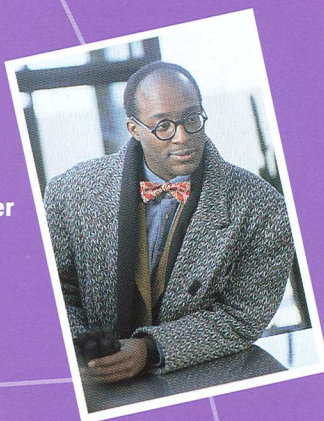


DESERTER

Returning to Earth's orbit, Zenon is unaware that a dismal fate awaits him. On Earth, the situation is hardly any better: the desert is constantly advancing.

In both cases, the solution depends a great deal on the human factor. In Zenon's case, it will take all Stella's energy and some collaboration to prevent him from becoming a "technological desert". Is there also someone who can stop desertification?

A film by Michel Murray
Produced by Jean-François Mercier



19 minutes 5 seconds

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Closed-captioned for the hearing impaired.
Decoder required.

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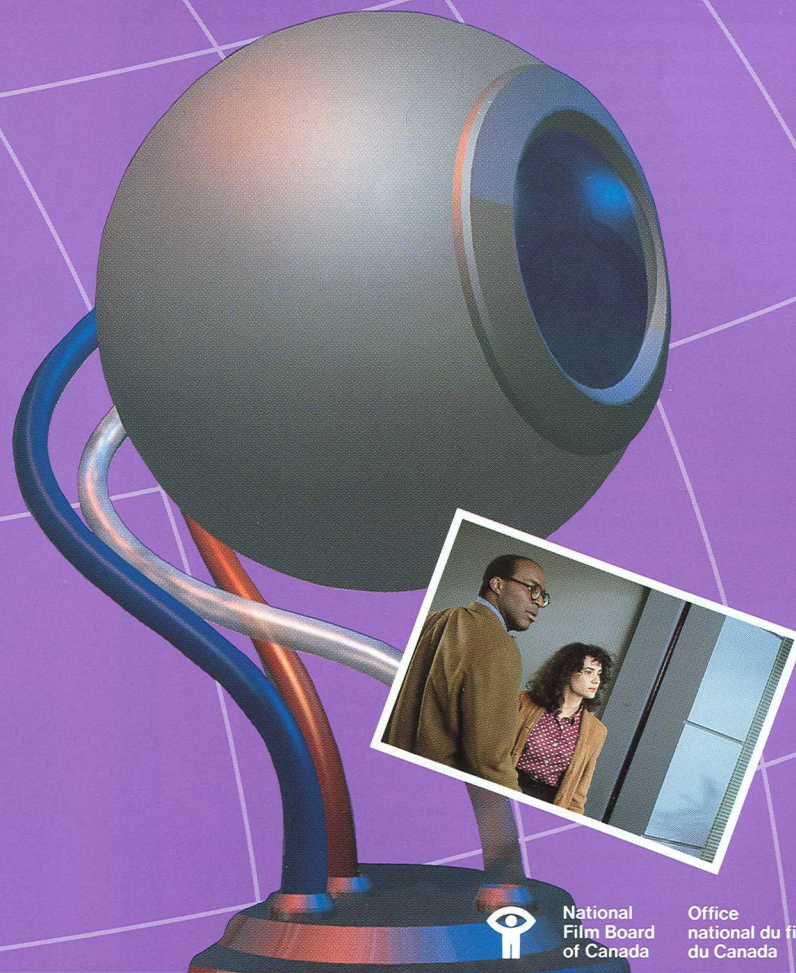


DESERTER

DESERTER

*Without water, neither Zenon nor the Earth
can survive!*

A film by Michel Murray
Produced by Jean-François Mercier



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ACTIVITIES

Vocabulary

Ecosystem: A basic ecological unit composed of the environment and the organisms (animal and vegetable) that live there.

A) Examine

1. Opinions

Water is the main concern of this film, and the characters involved have all directly or indirectly taken a stance on this issue. Have the group identify the concerns each character presents. Then have them state their own opinions and analyze how their position compares to the concerns of the characters. Have them explain, for example, the analogies and differences between Zenon's and their own capacity to fight desertification. (Characters: Professor Nguyen, Stella, Akossi-Woyo Barthélémy, Security Guard Lavoie)

2. The Water Cycle

When the satellite Zenon reflects of the Earth's water situation, he focuses on interdependence in nature. He makes this statement:

"Streaming, percolating, transpiration, evaporation, precipitation: water is in perpetual motion. And when the balance is upset at any point, a chain reaction is triggered".

After referring to this statement, ask the group to describe situations in their own environment in which the water cycle is disrupted. Make sure they also describe the chain reactions these disruptions provoke.

3. Result of Desertification

In the film, four phenomena are mentioned:

- *interruptions in the water cycle*
- *population migration*
- *climatic changes*
- *depletion of resources*

Have the group define each of these phenomena and explain how they are interre-

lated. For example: no trees, no evaporation, no rain, no people.

4.A. Trees

Zenon states that the solution to desertification is to plant trees. He bases this statement on the following reasoning:

Trees fight drought. Where there are trees, water remains in the soil, evaporating more slowly and returning as rain. Where there are no trees, water doesn't remain in the ground but heads to the sea, and rain is scarce.

Referring to the animated scene that explains this, have the group illustrate Zenon's reasoning (through drawings, models, skits...).

Later, compare the various illustrations to bring out a clear understanding of the above process.

4.B. Forests

If the activity for 4A proves effective, have the group do the same sort of activity (concurrently or consecutively) with the following extract from the film.

Akossi mentions the essential role that the forest plays in desert countries: it is indispensable to the equilibrium of agricultural and pastoral ecosystems and contributes to the nutrition of animals and humans, by preventing erosion and the advance of dunes.

B) Consider

1. Compromise?

Stella and Akossi no longer have access to the laboratory. Who are the people in charge of the Almeda research base and why would they have decided on this restriction?

Encourage the group to put forth plausible hypotheses and then stage the following simulation activity.

Divide the group into "people in charge", "researchers" and "judges" (who will approve or reject the others' attitudes). Insist that each group explain their motives in terms of their respective

"responsibilities". Encourage them to find a compromise to prevent groups from resorting to delinquent acts. Suggest that this process could be applied to real-life situations.

2. Desert, Desertification...

Ask the group to describe the images that these words bring to mind. Attempt to correct any misconceptions they may have. Ask the group to identify the various sources (film, television, books, travel) of their impressions. Compare these different impressions and identify the most accurate ones. Then have the group go on to list the factors (climatic, human and others) which tend to make an environment arid. Could these factors also be at work in their own environment? Are there any desert areas (or areas that are becoming desertified) in their region, province or country? Name the deserts found in neighbouring countries. Have the group do a research project to answer these questions.

3. Population

Remind the group of the problem described by Akossi:

Reforestation will not succeed without the participation of the local people. People have other priorities: basic food requirements, safe water to drink, health care, education... People's living conditions must first be improved. And then support must be given to develop and use alternative energy sources, which use very little or no wood.

Then present to the group the three-part "global solution" proposed by Zenon:

- food security
- development of energy resources
- stabilization of vegetation cover

Divide the group into three teams, each with the mission of attaining one of the objectives mentioned above. Each group must clearly specify the steps involved in their plan of action.

Ask each team to work on its own at first. Then organize a discussion with the group as a whole, focusing on the fact that the proposed actions of one team

could conflict with those of another. Demonstrate how important it is to have co-operation between the teams in order to effectively attain the objectives.

Ask the group which objective should be attained first (second and third). Ask them to describe a plausible "global solution" in their own words. Encourage use of the terms "ecosystem" and "global interdependence".

C) Discover

1. Nothing Can Be Done?

The security guard at the Almeda research base says: "It really is a shame... nothing can be done." Akossi answers: "Every small gesture we make counts; it may have great repercussions on a planet-wide basis."

Ask the group to explain both of these attitudes using concrete examples from their own environment. Encourage an exchange of ideas, emphasizing the fact that many simple actions based on a common principle can have great impact. For example: recycling, or planting trees.

Have the group make a list of such basic actions that, when multiplied by many people doing them, can produce exceptional results. Organize a contest to make posters promoting these actions.

2. Co-operation

Zenon says: "The desert's growing, Stella. Within 24 hours, certain parts of my brain will be completely dehydrated." Stella and Akossi know the value of Zenon and decide to join forces to prevent this.

Try to channel any emotional reactions to this scene to motivate the group members to take concerted actions to help their environment at the local level.

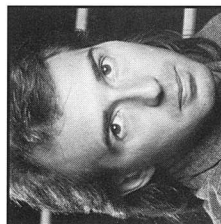
Remind them of the events in the film:

Two characters, alone powerless, work together and succeed in attacking a (symbolic) problem of desertification.

Have the group devise strategies for action at the regional, provincial or national level to combat problems

Bio-filmography of Michel Murray

Born in 1959 in Montréal, Michel Murray completed his college studies in graphics and earned a degree in film communications. He has been involved in several films on the level of initial ideas and as an animator and scriptwriter. For the NFB he has directed *Sylvia* (1995), *Tocade* (1987), *La Délia* (1989, co-directed with Yvon Provost). For the MEDIA-SPHERE program, he has made *The Aquanaut* (1990), *Deserter* (1991) and *The Pirate* (1991).



(e.g., land becoming arid, lack of trees) in their own environment.

Encourage strategies that are based on co-operation rather than competition.

Illustrate the virtues of co-operation, pointing out the concrete results it can produce.

3. Sahara and Sahel

Akossi states that the Niger and Senegal rivers are gradually drying up. Later, he announces that he must return to the Sahel.

Have members of the group find these rivers on a world map. Then have them find the Sahara (the largest desert in the world). Explain to them, as Zenon does in the film, that Sahel means "desert shore" and that it refers to the entire zone bordering the Sahara on the south and west. Ask them to locate the Sahel on the map, by indicating the main countries which comprise it: Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, for example.

It is estimated that the area of the Sahara desert is approximately 8 million km², and – somewhat like a tide – in some areas it advances and in others it recedes. However, it has been estimated that overall the desert advances at an average rate of 7 km annually.

Have the group do research on the movement of the desert, particularly on the way it advances and recedes. The research should enable them to better identify the regions or countries where such movement has been observed and to explain the main causes at a local level (e.g., cutting or planting trees, climatic reasons, social problems).

The essential aim of this film is to stimulate discussion. It is meant to be thought provoking and to help change attitudes about major global problems.

*

The film ***Deserter*** emphasizes the importance of water, in particular, the dramatic consequences of a lack of water.

Desertification is a threat to the entire planet.

Global problems require global solutions. Zenon and Akossi agree: planting trees helps stop desertification (and soil erosion). However, the pooling of human resources is the first step toward a global solution. As he returns to work in the Sahel, Akossi is firmly convinced of this; but in order for this to happen, some of our habits will have to change.

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with

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Computer Animation
Georges Mauro

Computer Animation System
SOFTIMAGE Inc.

Editing

Pierre Lemelin

Casting and Dialog Coach
Céline Mineau

Sets

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Props

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Costumes

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Make up

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