

ELEMENTAL

# Conversation Cards

Three Stories,  
Three Continents,  
One Commitment to Change

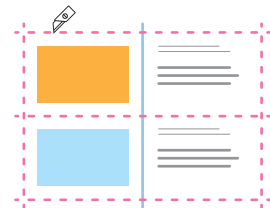
## How to Use the Conversation Cards

Use the cards to deepen your students' learning...

- ★ As pre-film warm-ups to introduce the topics and themes
- ★ As catalysts for post-film discussions
- ★ As writing prompts for personal reflections or essays
- ★ To spark ideas for action or class projects

## Preparing the Cards

- ① With a straight edge knife and a ruler, cut along the pink dashed rules.



- ② Score along the vertical blue rule and fold.



- ③ Close with double sided tape or glue at the corners.





CONNECTION TO PLACE

think

think

When Jay Harman was a child he used to go down to the beach, where he felt *completely at home*.

Where do you feel you can relax and be yourself? How might you create more places like that in your life?

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CONNECTION TO PLACE

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Eriel Deranger makes clear that she is an indigenous rights activist—not an environmentalist; and Rajendra Singh says he is a social worker—not a politician.

What job title would you imagine for yourself? How do our self-chosen titles reflect our connection to the world or to others?

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CONNECTION TO PLACE

think

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Writer Vera Nazarian said, *"If Music is a Place—then Jazz is the City, Folk is the Wilderness, Rock is the Road, Classical is a Temple."*

What music genre would best symbolize your community? What songs would you choose to represent it, and why?

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CONNECTION TO PLACE

ask

ask

In the film, Rajendra Singh uses religious terms such as pilgrimage, sacred, faith, and devotion to motivate people.

Where you live, what types of language promote environmental awareness? What role does language and culture play in shaping our relationship with a place?

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CONNECTION TO PLACE

ask

ask

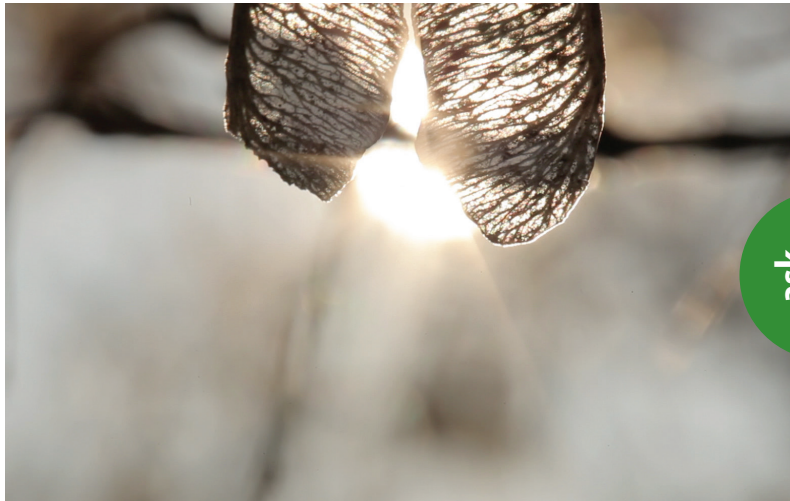
“If you don’t know where you are, you don’t know who you are.”

**Wendell Berry**, farmer, writer, and activist

What would it take to truly “*know where you are*”? How might that help define you or your life?

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CONNECTION TO PLACE

ask

ask

Use your senses to describe where you live or a place you love. What do you see? What can you smell? What do you hear? What can you touch? What can you taste?

How does the combination of these experiences make you feel about that place?

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CONNECTION TO PLACE

act

act

“A place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest, remembers it most obsessively, wrenches it from itself, shapes it, renders it, loves it so radically that he remakes it in his own image.”

**Joan Didion**, novelist and essayist

Draw a representation of a place that is meaningful to you—from when you were a child or more recently. Share your drawing with a partner.

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CONNECTION TO PLACE

act

act

“Find your place on the planet. Dig in, and take responsibility from there.”

**Gary Snyder**, poet

Where is your “*place on the planet*”? Find organizations working to protect or restore that place. Learn what they are doing, and how you can join in.

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CONNECTION TO PLACE

act

act

See how well you know the place where you live. (part one)

① From where you are standing or sitting, point to north, south, east, and west. ② Identify the current phase of the moon.

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CONNECTION TO PLACE

act

act

See how well you know the place where you live. (part two)

③ Name the nearest bodies of fresh water and salt water. ④ Estimate the times of today's sunrise and sunset. ⑤ Describe typical weather patterns in your area.

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PERSEVERANCE

think

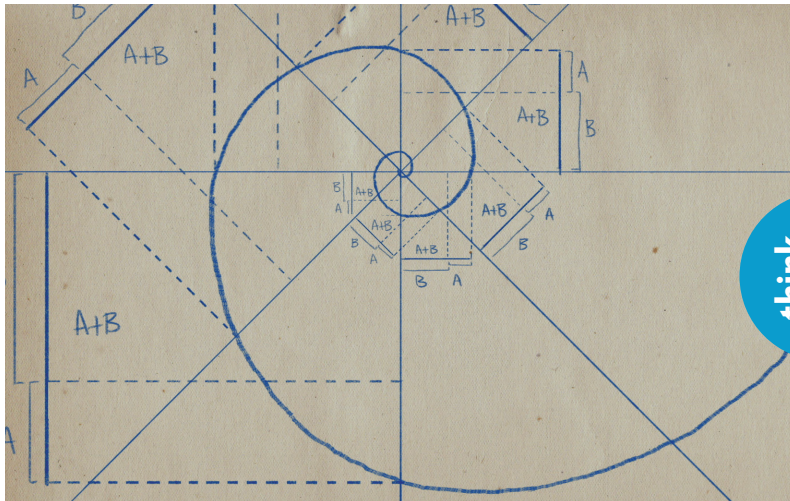
think

*Elemental* opens with this quote by poet T.S. Eliot:  
 “Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out  
 how far one can go.”

What do you think Eliot meant  
 by this? Why might the filmmakers  
 have chosen this quote to open  
 the film?

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PERSEVERANCE

think

think

In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell posits that it takes  
 10,000 hours of practice to truly master a skill such as playing  
 the guitar, or being a ballerina or a top-notch game designer.  
 He points out that with time and enough drive, even those  
 without innate talent can become expert in a particular area.

Do you find Gladwell’s view  
 encouraging or discouraging?  
 Why?

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PERSEVERANCE

think

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In the film, Jay Harman describes how life for him is about possibility as opposed to impossibility. He explains that when someone says, “*It can’t be done*,” he just sees a failure of imagination.

Think of a problem affecting your family, school, or community. How might a shift in perception—toward seeing only possibility—affect how you and others view it?

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PERSEVERANCE

ask

ask

“It always seems impossible until it’s done.”

**Nelson Mandela**, former president of South Africa,  
civil rights leader

If Mandela is right, can we ever know whether our aim is possible *before* embarking on a certain path? Does it matter?

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**PERSEVERANCE**

ask

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“The difference between perseverance and obstinacy is that one comes from a strong will and the other from a strong won’t.”

**Henry Ward Beecher**, 19th-century clergyman, social reformer, and abolitionist

Is perseverance always a good thing? In what circumstances might quitting be the more effective path?

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**PERSEVERANCE**

ask

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“The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world’s problems.”

**Mahatma Gandhi**

What do you think Gandhi meant by this statement?

Think of an example that would prove his point.

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PERSEVERANCE

act

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Make a list of the many different strategies the three protagonists employ to promote change (for example, marching or using motivational speeches). Rank the strategies from simplest to hardest to carry out.

Which do you think would be most effective in your community?

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PERSEVERANCE

act

act

The three protagonists in the film illustrate different roles for bringing change: For example, Eriel Deranger is an organizer who motivates others to speak out, Jay Harman is a visionary who helps us glimpse the possible through practical inventions based on nature, and Rajendra Singh is a water advocate who shares the truth.

How does each role promote change? What special challenges does each face? What role are you most drawn to?

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**PERSEVERANCE**

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Identify a skill or ability that you would like to master. Outline a plan for the next month to work toward your goal.

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**NATURE AS TEACHER**

think

think

Jay Harman says that the world's most serious problem is global warming.

What do you think is the biggest challenge we face? What would need to happen to solve it?

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**NATURE AS TEACHER**

think

think

Eriel Deranger describes our relationship with Mother Earth as similar to the relationship between an unborn baby and mother. She says, “...just like an umbilical cord gives [a baby] everything he needs; the water, and the plants, and the air give us everything we need here.”

Do you agree with her statement? How does Mother Earth provide for you? Do you have any needs that Mother Earth is not able to meet?

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**NATURE AS TEACHER**

think

think

Think about a plant, animal, or other natural object or phenomenon that resonates with you.

Take on its persona, and speak from a first-person perspective about what you experience as humans or natural events impact your surroundings.

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**NATURE AS TEACHER**

ask

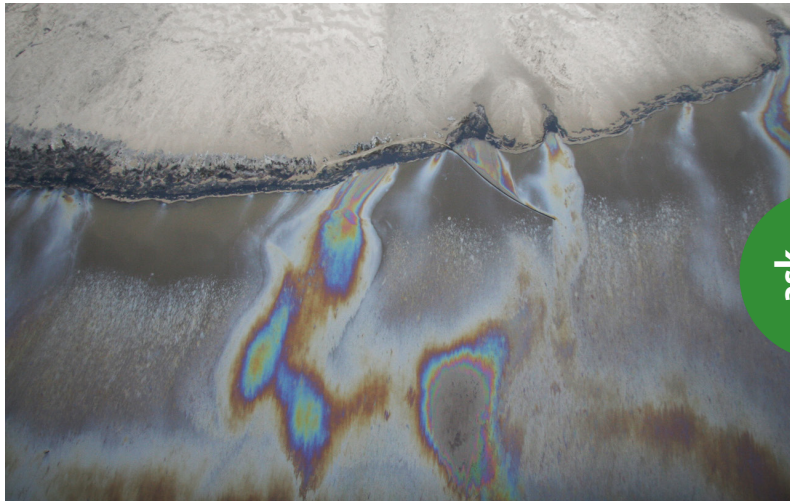
ask

As Jay Harman noted in the film, half of the world's population now lives in cities.

In what vital ways is everyone—even a city dweller—connected to nature? How might this statistic influence the way we address environmental issues?

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**NATURE AS TEACHER**

ask

ask

One thing we can learn from nature is that our actions often have consequences we didn't anticipate or intend. For example, as the film points out, burning fossil fuels is causing changes in Earth's climate.

What other past and current technological solutions have had unintended consequences affecting people or the environment?

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**NATURE AS TEACHER**

ask

ask

“Look deep into Nature, and then you will understand everything better.”

**Albert Einstein**, scientist

What could a person living in a town or city do to develop a deep understanding of nature?

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**NATURE AS TEACHER**

act

act

Jay Harman used natural whirlpools as the model for his innovation. This is an example of biomimicry, which draws on nature for conceiving models, systems, and processes.

Research other inventions or ideas that were inspired by nature's designs.

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**NATURE AS TEACHER**

act

act

“Dripping water hollows out stone, not through force but through persistence.”

**Ovid**, Roman poet

Describe one thing you can start today, realizing that it is the first step on what might be a long journey to make your community or the world a better place.

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**NATURE AS TEACHER**

act

act

There are many means by which people from diverse cultures express gratitude for the Earth: for example, through ceremonies, prayers, or rituals, or by creating altars or other structures.

Find an image or description of another culture’s way of honoring the Earth and share it with others.

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Share your experiences with us  
on how you used the conversation  
cards, as well as your thoughts  
and impressions.

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