

“Sisters of the Mother Forest”

A Story of Lucy and Annette Braun

Written and performed by Dr. Alice Jones

alice.jones@eku.edu

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In the 1930s, what began as a botanical research trip propelled two Cincinnati scientist sisters into the fight to save the virgin forest of eastern Kentucky, and forever changed ecological science and environmental conservation.

SYNOPSIS

Drawing on both storytelling and theatrical traditions, Eastern Kentucky University environmental geographer Dr. Alice Jones explores the lives and careers of sister scientists Annette Braun (1884-1978) and E. Lucy Braun (1889-1971)—the first two women to earn PhDs at the University of Cincinnati.

The one-woman/three character story focuses on the career- and life-changing role that a 1934 research trip to eastern Kentucky had on the pair—from shaping the trajectory of their ground-breaking research in ecological science and forestry, as well as their pioneering roles in the history of modern environmental conservation and land preservation.

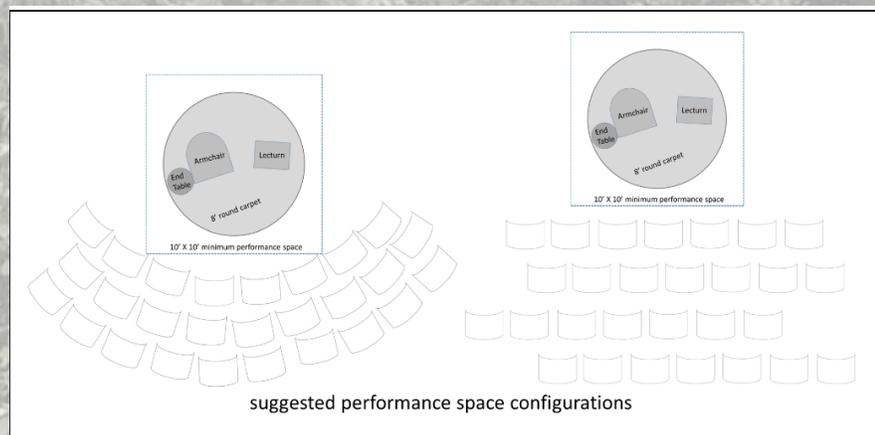
Through the characters of Lucy, Annette and a contemporary narrator, the play follows the intertwined personal and professional lives of the two sisters, who never married and were nearly inseparable for the better part of 80 years.

Their extensive forest field research through the 1920s, 30s and 40s stretched across 17 states, more than 300 field sites, and 60,000 miles. The work culminated in the central thesis of Lucy’s most famous and enduring book, Deciduous Forests of Eastern North America (1950)—a work of such scientific significance that in the more than 60 years since its publication, it has never been out of print.

PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS

With a running time of 65 minutes and minimal staging requirements, the play is intended for audiences aged 12 and up, and is designed to adapt to a variety of formal and informal settings—including stages, meeting rooms and classrooms, small auditoriums, and even park campfires.

The minimum requirement is a 10’ X 10’ performing space with a proscenium or half-circle configuration. No special lighting or sound are required, but the ability to light the performing space separately from the audience is desirable. Amplification (not provided) may be needed for larger spaces.



Performance rates will vary on venue, number of performances, educational activities, and travel.

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Curricular and Educational Opportunities

Curriculum guides aligned with common K-16 learning outcomes are available, and can be customized upon request in such areas as women in science, history of science, Appalachian studies; ecology & environmental science, and drama & arts.

Performances can be supplemented with question-and-answer periods, workshops, master classes, hands-on science activities, or dramatic arts activities.

Along with more than 20 years of place-based university teaching and research, Dr. Jones is a certified watershed trainer, and has experience with Project Wet, Project Wild and Project Learning Tree K-12 curricular activities. She also trained at Second City in Chicago, and has experience leading improvisation and theater games as well as writing workshops grounded in Second City/Viola Spolin techniques.

Sample Discussion Themes and Questions

• Arts/ Drama

- genre, climax, focus, relationships, design, aesthetic, complexity, choices, inspiration, point of view
 - *Critique the piece in terms of its connection to history, emotional impact, and storytelling*
 - *What was the story and vision of the piece? How did the writing, acting, directing, and technical choices support or detract from that story and vision?*
 - *How does the narrator in the piece compare with narrator personas in other dramatic traditions?*

• Environmental Science/ Ecology

- ecology, microlepidoptery, chestnut blight, old growth vs. virgin forest, mixed mesophytic forest, microclimate, thrust fault, glacial landforms, biodiversity, herbarium, land trusts
 - *How did the Braun's landscape-scale study influence the fields of ecological science and forestry?*
 - *What are the characteristics of the mixed mesophytic forest of the Cumberlands that make it unique from other deciduous forests of North America?*
 - *How did the Brauns' scientific and activist work shape modern environmental preservation and conservation history?*



• Women's History

- gender, patriarchy, academic androcentrism, Victorian & Edwardian spinsterhood
 - *Why was botany a popular college subject for women in the late 1800s and early 1900s?*
 - *What challenges did the sisters face in their personal and professional lives because of their gender?*
 - *What advantages might their gender have given them in conducting fieldwork in eastern Kentucky and other remote locations?*
 - *Given the time in which they lived, how would their lives have been different if one or both of them had married? Are there personal and professional reasons that they may have chosen to remain unmarried?*

• Appalachian Studies

- Cumberland plateau, mixed mesophytic forest, chestnut blight, settlement schools, rural postal networks, coal and timber extraction
 - *How did the social and economic conditions of depression-era Appalachia influence the ultimate outcome of Lynn Fork?*
 - *How did the physical geography and ecology of the Appalachian region affect each of the characters in the play?*