

The Unnatural Jew

Created by Noam Dolgin with help from many

An activity that explores the connections between land, time and responsibility, and looks at the Jewish historical and religious connection to *Zion* and the lands we live on today.

Age: 12 and up

Time: 30 minutes and up depending on how much of this highly flexible program you choose to lead.

Materials attached: 2 pictures of Hall Peninsula (Aerial photograph, and Inuit's recounting); Reading, *The Unnatural Jew* by Steven Schwartzchild

Program:

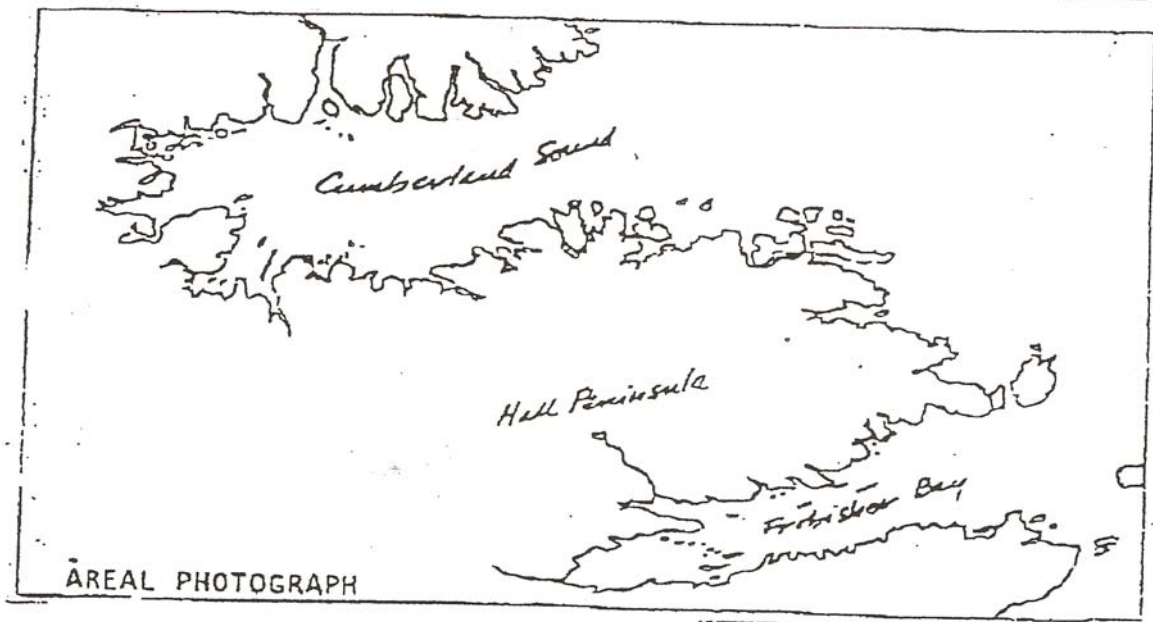
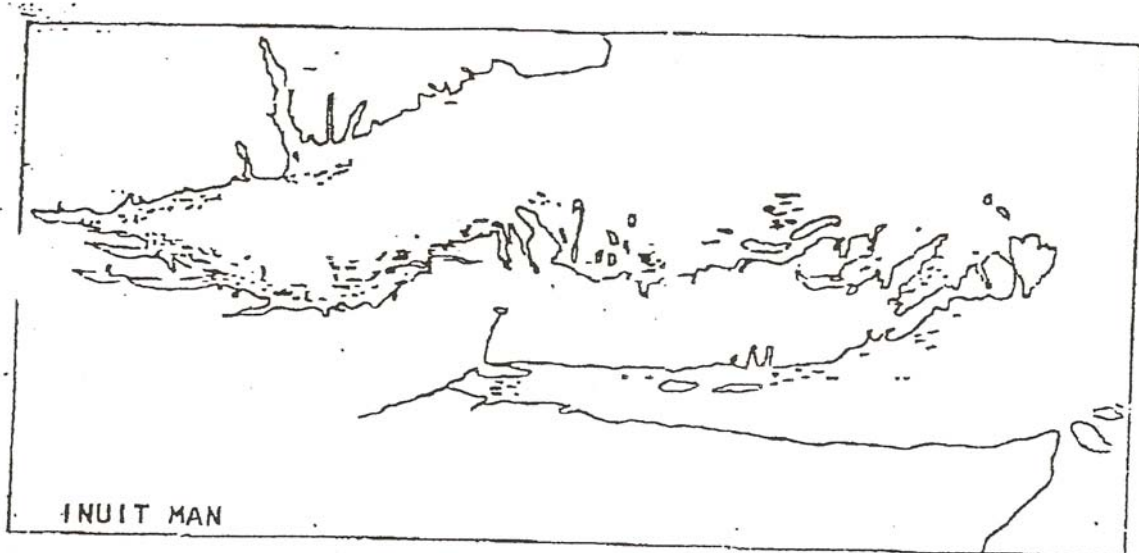
- 1) Define term: 'Eco'
 - a. How is used, what words begin with it?
 - b. What does 'eco' mean? Latin for Home
- 2) What is home? What makes somewhere home?
 - a. What land do we call home? What are the characteristics that make it home?
- 3) Ask students to draw a map of their home land, with a focus on the geography.
- 4) In what ways is it accurate? Why or why not?
What if we drew roads or buildings instead? Would our drawing be more accurate?
- 5) Show 2 representations of hall peninsula? What can we learn about the Inuit man from his drawing?
 - a. Where does he live? Profession? How long has he/ his family lived in this location?
 - b. What does this tell us about this person's connection to that piece of land? What are the benefits?
 - c. What effect does his people long term relationship with the area play?
- 6) Read *The Unnatural Jew*. Make sure that everyone understands what Steven S. Schwartzchild is trying to say.
 - a. Do you agree with Schwartzchild? Why?
 - b. If we are a people without a land, have we developed an earthly understanding and appreciation? Land ethic? environmental ethic?
- 7) Draw a map of Israel (*Zion*), with a focus on the geography. Is this map more or less accurate than the original? Why?
- 8) How does the Jewish religious connection to the land of *Zion* affect our relationship with that land and all land?
- 9) How does Zionism as an ideology address our connection with land, and the environmental dilemmas we face.
- 10) How can we develop a similar land and environmental ethic as Diaspora Jews.

Program Adaptations:

This is very adaptable program, depending on time, age, or area of interest, this program easily molded to fit your needs. Below are a few adaptation suggestions. If you write any of your own please send a copy to noam@tevacenter.org

- A) To Shorten remove step 3, 5 or 7. Though the combination of approaches and activities enhances the exploration. The program can be too long for certain situations and can stand with only 1 or 2 of these components.
- B) Step 3. Draw an assigned location and compare to actual map. Allows for a true analysis of the accuracy of our drawings. Puts a higher degree of focus on the part of the participants.
- C) Begin at step 3. Introduce concept of 'eco=home' at the end as part of an environmental *sikkum* (conclusion)
- D) Use readings on Jewish connections to the land of *Zion*, and the Zionist attitudes towards the land, to further develop steps 8 and 9.

Appendix 1 – Inuit Map:



Appendix 2 – Reading:

The Unnatural Jew

Steven S. Schwartzschild

In my philosophy department the graduate students organize an annual picnic. For some time past quasi-formal invitations have explicitly excluded me on the grounds that I am known to be at odds with nature. So I am. My dislike for nature goes deep: landscapes strike me as opponents, which, as the bible commands, I am *to fill and conquer* (Gen 1:28.) I really don't like the world, and I think it's foolish to tell me that I had better. One explanation of my attitude is historical. My parent's family lived in Frankfurt-on-the-Main, where I was born, since before 1500. We have been urban for well over half a millennium.

Here I want to analyze whether it is only an idiosyncratic or mainly historical attitude, or whether more important, even philosophical, factors are significantly involved. Might it be that Judaism and nature are at odds? Richard Popkin once asked this Zen problem of me: *Who was the last famous Jewish mountain climber?* Indeed, most Jews in remembered history are unnatural persons.

In summary: (for younger audiences)

Steven S. Schwartzschild, a teacher of philosophy, in his paper *The Unnatural Jew* noted that his students believed that he is at odds with nature. And, he said, they are right. Steven deeply dislikes nature in all its forms; he does not like mountain ranges or old forests; he does not like tundra or sandy deserts. In fact any landscape that is unsettled frustrates Schwartzschild. He wants to conquer all land. In fact, he feels that as a Jew, he is obligated by the Torah to settle and tame the land. He, like many Jews, grew up in a city. His parents, like many Jews, also grew up in a city. His grandparents and even their grandparents grew up in a city. Jews have lived in cities for hundreds of years. Schwarzchild believes that Jewish people are not connected to the earth.

Therefore, he asks himself: is Judaism and nature at odds? Schwarzchild believes the answer is yes. He often asks the question, who was the last famous Jewish mountain climber? The answer, Steven says, is that all Jews in remembered history are unnatural persons.