

Fishing: Film Study *Darwin's Nightmare*

This activity is a little different from the others. It focuses upon the impact on the people and the environment, of Lake Victoria in Tanzania of an introduced species of fish, the Nile Perch. This case study examines the workings of an inland freshwater fishery. The problems that the local people face are similar to those experienced by people involved in ocean and coastal fisheries. These problems include the over exploitation of a resource, the degradation of the natural environment and the competition for a dwindling resource base between the poor and the wealthy consumers. The film examines the impacts of a global phenomenon, overfishing at a local or a regional scale.

This documentary by German filmmaker Hubert Sauper, released in 2004 was nominated for an Academy Award. Some scenes in the film are a little confronting and teacher guidance may be needed. The pace is slow in parts, some scenes have subtitles and the film is shot using a hand-held camera, often at night. It is probably not the sort of film that you could show right through to a class but you could use scenes selectively.

While the film released focuses upon the fishing in Lake Victoria, it also deals with other issues including: globalisation of trade, the impact of AIDS, the impact of rural-urban migration and the illegal trade in arms.

Spatial Concepts

Concept	Example
Spatial Change Over Time	
Movement	
Spatial Association	
Region	
Scale	
Spatial Interaction.	

Background

In the 1960s a small number of Nile Perch (*Lates Niloticus*) was released into Lake Victoria. These giant fish, which can grow to 200 kg and two metres in length, proved to be very effective predators who multiplied rapidly and competed with the local species of fish for food. Many of these native species of fish declined in numbers or were eliminated. The main attractions of the Nile Perch as a food fish are its abundance, the ease with which it can be caught with a variety of techniques, both high and low technology, its large size and very palatable bone-free white flesh.

Originally, Nile Perch caught in Lake Victoria was only for consumption by the locals who mainly lived around the lake. However, over the last 15 years, it has been in heavy demand for domestic consumption in Europe, the USA and Japan. The number

of boats and people involved in the fishing and processing industry increased substantially. Factories sprang up in Tanzania along the lakeside in order to skin, trim, fillet and freeze the catches of Nile Perch and dispatch them by air to overseas markets help to meet the growing demand. While some people prospered as a result of this trade, the benefits were not spread evenly among all groups.

Lake Victoria supports one of the most productive freshwater fisheries in the world. Annual fish yields exceed 500 000 tons, with a value of \$US400 million. The Nile Perch fillets are transported around the world, but the local fishers and cannot afford to buy their own catch. This film examines the impacts of the increased globalisation of the trade of fish and the effects that increased contact with the outside world have on the local people who live around the lake.

Overfishing in many of the traditional coastal and deep-water fisheries in the global oceans forced consumers of fish in the developed countries to look for new sources. One of these sources was Lake Victoria. Ironically, now the supply of this once abundant source of fish is under threat because of its popularity.

A detailed study guide for this film can be downloaded from the website of ATOM, The Australian Teachers of Media www.atomvic.org/ Go to Resources and then Study Guides.

Activities:

1. Why were the Perch introduced to Lake Victoria?
2. What have the impacts of the introduction of the Nile Perch been on people and the environment?

Impacts on Lake Victoria	Positive or Negative	Impacts on People	Positive or Negative

3. What factors have contributed to this situation?
4. What are the implications for the future health of the people of Tanzania if the current pattern of catching and exporting the best fish continues?