



# Kris Tompkins, Co-Founder & President, Tompkins Conservation

## Protecting Life on Earth

### Lesson Introduction

**Interview Log:** Interviewed on January 24, 2024 by Teddy Kunhardt

- ▣ Access **The Thread** episode of Kris Tompkins on our [YouTube channel](#) or at [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)
- ▣ Access her long-form interview on [LifeStories.org](#)

### Learning Objectives

#### Social Studies Focus

- ▣ Reflect on how one's childhood and family shape identity formation
- ▣ Understand the evolution of a start-up-business through the history of Patagonia
- ▣ Understand the concept of rewilding and its significance in ecological restoration
- ▣ Explore the challenges of advocating for environmental protection and conservation of ecosystems

#### English Language Arts Focus

- ▣ Examine perspective taking from the point of view of one conservationist
- ▣ Analyze the structure and purpose of a narrative, identify key themes, and synthesize information from a spoken text
- ▣ Analyze, reflect on, and discuss the title of the episode "Protecting Life on Earth"
- ▣ Explore the idea of purposeful work and a meaningful life
- ▣ Use Kris Tompkins's episode to inspire an opinion piece on an assigned topic

### Episode Overview

Kris Tompkins co-founded the outdoor clothing company Patagonia in 1973 and guided it to become a billion-dollar global enterprise. In this revealing episode of *The Thread*, Ms. Tompkins talks about the work she and her late husband, Doug, have done to extend Patagonia's corporate principle of protecting the planet from the climate crisis into concrete action. This includes buying millions of acres in South America to preserve the land and its endangered species. Kris Tompkins is a rare example of how you can succeed in business without compromising your integrity and principles.



### Biography

Kris Tompkins is a leading conservationist and former CEO of Patagonia. Born in Southern California, she developed a deep love for nature during childhood visits to her great-grandfather's ranch. After graduating from the University of Idaho, she returned to California in 1973 to help her friends Yvon and Malinda Chouinard launch Patagonia, where she eventually became CEO in 1980, shaping their innovative, anti-corporate model. In 1993, she retired and married Doug Tompkins, co-founder of The North Face and Esprit. Together, they channeled their entrepreneurial talents into conservation, protecting over 14 million acres across Chile and Argentina while establishing 17 national parks. A trailblazer in her field, Kris became the first conservationist to receive the Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy and was named the United Nations' Global Patron for Protected Areas in 2018. Today, she continues her advocacy as co-founder and President of Tompkins Conservation and President of the Board of Rewilding Chile.



## Teaching Tip: First Take

A **First Take** is a warm-up writing or conversation exercise created uniquely for *The Thread* that strengthens media literacy skills. Like an opening song in a musical, the first stanza of a poem, or even the first impression one person makes on another, the First Take asks students to reflect and share their initial thoughts and feelings about the episode's opening.

### Suggested Steps

▣ **Watch and then read aloud** the opening of Kris Tompkins's episode with students:

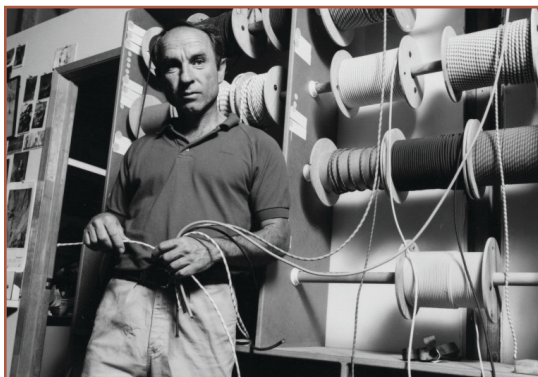
"What I hope - Doug and I always talked about. 'Oh, when we're both dead we'll go on and we'll do the same thing out in the billions of light years away,' those kinds of things and that would be fantastic. But I also know that durability counts. So whatever happens to me, I have this life and it's been so extraordinary. I'm not in a situation of needing the next story. This one that I've got is almost more than I can handle on many days."



▣ **Ask and Discuss:** What do you learn about Kris Tompkins from these opening sentences? What insights can you infer?

▣ **Next,** as a class, discuss the role of "the opening" in any form of storytelling – an interview, film, play, or song. What is their point of view on why the filmmakers chose this as the opening for the episode? What ideas, topics, or themes may the filmmakers be foreshadowing?

▣ **Last,** have students do a one-minute quick write reflecting on how the opening connects with the episode's title, "Protecting Life on Earth." Then, have students get into pairs and share their thoughts and feelings.



**Photos:** Doug and Kris archive. (Personal photo from Kris Tompkins) top; Black and white portrait of Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard at factory in Santa Barbara, CA. (Robert Landau) lower left; Chile landscape mountains and valley. (Personal photo from Kris Tompkins) lower right



## Teaching Tip:

# *The Thread Up Close*

**Step One:** Watch Kris Tompkins' episode "Protecting Life on Earth" here.

Next, have students discuss and debrief the episode using these suggested questions:

- ▣ How would you describe the professional philosophy of Kris Tompkins?
- ▣ What role did the Patagonia company play in shaping Doug and Kris Tompkins' s later environmental work?
- ▣ What challenges did they face in their conservation efforts?
- ▣ How do you understand the concept of rewilding? What resources does rewilding require?
- ▣ What are the potential benefits of this approach to environmental protection and preservation? What are the challenges?
- ▣ What big takeaways do you have from her *Thread* episode?

**Step Two:** After discussing the questions in Step One, have students return to *The Thread* episode and engage in a close read and analysis of her interview using the transcript and video as a reference. Depending on the lesson, question, or theme you are aligning *The Thread* with, have students annotate the transcript, select passages that reflect the assignment, and explain their reasoning in class.

Here is an example of a *Thread* lesson connection: If you are exploring ecological restoration and environmental conservation, the Tompkins's work in Chile and Argentina is trailblazing and controversial. Tompkins recounts that after she and Doug moved to Chile and began to buy up large tracts of land for conservation, fights ensued.

"This is a fight between people who produce from nature and people who are trying to protect nature," she recalled. "It was a clash of somebody who had money and could come in and buy up hundreds and thousands and eventually nearly a million acres of pristine forest and not cut it. So the fight, whether it was salmon or forest or grasslands, became a fight over consumption - the conversion of nature to production; that was the actual fight."

### Connections: *The Thread Up Close*

- ▣ What tensions and differing points of view are at the foundation of this "fight"?
- ▣ What values about conservation do you share and which differ from Kris Tompkins?
- ▣ Who should decide or control the protection of land?
- ▣ How would you balance constituent needs in protecting lands if you were a nation's political leader, a corporation's leader, or an environmentalist working on behalf of indigenous communities?
- ▣ What new insight did you learn about (yourself, your community, your world) from her stories?



## Activity: Protecting Life on Earth

Kris Tompkins shares the story of the evolution of the concept of rewilding. While initially begun “to get nature outside of production and save it,” it is deeply rooted in the future and has come to be grounded in two principles:

- ▣ Creating fully functioning ecosystems by preserving land and bringing back all the principal species that have long gone missing.
- ▣ Supporting local communities surrounding the land to be economically sustainable and protectors of these protected land corridors and parks.

Have students write a 1000 word opinion piece using the title “Protecting Life on Earth.”

**Extended Learning:** Compile these perspectives and send them to a local newspaper or online publication, or read them aloud in class in a forum-style with the opportunity to field questions and foster discussion.



Photos: Guanaco wildlife. (Personal photo from Kris Tompkins) lower left. Parrot ibera wildlife. (Personal photo from Kris Tompkins) lower right



### Additional Resources

- ▣ [Tompkins Conservation](#) - official website
- ▣ Read about the establishment of the national park system in Chile “[With 10 million acres in Chile, a National Park System is Born](#)”, *The New York Times*
- ▣ Learn more by watching the documentary [Wild Life](#), which tells the story of Kris and Doug Tompkins’s work

