



PENN PROGRAM IN  
ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES



## WRITING CLIMATE CHANGE: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

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This worksheet is available online at <https://my-climate-story.org/resources/>

What is climate justice storytelling?

Climate justice storytelling is speaking truth to power — amplifying stories of injustice that would not otherwise be told or heard. Why do this? Storytelling compliments science. We need scientists and storytellers to work together in order to create lasting change and to tackle climate change. The way I see it, both telling and listening to stories are forms of activism. Listening builds empathy, and empathy is a powerful tool to dismantle apathy. It becomes harder to ignore a problem if we hear the voice of someone who is impacted. Human stories are powerful. We need to hear your climate story.

***What language can we use to draw people into stories of climate change, rather than pushing them away?***

- [Many Americans think that climate change is happening, but it won't harm them personally.](#)
- Image-based communication is important. Get sensory. Tiny details are like paperweights that hold down the big idea of your argument – without those details the argument floats away.
- Lean into [values-based communication](#). Values influence the way that people interpret climate science and information. [Think critically about your intended audience](#). Who are they, and what values guide their behavior? Craft your story to make it relevant to that reader's values, or tell a story that draws them in & inspires action from the perspective of protecting a worldview that they hold dear.



**Let's practice storytelling and deep listening now.**

Ask a partner: *Tell me a story about water and/or climate change.*

One person is the storyteller, and the other is the story listener. You have 10 minutes for this activity!

Tips for story listening	Tips for storytelling
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make eye contact</li> <li>• lean in</li> <li>• listen without the intention to respond</li> <li>• nod</li> <li>• at the end, reflect back with your partner ex) "I was right there with you when..."</li> <li>• Switch roles after about 5 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on lived experiences of change that you have witnessed in your lifetime</li> <li>• switch roles after about 5 minutes</li> </ul>

Try the following exercise at home or at school:

In a 10-minute free write, be inspired by the climate story you shared today, your partner's story, or a hybrid of the two. Try writing a poem!

Poets find language that makes climate stories resonate. Check these poems out for inspiration!

"[A Poem to my Daughter](#)" - Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner | "[On the Fifth Day](#)" - Jane Hirshfield | "[Touring the Earth Gallery](#)" - Jennifer Foerster | "[the earth is a living thing](#)" - Lucille Clifton | "[The Leash](#)" - Ada Limón | "[Remember](#)" - Joy Harjo | "[Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Glacier \(after Wallace Stevens\)](#)" - Craig Santos Perez | "[Mercury Rising \(A Visualization\)](#)" - Jena Osman | "[Radial Scent](#)" - Sharon Wang | "[Why Whales Are Back in New York City](#)" - Rajiv Mohabir | "[Letter to Someone Living Fifty Years from Now](#)" - Matthew Olzmann | "[The Social Life Of Water](#)" - Tony Hoagland

**How else can you get informed and involved?**

Contribute your climate story (or stories) to the Story Bank at [my-climate-story.org](http://my-climate-story.org)

Check out the [Principles of Environmental Justice](#), [Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing](#), and read about how [segregated communities are exposed to higher levels of pollution](#).

Submit a message to [Dear Tomorrow](#), an archive where listeners can write a message to their children, family, or future self promising to take action on climate change.

Calculate your [environmental footprint](#), and brainstorm a list of ways to minimize it in the coming year. Check out "[Climate Solutions 101](#)" from [Project Drawdown](#).

Browse the [Psychology of Climate Change Communication](#). Follow up with [these articles](#) on [how to talk to anyone about climate change](#). [Contact political candidates in your district](#) to ask them to pledge to take climate action. You can also [write a letter](#) to your [elected official](#) on climate change, [call](#) your [senator](#), or [write an op-ed](#).

Find a group of climate activists in your area and, if you can, join or help organize an upcoming climate march. [350.org](#), [Greenpeace](#), and the [Sierra Club](#) are all great places to start.

Check out the [350.org toolkit on the power of storytelling](#). Listen to a few [stories from The Moth](#) for inspiration on how to tell your own story on climate change. Practice telling your climate story to a friend.

Access the [American Rivers database](#), where you can look up if bodies of water near you are safe for swimming. Next, learn about the work of [Afroz Shah, 2016 UN Champion of the Earth](#), and get a group together to organize a watershed cleanup in your community.

[Learn about USDA climate hubs](#), read this [Climate Change 101](#) toolkit, and check out this article from [Scientific American](#) on what farmers think about climate change. If you're feeling inspired, talk with a local farmer about their experiences.

[Read these facts about climate change and drought](#), and share what you learned with a friend or family member.

[Read](#) about [how a warming planet drives human migration](#), [five facts on climate migrants](#), browse this [list of resources from the UN](#), and check out the [Climate and Migration Coalition's Moving Stories collection](#).

Take the [Climate Optimism Pledge](#).

Think critically about your skills. What gets you up and out of bed in the morning? What do you love doing more than anything else? Then find a way that you can lend that skillset to a cause that you care about. It can be easier to do this by linking up with a group rather than starting something new, but starting a project of your own can also be exhilarating. **Just know that you are not alone, and that there is a community of people who care about these issues alongside you.**