Rebels with a Cause

How a battle over land changed the landscape forever.

An award-winning documentary by Nancy Kelly and Kenji Yamamoto

Produced in association with KRCB North Bay Public Media

Narrated by Frances McDormand
A Note from the Executive Producer

Upon reading Martin Griffin’s *Saving the Marin-Sonoma Coast* back in 1998, I realized how little I knew about the small groups of people who worked tirelessly to save land on the northern California coast. It’s hard to imagine now, when we are all so well-connected, but these “rebels” worked in a kind of isolation, not aware of what other folks were doing to save other small pieces of land or what the big picture would look like. In the end, those individual areas were joined together, resulting in a very large swath of land along the northern California coast saved for the public to enjoy. I thought others probably didn’t know the story either, tending to assume that those lands had always been set aside for public enjoyment and recreation. I am delighted that we asked Nancy and Kenji to work with KRCB on the documentary. *Rebels with a Cause* has inspired hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of viewers with this incredible story.

—Nancy Dobbs
President and CEO, KRCB North Bay Public Media

A Note from the Filmmakers

Documentary films are massive undertakings, and we always carefully consider the merits of taking on a project. But when Nancy Dobbs asked if we’d be interested in making a documentary about how the coastline north of San Francisco was saved from development, we instantly said yes, because northern California is our home. Among the joys of living here are the parks, open spaces, farms and ranches so close to the urban cores of the San Francisco Bay Area.

*Rebels with a Cause* is about land, but it is even more about the people who saved it. Getting to know the “rebels” who helped preserve those lands was an honor for us. In a time when few challenged the mantra that “growth is good,” these rebels dared envision a different world, one where vast parks and open spaces were preserved near where people lived, not just in remote areas hundreds of miles away. In many cases these were ordinary people who surprised even themselves by what they accomplished. And in their local work they helped ignite a worldwide environmental movement.

Since its premiere in 2012, *Rebels with a Cause* has screened in theaters, film festivals, community organizations, schools, colleges, libraries, and museums. It has aired on PBS stations across the country. It has been shown in a barn, in a tent on a freshly mowed hayfield, and at a community outdoor cinema where the audience sat on lawn chairs in the street. Wherever we are, we invite local people who are working for similar goals—the “rebels” of today—to join us for a discussion with the audience. We believe *Rebels with a Cause* educates, moves, and inspires those who see it and hope you’ll feel the same way.

—Nancy Kelly and Kenji Yamamoto
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There are 84 million acres of federally protected parklands in the United States today.\(^1\) How many of us know the history behind the vast landscapes we enjoy for walking, camping, boating, fishing and otherwise exploring? What are the stories behind urban park systems that are teeming with bike riders and boaters, farms and gardens, playgrounds, and pedestrians? *Rebels with a Cause* takes us to the breathtaking landscapes of northern California, and the long and arduous history behind their protection as national treasures. As viewers, we share in this story by hearing the voices of those who made it happen, and we are inspired to learn more about the public lands, open spaces, and agricultural domains in our own regions. At the same time, *Rebels* opens conversations about environmental activism, economic development, and political balancing acts.

In the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century, California’s population increased by 600\%\(^2\). In the 1950s, development was consuming coastal open space and farmland and converting it to “planned communities” and shopping malls in a process that seemed to have no limits. But California had a countervailing tradition to draw on: a heritage of activism, from John Muir onward, on behalf of natural areas and public access to them. In response to the pressure of urbanization, this movement came down out of the mountains, so to speak, and into the metropolitan regions.

*Rebels with a Cause* tells the story of small groups of people near one urban area who—working rather simultaneously, but not always aware of each other—fought to protect and preserve pieces of land for public use. Ultimately, these successes were combined into something much grander: a great band of territory claimed for parks and farms instead of rampant development. This incredible effort encouraged similar efforts nationwide. It’s the story of garden clubs, ranchers, farmers, conservationists, elected representatives, grizzled veterans, inexperienced volunteers. They relied at times on confrontation and sheer political force, and at others engaged in compromise and negotiation with skeptical communities. It’s a struggle that crosses party lines, unites seemingly antagonistic foes, falters and is nearly extinguished many times along the way, but is finally victorious.

\(^1\) [nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm](http://nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm)

“People think National Parks have always been here, but many don’t know the story of their creation. This film tells the important story about the creation of Point Reyes National Seashore and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.”

—Dayton Duncan, Writer/Filmmaker
The National Parks: America’s Best Idea

Use this Viewers Guide to explore the Rebels with a Cause story with your student group, classroom, or community organization, or in your family living room. There are discussion questions, lessons, and activities to take you from Rebels to your own backyard and the quest for preserving natural areas in your region. Use these pages to spark discussion and motivate action.

Sources
- National Park Service. nps.gov
- The Nature Conservancy. nature.org
- The Sierra Club. sierraclub.org
- The Trust for Public Land. tpl.org
Use Rebels with a Cause to raise conversation and action about the following themes:

- Community organizing and citizen action.
- Public use and private development.
- Physical, psychological, and other health benefits of urban parks and open space.
- Social, environmental, and economic impacts of parks and open space.
- Preservation and conservation.
- Environmental history and environmental justice.

“Rebels with a Cause tells the story of how vision, advocacy, community action, commitment, political will and strategy can work together to outwit and outmaneuver even the richest, most powerful factions. It’s a reminder that a strong coalition of ‘regular people’ can achieve a truly ambitious goal for our country. That lesson is worth noting, especially given the influence money has on our political system today.”

— Nadine de Coteau
EarthJustice
COMMUNITY GROUPS
TAKING UP THE CAUSE

Primary Audiences: Community organizations, youth organizations, urban gardening clubs, environmental chapters.

Purpose: Any dedicated group concerned about environmental justice or the preservation of public land is in an excellent position to leverage the story of Rebels with a Cause to further their own work. These smaller groups, who know and understand the local community, and are often willing to fight with modest resources, can sometimes block a behemoth.

Use the following to inspire and activate your group.

Preparation
As you prepare to host a screening of Rebels with a Cause, consider your goals for the event. Are you engaging a large audience in a general conversation? Are you hoping to spark action or motivate an existing group? Or are you planning to generate interest in a new project?

Once your goals are defined, align your event to meet them. Large groups tend to benefit from panelists or guest speakers following a screening. If there are specific messages you hope to convey, be sure to invite guests to support these conversations. Small groups can be ideal for more intense discussions and igniting individual or collective action.

If you are inviting special guests or panelists, reach out ahead of time, and involve them and any other stakeholders in advance of the screening.

Key steps:
- Review the film and this Viewers Guide ahead of time.
- Choose a facilitator who will guide discussion and keep the conversation moving.
- Select an appropriate venue. Make sure your venue can accommodate all your viewers. Is your screening room well-marked, with ample room for viewing and discussion? Is it accessible to wheelchairs? Check the projector, sound, seating, and screen well ahead of time!
- Help people stay connected via your website or Facebook page.
Discussion
After viewing *Rebels*, warm up your group with a general discussion of the film.

*Consider the following prompts:*
- Describe one moment or image in the film that stood out to you.
- Did *Rebels* change your thinking or deepen your understanding? How?
- What issues does the film highlight?
- Did any one of the “rebels” in the documentary capture your attention more than the others? Why?
  rebelsdocumentary.org/the-people/rebels/
- Describe what you believe to be the most important message of the film.

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**Case Study**
Karen Hansen, a teacher and environmental activist who is also a friend, approached me about screening *Rebels with a Cause* in Monterey, CA where she lives. She wanted to involve five grassroots community organizations: Sustainable Monterey County, Monterey County Against Fracking, Save Fort Ord, the Green Party, and a ballot measure campaign for public ownership of the district water system. She thought a couple hundred people might attend, so we reached out to the Osio Cinema, an independent movie theater in Monterey, which booked *Rebels* for a weeklong run.

The host organizations’ use of email, social media, personal contacts, and the press was impressive and effective. The local paper named it “Pick of the Week”! There was standing room only—over 200 people attended, including a number of “rebels of tomorrow.”

After the screening, representatives from the host organizations engaged in a discussion with the audience. The effect of that one screening was so strong, local community organizations have screened *Rebels with a Cause* at least three more times.

—Nancy Kelly
**Action**
Next, begin to move from reflection toward action. Split into pairs or small groups to go deeper, drawing if you like from the themes below.

**Small group theme ideas:**

➤ How can you integrate the *Rebels* story with your own work? How can the themes in *Rebels* inform what you are fighting for?

➤ The rebels employed a number of valuable strategies common to successful citizen action. These included: understanding the problem (benefits of open space and detrimental effects of sprawling development); researching existing plans, trends, and interests; appealing to conscience; rallying public opinion; keeping open lines of communication; and being creative to get to “yes.”³ Consider ways your group can use or build on these strategies.

➤ Did the rebels ever appear helpless, hopeless, or afraid in their fight to preserve open space? How did they persevere? Do you ever feel hopeless when considering the environmental, social, or political battles in your region? How do you persevere?

➤ Marin County Supervisor Gary Giacomini said in *Rebels* that the Straus dairy family was “ostracized something terrible...it was really bad,” for siding with the land preservation groups instead of the majority of ranchers, who wanted the option to sell their farms for top dollar to suburban developers. Giacomini himself was ostracized by his family for siding against the ranchers. What would you have done if you were in his place? Many people in struggles for environmental rights, civil rights, and other battles have faced not only opposition, but also threats of isolation and violence for their views. What price would you be willing to pay to take a stand for what you believe in?

➤ Consider the situation that the ranchers faced in the film. When people started organizing for the national seashore and land preservation on one side and suburban development on the other, what did the dairy farmers and ranchers want? How can you better understand a group that may seem to be thwarting your cause? How could you become allies?

Each small group can prepare a list of reflection and action items to bring back to the larger group. Next, your large group can prioritize areas for action they would like to pursue and create a plan to get there.

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³ [ohiocitizen.org/campaigns/good/gnc.bkgd.html](http://ohiocitizen.org/campaigns/good/gnc.bkgd.html)
Take Action! Steps:

- Talk to five people about *Rebels with a Cause* and compare a situation in the film to something going on in your area.
- Learn what the present vision for future land use is in your local city, county, township, or borough.
- Continue to research the history of local land use, preservation, and development, then share what you are learning.
- Attend local meetings and hearings concerning land conservation and environmental justice.
- Volunteer with a local environmental organization, farm, club, or land trust.
- Support the local economy by using farmers markets and buying local food.
- Plan and attend activities that gather the community and raise awareness about your efforts—film screenings, bike rides, hikes, walks or road races, festivals, or fairs.

Sources

GRADES 9-12, COLLEGE
PROFILING A PARK

Subject Areas: Social studies, environmental studies, political science, government, and civics.

Timeframe: Two 60-minute sessions.

Materials: Pen and paper, map, atlas, computers with Internet access, and printer.

Purpose: For a younger audience, Rebels with a Cause can serve as a history lesson while also offering a model for understanding how small groups of ordinary people can spark big changes in the world around them. One thing the rebels all had in common was an appreciation for wide-open, relatively natural lands, and the wish to give the public access to them.

In this lesson, students will bring the story of Rebels into the present by investigating the history of their own regions and understanding the benefits of open space for people in their communities to access and enjoy.

Objectives

- Understand the public benefits of accessible open space.
- Identify an area of open space near home to investigate and research.
- Use research and reporting skills to share learning with a group.

Preparation and Viewing

From DVD menu, choose the educational version (57 minutes). The DVD has closed captioning and Descriptive Video Service. If necessary, use the chapter breaks in the menu to divide the screening of the film over 2 days.

Think-Pair-Share. Before screening the film, ask students to think about the public open space in or near their neighborhood or city.

Have students write down their responses to the following questions:

- Do you use parks, trails, waterways, open space, or natural areas near you? Which ones?
- Why do you visit? And if not, why not?
- What are some of the reasons people visit, or don’t visit, these areas?

How Marincello Became a Park

I think the accumulated stress of all the opposing things that went on—e.g., law suits, challenges of credit cards, endless negative press, and zoning threats—moved Gulf Oil to decide to get rid of the Marincello project. I negotiated a deal where Gulf would get $6 million in cash and $6 million in a tax credit.

As I described in Rebels with a Cause I optioned it for a symbolic $100. I went to Congress and got a vote to cover the $6 million cash and to guarantee the $6 million tax benefit. Martha Gerbode constantly supplied money for me to keep going. Part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area is named after her in appreciation.

—Huey Johnson
Co-Founder, The Trust for Public Land; Founder, Resource Renewal Institute
Split students into pairs to discuss their answers with each other. Invite a few pairs to share their responses with the whole group. Ask the class to identify the value of preserving open space in or near their communities.

*Potential themes to explore:*

- Physical and mental health.
- Environmental benefits.
- Community interaction.
- Safe places to play.⁴

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**Discussion and Reflection**

After the screening, begin a general discussion about the film.

*Consider using some of these prompts:*

- Describe one moment or image in the film that stood out to you.
- Did *Rebels* change your thinking or deepen your understanding? How?
- What issues does the film highlight?
- How can the *Rebels* story connect to debates about use of open space in your area?
- Describe what you believe to be the most important message of the film.

**Assignment – Profile a Park**

Have students select a state park, recreation area, forest, rails-to-trails pathway, waterway, land trust holding, or any other natural area with public access near where they live. Students can select an area they know well, or one that is less familiar. Alternately, the teacher can pre-select a list of open space areas students can choose from.⁵

Using a program like Google Maps, print a map of the area you will be covering for your project.

Research your open space area. Research sources include state parks departments, local conservation groups, Wikipedia, etc.

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⁴ [cdc.gov/healthyplaces/parks_trails/](http://cdc.gov/healthyplaces/parks_trails/)

⁵ NOTE: Curriculum Designer Melina O’Grady tested the research process on Sweetwater Creek State Park outside of Atlanta. In about ten minutes of searching on the web, she found the basic information about the park and the Georgia Conservancy group that spearheaded its protection in the mid-1970s. Wikipedia is a good place to start, though all sources should be used with due caution.
Use the following questions in your research:

Part I – History
- When was this open space area set aside?
- What was this land used for before?
- How was the area protected? Who were the “rebels” involved? Were there conservation or naturalist organizations, politicians, activists, ordinary citizens, neighborhood groups? Was one group always aware of what others were doing?
- Why did the “rebels” want to protect this land? What was the position of those opposed?
- Who had the actual power to protect the land and why did they decide to do it?

Part II – Present
- How is the land physically used today? How has its use changed?
- Who benefits from this area today and how? Is this land physically accessible to all? If not, are there valid reasons (sensitive species, farm operations)? Are there hidden costs or barriers that impede people with lower incomes from accessing it? To check how your own city ranks with others, look here parkscore.tpl.org/ for more information.
- Distill the benefits of this open space into one sentence. How would you express this message in a tweet? A photograph for social media? What do you lose when you create a single message about a complicated issue?
- Are there costs or disadvantages to the preservation of this open space?
- Compare and contrast your story to the Rebels story.

Once students have gathered their research, they can put it together into a poster, a webpage, a presentation, or a slide show for the class.

Common Core Alignment

CCSS.ELA-Literacy SL.9-10.4
Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy SL.9-10.5
Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
Additional Project Ideas

Include a math component:

- If the park is near enough to visit, calculate the height of a tall tree or other prominent feature. Have one group member stand far enough away from the tree so that they can clearly see the top of the tree. Make sure to stand level to the base of the tree. Then measure the distance from the base of the tree to the observer (x in the diagram) and the distance from the eyes of the observer to the ground (y₁ in the diagram). Use a protractor or level to measure the angle as an observer looks directly at the top of the tree (call this angle A). You can measure the angle easily by using the built-in level on many smart phones or by using a free clinometer app. Then, use right triangle trigonometry to find the remaining height of the tree, from eye-level to the ground (y₂ in the diagram). Finally, find the height of the tree by adding y₁ and y₂. If the age of a tree is known (ask a ranger or manager), students can also use age and height to calculate the average yearly growth. See Appendix for full page diagram.

- Gather data about tides, stream flows, temperatures, length of day, or any other oscillating periodic function at or near your local park, or from a site like weather.com or climate.gov. Create a trigonometric function that models this real-world situation. With temperature, for example, the average yearly temperature will become the midline/horizontal shift of the trig function. The difference between the average and the maximum or minimum temperature will become the amplitude of the trig function.

Design an open space project:
Using ideas from your research and from Rebels, design your own open space project. Where would it be? Who would use it and what for? How would it be different from other open spaces in your area?

Design a debate:
Design a debate or discussion between the many interests in Rebels. Students can take the positions of the ranchers, farmers, developers, environmentalists, and the less-informed but interested public.
At the end of the film, one character describes the “unintended consequences” of preserving so much open space in Marin County, with one of those being the steep increase in home prices. “Our kids and grandkids can’t afford to live here,” Gary Giacomini says, then adds that if he could do it over, he would still save the land. Developers would argue that more homebuilding would lower housing prices. What would the “rebels” or environmentalists say? What would different economists say? What was important to the ranchers?

Use a graphic organizer:
If you have less time, ask students watching the film to note points that strike them under the following headings: social, political, economic, and environmental. Follow the screening with a general discussion. Consider the moment when one of the “rebels” describes the open space they saved as the “lungs of the Bay Area.” What does he mean? Why was it important to have a contiguous area from the Golden Gate Bridge through to the tip of Point Reyes? What was the political, social, economic, and environmental value of a large connected tract of open space?

Interview local “rebels”:
Continue to research, and, if possible, visit one of your local parks as a class. Find people to interview who can tell the story of the park and how it has changed over time.

Sources

- Green, Jared. “The Value of Urban Parks, Uniting the Built and Natural Environments.” American Society of Landscape Architects. 4/21/10. dirt.asla.org/2010/04/21/the-value-of-urban-parks/
- Lonergan, Mark. Math Components. Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA.
- Madsen, Jesse. Graphic Organizer. Social Science Department, Terra Linda High School, San Rafael, CA.
- “Parks and Trails Health Impact Assessment Toolkit.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. cdc.gov/healthyplaces/parks_trails/
- “ParkScore.” The Trust for Public Land. parkscore.tpl.org/
COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY
IN SEARCH OF REBELS

Purpose: College classrooms are excellent settings for screening Rebels with a Cause and using its message to instigate development of 21st century solutions to land use questions in an era of increasing urbanization and global environmental concerns. The experience of the "rebels" in the documentary is a demonstration of change built on dedicated community activism over decades of time. College and university students can use this example to compare and contrast the Rebels story with other examples of the success and failure of citizen actions to protect the public interest.

Use this lesson to deepen students’ understanding of the Rebels story of citizen action, environmental studies, urban planning, and the benefits to society of access to urban parks and open space.

Project
Consider the following project themes to weave Rebels with a Cause into your syllabus:

- Research similar efforts to preserve parks, open space and/or agriculture in different regions of the country. How do these efforts compare to the Rebels story?

- Investigate the benefits and costs of protecting land in and near urban areas from development. Is preserving open space ever the “wrong” choice for a community? Are there situations where you would favor development over preservation? Why or why not?

- How does this movement intersect with the movement to confront climate change? How do farms and agriculture fit into that future? What about other efforts to convert military use or railroad use to public access of land?

- Consider the role of leadership in the Rebels story. Analyze how the movement’s leaders arrived and how they saw their roles. Why were they effective? What strategies did they use to thwart their opponents? What coalitions were made and how did that happen? Were there opportunities that were capitalized on? Mistakes or setbacks? How did the citizen actors define the problem? Choose one or two other examples of social change leadership and compare with Rebels.

Rebels with a Cause
Making Rebels with a Cause involved extensive research, which was the foundation of the story: deciding who to interview; bringing events alive through motion picture and still photographs; and finding an object that was essential to telling the Marinello story. I read over 7,000 pages of books, contacted 56 archives, collected over 1600 archival images, and spent three years searching for the developer’s model of Marinello. I’m glad we did all that research—you never know where you're going to find a gem.

—Nancy Kelly
Focus on the economic impact of urban parks and open space areas. Beginning with the Rebels example, analyze the value to society of open space preservation compared to residential or commercial development. (See Links box)

Manicured urban parks have their roots in the grand vision of Frederick Law Olmstead and the naturalists of the 19th century. What is different about the way the Rebels envisioned access to nature for city dwellers? What about today? Compare and contrast the public interest in open space in these three different time periods.

Discuss the future of the open space and land preservation movement. To balance the environmental, social, and political realities of the future, what new questions need to be asked and debated in this century?

Consider benefits that were unknown during the time portrayed in Rebels with a Cause. For example, in adapting to climate change, what is the role of areas like the interconnected habitats and corridors depicted in Rebels? Given sea level rise, what is the value of unbuilt coastlines?

Consider current battles over land use, such as: Grand Canyon park development, urban farming on abandoned land in Detroit, receding coastlines in the Gulf of Mexico, fracking, the declining condition of forests, the role of private concessioners in providing services in national parks.

Sources
- Beder, Sharon. “Activism versus Negotiation: Strategies for the Environment Movement.” HER Institute. herinst.org/sbender/envpolitics/activism.html#VEPiZ0fC2MM
Environmental Protection, Preservation and Activism
State and municipal parks & recreation departments.
Every state and most cities will have a parks and recreation department that offers information, history, and resources for your local area.

Multicultural Environmental Leadership Development Initiative. meldi.snre.umich.edu/
Housed at the University of Michigan, this initiative aims to increase diversity in environmental organizations and the broader environmental movement as a whole.

National Park Service. nps.gov
Links to information about parks, historic sites, seashores, and other protected areas around the country. Also links to Teacher and Kids pages for interactive and comprehensive activities and lesson plans.

Sierra Club. sierraclub.org/
The Sierra Club has chapters throughout the United States and Canada that offer opportunities for local involvement, activism, and outings. Find links to chapter sites here: sierraclub.org/chapters.

The Trust for Public Land. tpl.org
The Trust for Public Land works to protect the places people care about and to create close-to-home parks—particularly in and near cities, where 85 percent of Americans live.

Citizen Action
Ashoka. ashoka.org/fellows
Ashoka Fellows are leading entrepreneurs who have innovative solutions to social problems and the potential to change patterns across society. Ashoka Fellows work in over 70 countries around the globe.

Brower Youth Awards. broweryouthawards.org
Each year the Brower Youth Award recognizes the work of 6 young leaders who are making strides in the environmental movement by demonstrating excellent leadership as well as a commitment to the communities their work serves.

Echoing Green. echoinggreen.org/fellows
Since its founding in 1987, Echoing Green has provided more than 600 promising social entrepreneurs working in sixty countries with $36 million in start-up funding and customized support services.

The Goldman Prize. goldmanprize.org
The Goldman Prize is the world’s largest prize honoring grassroots environmentalists.
Books


Larger diagram from Page 14
Additional Project Ideas – math component #1