to do a short, 3- to 5-minute video on that topic. It can be a more personal film like *Green Dream* or more of a media text, combining interviews and reportage with documentary filmmaking techniques. After the videos are completed, they will be screened to the class as a whole. In the ensuing discussion, each student will also reflect on the process of filming and how creating a media text like that has helped inform their thinking about the issues related to wild green spaces in the city. Then the class can also offer their insights on and interpretations of the videos, engaging in this way in peer learning.

ACTIVITY 4

RESEARCH NATIVE SPECIES

In groups of two, have students do research on what are considered the native flora and fauna species in their neighbourhoods or the neighbourhood of the school, and whether these native species are still present there or not. Ask them to find out what other, foreign, plants or animal species have been introduced there and from where? Have the class share their findings as a group and initiate discussion on biodiversity of ecosystems in urban environments.



ACTIVITY 5

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT A SOCIAL-ACTION INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE COMMUNAL GREEN SPACES IN THE CITY

Have students brainstorm as a class about what an effective social-action initiative would be and what their main message would be. What imagery and symbolism would they use? What audiences would they like to reach? Then, divide the class into smaller groups and assign each group a task: some will design and create campaign materials by using ecologically sustainable artistic materials and practices; others will work on promoting the initiative and getting the public involved through social media; still others will write press releases and other written material for distribution.



ACTIVITY 6

PRACTICE ECOLOGICAL URBAN PLANNING

Start by showing again to the students the second-to-last scene in *Green Dream* of the bioblitz at the Champ des possibles in Montreal. Ask the students to pay attention to what the last two speakers say about urban planning and the place of nature within cities. Then ask the students to imagine that they are urban planners and to think about how they would redesign their neighbourhood to include more wild green spaces. What areas would they designate to make nature more present in urban life? How would the presence of human beings be accommodated in these green spaces (for example, would there be benches to sit, lookouts to observe plants, birds, etc.; would it be more like a garden or like a field)? Should there be rules and regulations to protect these areas, and if yes, what kind? How would land use be defined? Where would residential and industrial areas be? Then ask the students to draw graphs, maps or blueprints and write a proposal for their redesign ideas.

ACTIVITY 7

MY IDEAL COMMUNITY

As an extension of Activity 6, students can reflect first through a class discussion on what their ideal community would look like and what is the place of nature within it. How would they describe the relationships between people in this community? In what ways can this community practice environmental stewardship? How would that community welcome diversity and promote inclusion? What can nature teach us about diversity? Knowing that the built environment has an impact on the sustainability of the natural world, but that it also affects a person's state of mind, what would the built environment of their community be like? After the discussion, have the students engage creatively with this theme: they can either write a text about a day in the life of a resident of that imaginary community; they can draw that as a short graphic novel; or create a media text using digital tools.

Quotes from the film for further exploration

"It bothered me that the green spaces around me were manicured to the point where they were stripped of their wild character. It felt as if I lived in an artificial world and a part of me felt stunted in this environment. It's not that wilderness did not exist or that it was not valued or cherished. It's just that it was being presented in a much more ritualized way than I was used to. Wild nature was kept to designated areas, which had clear boundaries, names and rules. In these places there were codes of conduct that visitors had to follow. But after marveling at nature's untamed beauty, visitors would then get in our cars and go back to their world. Where they would exterminate anything that looked like wilderness. Why couldn't nature in its wilder form be a vibrant part of our cities?" —Narrator (quotation starts at 5'40" in the film)

"I love that we have stepped back and have allowed these green spaces to grow wild. But I feel conflicted, because I also see that if we do not consciously take care of them, these wild spaces will end up damaged, neglected or destroyed." —Narrator (starting at 15'51")

"For as long as I can remember, I have felt that the best way to take care of nature is to leave it alone. I felt that if we stepped in and tried to manage it, we would interfere with its inherent way of being, with its perfection. I saw most forms of interference as an intrusion." —Narrator (starting at 18'36")

"I see now that my neighbour's care for their gardens has improved my neighbourhood and enhanced the green spaces in it. I am starting to feel at home here. And I also see how the sense of care that people show for their gardens is carried to the wild spaces in the area where we live." —Narrator (starting at 18'36")

"Maybe I don't have to see our engagement with nature in such extremes. Where we either step aside and do nothing or control it excessively. Maybe there are degrees in which we can engage with and care for green spaces that are necessary and healthy." —Narrator (starting at 22'09")

“Because what we would like to see is the creation of a formal park [...]. Which is by its definition a park, which has a few places to sit, which has a few places to contemplate nature. But which stays really natural. So that kids especially, and also adults obviously, can have access to this kind of experience within in the city. Which is like chasing bugs and finding something crowing up on your foot. Seeing all sorts of wild plants. You know what would grow if we did not always cut it down.”

—Sara Finley, participant at the bioblitz at the Champ des possibles in Montreal (starting at 37’56”)



“In terms of urban planning or business, this zone was never green on their map, right, it was white. Which means it is undeveloped, right. So it is a chunk of the city that is waiting for something to happen to it, but they didn’t realize that stuff was already happening or that it serves a really important function in people’s lives. I think it is important, I think most cities should have places like these, even in the most dense part of our cities, cause people need to have contact with nature. So for me this spot is really an example of good urban practice and the fact that we should be leaving space for nature to blossom and flourish in our cities.”

—Marke Ambard, President of the Borad of Directors of Les Amis du Champ des possibles, Montreal (starting at 38’50”)

“So just by planting more native plants, we all of a sudden increase the amount of life that is here. I think people long for nature in the city, because nature is an important part of being human. It’s normal. So it is good for us to touch nature, but if we are really going to touch nature in places like this, then it should be exciting. There should be more exploration.”

—Marke Ambard, President of the Borad of Directors of Les Amis du Champ des possibles, Montreal (starting at 41’23”)

Websites and online resources

KNOWLDGE OF PLANTS

PlantNet Application

Let's you identify any plant from a picture

About the application:

<http://www.collective-evolution.com/2016/03/10/the-shazam-for-plants-will-identify-any-plant-from-a-picture/>

Download app for Android:

<https://downloads.tomsguide.com/PlantNet-Identification-Plante,0301-56125.html>

Download app for Apple:

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/plantnet/id600547573?mt=8>

Branché application

Expand your knowledge of urban trees

A location-based app that uses the City of Montreal's tree database

Download app for Apple:

<https://itunes.apple.com/ca/app/branch%C3%A9/id564673983?mt=8>

Download app for Android:

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.iekho.branche&hl=en>

MAPPING TOOLS

Open Street Map

<https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=8/46.825/8.224>

Making Maps: DIY Cartography

<https://makingmaps.net/>

StoryMapJS

<https://storymap.knightlab.com/>

Tripline

<https://www.tripline.net/>

NATURE AND CITY

Sierra Club

<http://www.sierraclub.ca/en>

Sierra Club Youth Coalition

<http://www.sierraclub.ca/en/SYC>

Build the City Lab

**Be part of the wider discourse around cities, culture, communities,
democracy and the Commons**

<http://ecflabs.org/lab/build-city>

Cities for People

Canadian urbanism uncovered

<http://citiesforpeople.ca/en/>

City Lab: Article on childhood experiences of nature in cities

“Creating the Next Generation of Urban Conservationists” by Teresa Mathew
<https://www.citylab.com/environment/2017/08/creating-the-next-generation-of-conservationists/536469/>

ARTISTS EXPLORING URBAN GREEN SPACES AND CITYSCAPES

Wild City Mapping

<http://www.wildcitymapping.org>

Dominique Ferraton - Cartographie éphémère

<http://www.dominiqueferraton.ca/carto.html>

Emily Rose Michaud - The Roerich Garden

<http://www.emilyrosemichaud.com/albums/the-roerich-garden-project>

Geneviève Chevalier - My Woodland

<http://genevievechevalier.ca/project/mon-boise-my-woodland/><https://storymap.knightlab.com/>



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