

# Dialogue— Disappearing Wetlands

## Objectives

Students will:

- analyze David Bates' painting, *Grassy Lake*, generating and interpreting a list of what they observe in the painting.
- improvise a dialogue between two people in a canoe in a swamp.
- write a dialogue about the disappearing wetlands in Louisiana, using the writing process, i.e., prewriting, drafting, reviewing, and editing.
- research the wetlands of the BTE for the purpose of creating a script that will be shared with an audience.
- critique, edit and revise each others' work.
- learn techniques needed to create a tape of their dialogues.
- use the Internet to find an appropriate audience with whom to share their taped dialogues.
- make a fact page or brochure to provide additional wetlands information to their audience.
- record daily reflections in their journals about the process.



David Bates, "*Grassy Lake*,"  
oil on canvas, 1982, New Orleans Museum  
of Art: Museum purchase P. Roussel Norman  
Purchase Fund and Gift of Mr. and Mrs.  
Claude C. Albritton, III, 83.27

## Overview

This role play helps students understand the many sides to the problem of wetland loss in Louisiana.

## Preparation

- Acquire a print of *Grassy Lake*
- Make copies of opening lines (Refer to “Process,” Step 7)
- Gather materials
- Make copies of Checklists
- Download information on David Bates (Refer to “Resources.”)

# Dialogue— Disappearing Wetlands



## Materials

- print of *Grassy Lake* (p.76)
- two caps (optional)
- copy of opening lines
- access to computers and Internet
- audiotapes
- paper/pens
- canoe paddles, real or cardboard (optional)
- journals
- resource books
- Handout: *Checklists* (pp.72-73)
- tape player

*My work in the last few years has been a process of allowing myself to paint subjects that I really cared about—finding my own place that is special to me. My Grassy Lake pictures are more than a series of paintings for me. They represent the ongoing life of an ancient lake swamp in which I am privileged to participate.*

~ David Bates

North Texas Institute for Educators on the Visual Arts (n.d.) retrieved December 21, 2004 from <http://www.art.unt.edu/ntieva/artcurr/alsp/bates.htm>

David Bates, born in Texas in 1952, loved and appreciated the unique beauty of the wetlands in Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas. In particular he was enthralled by the wildlife, water, and light of Grassy Lake in southwestern Arkansas, and in 1982 he painted Grassy Lake, currently on display at the New Orleans Museum of Art.

A dominant theme in Bates’s work is the relationship of humans to nature. Grassy Lake serves as a catalyst for inspiring students to research and create dialogues that will educate people about the Louisiana wetlands. Students will record their dialogues on audiotape and find appropriate local and national venues.

## Procedure

## Dialogue—Disappearing Wetlands

1. Ask students to observe quietly the print, *Grassy Lake*, for approximately three to five minutes.
2. Partner students to record everything they observe in the print.
3. Briefly share observations with the whole class.
4. Discuss what inferences can be made from what was observed, using the following questions:
  - Where are they?
  - Who are they?
  - What is their relationship to each other?
  - Why are they there?
  - How are they feeling about being there?
5. Ask the following questions when discussing the artistic attributes of *Grassy Lake*:
  - What is the focal point, the portion of the painting that draws your attention? (the men's faces)
  - In what direction do your eyes go when looking at the painting? (The slanted oars pull the viewer's eyes diagonally, across the painting.)
  - How does Bates use shapes? (The objects are composed of geometric shapes—rectangles, circles, triangles, and ovals—to illustrate men's legs and arms, the canoe, lily pads and flowers.)
  - Does this painting look realistic? (No)
  - How does it portray the details and the beauty of the swamp? (Answers will vary.)
  - From what point of view is it painted? Why? (The point of view is between bird's eye view and a straight-on view; allowing us to see both men's faces)
  - How does Bates' style of painting portray a connection between the two men? (the foreshortening [a technique that gives the illusion of depth to a person/object so that it appears to push forward or go back into space] shows the closeness both physically and figuratively, between the two men)
  - How else does Bates' style of painting portray a connection between the two men? (Answers will vary.)
6. Have students write words and phrases in their journals describing feelings they have about the painting.
7. Role Play: Initiate dialogue in the canoe by printing the following "One Liners,"

cutting them out and giving one question/comment to each pair in the canoe.

- What was that sound?
- I don't know if this was such a good idea.
- This reminds me of the last trip we had together.
- How will we get help?
- Are you sure that you know where we are?
- Why did we come here?
- Did we take a wrong turn?
- I have never done anything like this before.
- Did you see that?
- It's getting late, shouldn't we turn back?
- Was that lightning?
- How will we turn around since the vegetation is so thick?
- What was that?
- Did you hear thunder?
- There is nothing like this were I come from.
- That is amazing; what is it?
- This wouldn't have happened yesterday.
- Will it always be like this?
- Are you going to miss this?

## Dialogue— Disappearing Wetlands

8. Give students five minutes to improvise a dialogue using their opening lines.

9. Allow the partners to wear the caps and hold the oars as they share their dialogues with the whole group.

10. Critique the performances, e.g., authenticity, voice, facial expression, movements, etc.

11. Share background information about David Bates and Grassy Lake, Arkansas. (Refer to “Resources.”)

12. Have the students research the wetlands of Louisiana. A good place to start is the URL <http://www.marshmission.com>, a chronicle of the artistic journey of naturalist-photographer C. C. Lockwood and landscape artist Rhea Gary into Louisiana's wetlands.

13. Pass out copies of the handout Checklists. Review the criteria for “Dialogue Writing.”

## Dialogue—Disappearing Wetlands

14. Use the dialogue *If We Don't Protect the Wetlands—Our Name is Mud* (pp.74-75) as a practice activity, illustrating how to write a script as well as how to make an audiotape.
15. Place students in cooperative groups of three.
16. Give them time to write a three-to-five minute dialogue about the disappearing wetlands of the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary.
17. Practice performing the dialogues.
18. Review and edit the script, if necessary.
19. Review the criteria for “Making an Audiotape” on the handout Checklists.
20. Make an audiotape of the dialogues.
21. Critique and edit the audiotapes, if necessary.
22. Discuss possible local/state/national/international audiences to receive the tapes.
23. Use the Internet to find an audience to receive the tapes.(Check out ePALS in the “Resources.”)
24. Ask students to research and create an information flier about Louisiana’s disappearing wetlands that will accompany the tape.
25. Review the criteria for “Designing an Information Flyer” on the handout Checklists.
26. Critique and edit the information flyers, if necessary.
27. Send tapes and fliers to an authentic audience.

# Dialogue—Disappearing Wetlands

## Checklists

### WRITING DIALOGUE

Your script should include:

- a sense of place—in the wetlands, in a canoe
- a narrator
- an introduction using vivid descriptive words that capture the essence of the wetlands
- dialogue between two people—one is the guide who has lived in the area all his life, and the other is a traveler on his first trip to the wetlands
- crisp dialogue that bring the characters to life
- clear description of a problem, concern, issue, or feeling
- dialogue that “rings true”
- dialogue that creates an emotional impact—there is a connection between information and feeling
- dialogue that educates the audience about the wetlands’ environment
- evidence of knowledge about the wetlands, its plants, and animals
- sufficient dialogue for a performance that lasts between three and five minutes
- citation of resources

### MAKING AN AUDIOTAPE

Your completed tape should:

- be easily understood
- contain subtle swamp sounds
- last between three and five minutes
- have an emotional impact on the audience

When you are recording your dialogue:

- vary the rate of speech—slower to convey suspense, faster to evoke action
- articulate clearly, using adequate volume
- shift characters smoothly
- it should be easy for the listener to identify who is speaking

# Dialogue—Disappearing Wetlands

## Checklists—CONT'D.

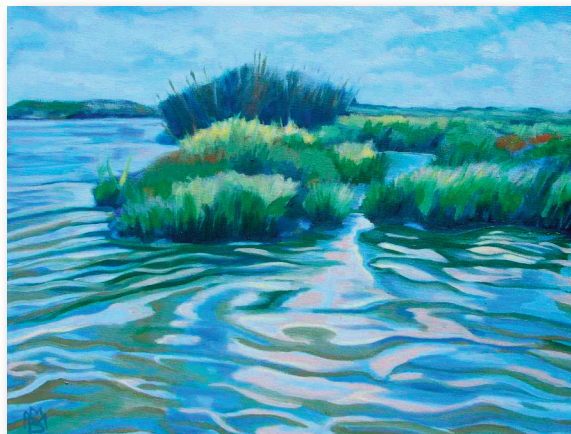
### DESIGNING AN INFORMATION FLYER

Your information flyer should:

- inform the audience of the importance of the wetlands
- inform the audience of the future of the wetlands if nothing is done, and how this will impact Louisiana and the United States
- consist of short, concise bullets
- include an eye-catching graphic that is related to the message

Review and make sure that:

- all facts are accurate
- capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and spelling are correct
- vocabulary is appropriate for the audience; words are defined, if necessary
- information is organized
- formatting is attractive and attention getting, i.e., type and size of font, bold text, use of color
- layout and design look professional, e.g. neat and attractive



"Blue Marsh"  
Marian Brister Martinez, artist.  
Printed with permission.

# If We Don't Protect the Wetlands Our Name is "Mud"

Bobby is an old Cajun who lives on the banks of Lac des Allemands. Elton is an up-and-coming cosmetics consultant from New York City trying to determine if his company can use mud from Lac des Allemands for their new Mud Mask.

Bobby: I grew up here, you know. Spent my childhood on these banks and waters.

Elton: Did you now? Tell me more about this lovely mud.

Bobby: Look at those cypress trees! Have you ever seen anything more beautiful?

Elton: Well, actually (under his breath) .....yeah, sure.....

Bobby: Do you realize that a few years ago that this very spot would still be on dry land? This part of the lake has eroded away.

Elton: So....there's plenty of mud here. About the mud.....

Bobby: The mud is at the bottom of the lake.

Elton: No, really....

Bobby: We lose an average of a football-field size chunk of wetlands every thirty minutes. Every thirty minutes, Glen! Think about that!

Elton: My name is Elton.

Bobby: Saltwater intrusion is destroying these trees. They are disintegrating... along with my childhood.

Elton: We want to market this mud as a facial treatment. Can you tell me a little bit more about it?

Bobby: (sharply) Hold your paddle right, will you?

Elton: Don't talk to me like that! Who do you think you are?

Bobby: I'm trying to get you to listen to my story. These swamps are a habitat for muskrats. I had a pet muskrat. His name was Spot.

Elton: I really don't care about muskrats. Do you know of any way to retrieve the mud from the bottom of the lake?.



## If We Don't Protect the Wetlands—— Our Name is “Mud”

CONT'D.

Bobby: Spot died a few years ago, but his kin still live in these wetlands. These disappearing marshes and swamps are their home, Glen, and mine, too. They are dying!

Elton: That's a shame. But perhaps the mud could brighten up their lives....and complexions..

Bobby: ENOUGH WITH THE MUD, MAN! That is not the priority here. These swamps are like my youth! They are disappearing!

Elton: Old dude, you're disappearing.

Bobby: You've got that right, because our culture will disappear along with these wetlands. My grandfather owned this land. Doesn't that mean anything to you? Don't you care about anything other than yourself?

Elton: Quite frankly, no. But the mud means a lot.

Bobby: Did you see that Great Blue Heron just fly by?

Elton: It was the same color as our most popular eyeshadow, Grecian Slate.

Bobby: Don't you see? These wetlands are filled with potential. They are filled with inspiration for your makeup products. And they are dying because people don't care enough to fix the problems they're facing.

Elton: The colors of this swamp do remind me of the colorful shades of makeup back home in New York. Have you ever been to New York? It's quite different from here.

Bobby: This is my home, the only place I want to live. I'm trying to save my beautiful wetlands, while you are miles away putting makeup on beautiful faces.

Elton: (Thoughtfully) I know it must sound like I don't care, but I didn't know how valuable these wetlands are. But I see the error of my ways! The swamp is beautiful, and it needs to be saved.

Bobby: I can't believe you actually said that! But it is true. The swamp is a dying beauty, and it deserves our undying attention.

*(Inspirational music)*



David Bates, "Grassy Lake," oil on canvas, 1982, New Orleans Museum of Art:  
Museum purchase P. Roussel Norman Purchase Fund and Gift of  
Mr. And Mrs. Claude C. Albritton, III, 83.27

# follow up

## Assessments

Use Rubistar to create rubrics for the presentation, tape, and flyer. The URL for Rubistar is <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php>

## GLE's

### **Biology—Interdependence of Organisms**

Analyze positive and negative effects of human actions on ecosystems  
(LS-H-D4) (SE-H-A7)

### **Environmental Science**

Analyze the effects of common social, economic, technological, and political considerations on environmental policy (SE-H-C3)

# follow up

## Resources

### **About the Artist: David Bates**

<http://www.art.unt.edu/ntieva/artcurr/alsp/bates.htm>

### **Art Education, Collaboration and the Internet**

This is a how-to Web site on integrating the Internet and new technologies into the art curriculum. <http://www.artjunction.org/articles/collab2.html>

### **ePALS**

ePALS is the world's leading provider of school-safe email and collaborative technology for the educational market. EPALS connects over 4.6 million students and educators in 191 countries for classroom-to-classroom projects and cross-cultural learning in the world's largest online classroom community.

<http://www.epals.com/>

### **Vanishing Wetlands: Two Views**

<http://www.marshmission.com>

## Lesson Source

