

When Mickey Came to Town

The following film discussion guide will help you introduce the film, *When Mickey Came to Town*, and host a discussion around the Stop Disney movement.

If you are looking to start your own movement, we challenge you to think about how you can apply the same principles and actions to the change you wish to provoke.

INTRODUCING THE FILM

Facilitator: We are happy to present the film *When Mickey Came to Town*.

This film looks back on a campaign waged a little over 20 years ago in Haymarket, Virginia – which was, at that time, a rural area about 30 miles from the Nation’s Capital. Although Haymarket was a small, farming village, it was surrounded by some of America’s most historical and scenic areas including Civil War Battlefields, historic homes including Jefferson’s Monticello, and landscapes dating back centuries.

With all the history and rural landscape at stake, you can imagine the trouble that arose when the Walt Disney Corporation announced that they had selected this site for a new theme park – “Disney’s America!”

We hope that this film will strike a flame in you to take action and give you confidence in the idea that surprising things happen when a group of people come together to protect a place that is special to them.

I don’t want to spoil the story, but you will recognize the David and Goliath nature of the epic battle that followed.

This 30-minute film was produced by the American University Center for Environmental Filmmaking under the guidance of Chris Palmer and direction of Sam Sheline. After the film, we will have a discussion about what members of a community can do when they feel that a place they hold sacred is threatened.

Enjoy the film.

AFTER THE FILM

Discussion Guide

1. Any general comments about the film? What were your observations?
2. Early in the film, Tracey Shafroth who has been asked to organize an opposition, says, “The first step was me knowing I had no idea what to do.” She calls upon an experienced organizer, Doug Wheeler, who says, “Invite the smartest people you know, feed them a good lunch, and then lock the door.”
3. My first question is, “What do you think went on when they “Locked the Doors?”
Some possible answers:
 - a. Assessed their assets
 - b. Assessed what they were up against
 - c. Discussed elements of a strategy – political, meetings, actions, communications
 - d. Planned how they were going to stay in touch
 - e. Brainstormed about who else should be involved
4. One thing that impressed me was the fact that the people who chose to oppose Disney’s America knew they were facing heavy odds from the beginning – a 75% approval rating for the project, yet within 11 months, that approval rating had completely flipped and Disney backed-out.
5. What do you think was the turning point? How did the organizers bring that about?
6. Why do you think they were they able to bring about such a turn-around? What were some of the tactics they used?
Some possible answers:
 - a. Capitalized on the broad-scale recognition of Disney/Mickey Mouse
 - b. Emphasized the impact on the Civil War battlefields – ignited personal identification with the Civil War
 - c. Visual elements – cartoons, puppets, demonstrations that got press coverage
 - d. Multiple fronts – traffic, water, destruction of historical sites, poor taste, loss of cultural character – Virginians are very proud of their culture and history.
7. So they had a lot going for them – what if some of those elements had been missing? What were the elements that you think were absolutely necessary?
Some possible answers:
 - a. Every campaign has assets and challenges – it’s just a matter of getting clear about how to use them
 - b. Took advantage of lots of free publicity – How?
 - c. Reached out to a broad array of interest groups

8. The issue seemed to “go viral, “ partially thanks to the ingenious messaging from the campaign, and partly because Disney and its characters were and still are such a big name. What could be done to get publicity when the issue does not have such familiarity in the public consciousness?

Some possible answers:

- a. Explore why others might care about this issue – what’s in it for them?
- b. Be creative – draw attention to the issue with costumes, parades, or music

9. Many people in this community had good political connections, as well as personal connections with the historians. Why was this campaign still a challenge for them?

What did they have to do differently?

Some possible answers:

- a. They were not organized before – needed to come together for a common purpose. Also needed to establish lines of communication and a method of coordinating the various groups and their activities
- b. Not all citizens in the area were opposed to the idea, some stood to benefit from increased property values or other aspects of the project. The organizers needed to hold community meetings and be sensitive to different opinions and perspectives within the community.

10. Does this film have lessons for groups or communities that do not have as many resources? What can they do in a similar situation? What resources have you found helpful for those who are getting started?

- a. Assess what resources they DO have. Passion, commitment, understanding of the issues, connections to important people (even 2nd or 3rd-degree), diversity of talents
- b. Create an organizational structure and a strategy
- c. Find dedicated sources of financial support.

11. What happens after a campaign is successful? Is that the end of the need for organization and collaboration within a community?

In this case, several things happened after the campaign:

- a. The victory inspired many of the organizations to continue working together – focusing their resources and efforts on one campaign at a time. They formed, The Coalition for Smarter Growth, that is still active to this day.
- b. Landowners in the region realized that their historic landscape was under threat and donated land and other resources to protect it through the Piedmont Environmental Council.

- c. A new organization, the Journey Through Hallowed Ground was created to raise national and international awareness of the unparalleled history in the region extending from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, through Maryland and Harpers Ferry, West Virginia to Jefferson's Monticello in Albemarle County, Virginia. This heritage corridor has pulled together many resources to help visitors see and appreciate the many historic sites and landscapes throughout this swath of land.
- d. Many individuals who met through the campaign became life-long friends and continue – through multiple generations -- to support one another and important local and regional causes.
- e. Finally, many of the organizing techniques and principles learned through this campaign have been put to use in other situations by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Land Trust Alliance, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and the National Farmland Trust – just to name a few.

The moral is that organizing with others around a cause you believe in has lasting effects in many realms and reverberates for a long time.