Embedding Environmental Issues in Non-Eco Modules Dr. Allen Webb

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What can we do in our modules? - Notes

Climate Breakdown is already upon us –

An existential crisis – an ecological and sustainability crisis

Profoundly shape lives of students – huge issues of climate justice, including generational justice

UK second highest historical per capita contributor to greenhouse gases – immediately after the USA

IPCC: we must reduce greenhouse gasses by 50% by 2030

Learn more yourself – Mark Lynas: [*Our Final Warning*](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Our-Final-Warning-Degrees-Emergency-ebook/dp/B07YN9WSN8/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=our+final+warning&qid=1607955032&s=books&sr=1-1)*: Six Degrees of Climate Emergency*, Mary Robinson: [*Climate Justice*](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Climate-Justice-Resilience-Sustainable-Future/dp/1408888467/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2Z3Y3F10RLTR5&dchild=1&keywords=climate+justice+mary+robinson&qid=1607955073&s=books&sprefix=climate+justice+mary+%2Cstripbooks%2C217&sr=1-1)*: A Man-Made Problem with a Feminist Solution*

Don’t have to be an expert, learn with your students.

English - one of the most powerful disciplines for addressing environmental crisis

Bill McKibben: “The scientists and engineers have done their work, providing a timely warning on climate change and producing the technologies like solar panels that would help take it on. It's the rest of us that have so far failed, and it's largely a failure of...imagination, precisely the reason that we have English class.”

Imagining what future may hold, not only scientifically, but also socially, politically, and at interpersonal levels. Utopia/Dystopia/“Cli-fi”

Understanding the perspective and rights of others

Considering ethical questions, climate justice, generational justice

Fostering student voices to make a difference

In Our Modules

1. Build on existing topics, reading, assignments.

Critical reading – we have developed “lenses” that help us read gender, race, sexuality, class, we can also critically read to see the representation of nature. Literary texts always have settings. We know how to read together texts and contexts – we can read to understand the development of environmental crisis.

Writing – create options for exploring eco-critical analysis, environmental ideologies, persuasive, place-based & creative writing.

Critical theory – include ecocriticism, especially feminist, postcolonial, activist – ([ASLE](https://www.asle.org/)), Amitav Ghosh: [*The Great Derangement*](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Great-Derangement-Climate-Unthinkable-Lectures/dp/022652681X/ref=sr_1_1?crid=TYHSMY3LKFDZ&dchild=1&keywords=the+great+derangement+climate+change+and+the+unthinkable&qid=1607955202&s=books&sprefix=the+great+derangement%2Cstripbooks%2C167&sr=1-1)*: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*.

Supplement, Connect, Transform, or Create courses – Add in “cli-fi” short stories, climate related poetry, essays, film. At Cardiff already so many natural fits in modules already teaching (Imaginary Journeys, Literature and Science, Utopia, Apocalypse, Writing Nature, Activist Poetry, Gender and Monstrosity (Frankenstein), Climate Change & Fiction). So many modules where environmental themes could become important: African American (Octavia Butler, Nnedi Okorafor); Modernism/City (TS Eliot, *Odds Against Tomorrow*), Shakespeare (Green World, MSND, Macbeth, The Tempest), Poetry (Pastoral to Greater Romantic Lyric), Jane Austin or Brontë’s (Nature walks, heath)

Courses I have taught with climate dimension: [Cultural Studies and Climate Change](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/envs4120f18.html), [Climate Refugees in Literature](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/engl1100f18.html), [Nature Writing and Climate Crisis](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/engl3110s16.html), [Afro- & Ethnic Futurism and Climate Crisis](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/engl6780f19.html), [African Literature](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/engl3140s17.html), [Teaching about Climate Change in English](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/engl6780s18.html) (many short stories and other resources linked to this syllabus)

2. [*Textual Intervention*](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Textual-Intervention-Critical-Strategies-Interface/dp/0415054370)*: Critical and Creative Strategies for Literary Studies* by Rob Pope is a good fit with climate crisis. Using the “cli-fi imagination” allows:

Exploring climate crisis is the context of almost any literature module or text.

Seeing climate crisis happening as characters are going on with their lives and their choices.

Examining historical disjuncture in epic mode rather than realism (Ghosh).

Understanding of how climate exacerbates existing inequalities and can foreground climate justice.

Exploring a wide range of solutions.

3. Teach to make a difference: Young people are crucial right now in transforming politics. (Gene Sharp: [198 Methods of Nonviolent Action](https://www.aeinstein.org/nonviolentaction/198-methods-of-nonviolent-action/) – writing!) My students:

Educate others in the classroom, campus, and in the community:

* Wrote and shared poetry, short stories, literary/film analysis, curriculum plans & persuasive essays ([assignment](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/envs4120clifiproject.html))
* Designed their own climate crisis course ([assignment](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/engl6780project.html))
* Researched aspects of climate crisis and presented to class ([example](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/engl3110presentation.html), [example](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ei9o3PVhlqgiaPhRASA7HEriR9Fv72cuPFS8PguUshk/edit#slide=id.p))
* Led community discussions about climate change
* Wrote “Climate Manifestos” ([assignment](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/envs4120manifesto.html), [published student manifestos](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/envs4120manifestolinks.html))
* Organized a climate change “teach-in”
* Designed climate action projects
* Organized community film/discussion/tabling on refugees
* Showed a climate change documentary at school and led panel after
* Examined how future careers can address climate change

Became involved with environmental and climate activism

* Protested tree cutting and planted trees
* Spoke at community climate protests
* Joined Fridays for Future and Global Climate Strike
* Blogs, wikis, websites, Snapchat, Facebook (blogs: [assignment](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/engl1100blog.htm) – [student blogs](https://climatechangerefugees.blogspot.com/))
* Climate crisis “[Culture Jamming](https://depts.washington.edu/ccce/polcommcampaigns/CultureJamming.htm)” Memes ([assignment](http://homepages.wmich.edu/~acareywe/culturejam.html))
* Online climate change cook book for young people

Excerpt on Textual Intervention and Climate Inquiry

One of the most interesting books about teaching literature is Rob Pope’s (1994) *Textual Intervention: Critical and Creative Strategies for Literary Studies*. Pope describes a strategy of textual intervention where students creatively “intervene” in class texts they are reading to make changes, changes that often end up illuminating aspects of the texts or society. Students might “intervene” by writing letters between characters, writing from the perspective of marginal characters, adding a missing scene, changing the gender of a character, changing the location or time period -- and then discussing and writing about how their “intervention” helps them see the original text or the society it portrays differently. This kind of intervention is all the easier in the age of digital texts as classic works found in on-line literary archives can easily be cut and pasted into student word processing programs (Rozema & Webb, 2008). Of course, texts do not need to be digitized for students to come up with creative interventions.

We believe textual intervention is a powerful tool to allow teachers to bring the cli-fi imagination and climate change inquiry to all kinds of texts already in the curriculum. After learning about climate change from research, short essays, or documentaries, students can then intervene in traditional works. Intervention can take the form of actually rewriting or adding to an existing text, or writing ideas about how that text might be changed. Students can work individually or in groups, to come up with ideas and to discuss and debate different interventions.

Students can take commonly taught texts and intervene in them by setting them into the future, a future where climate change is evident. Or they could anachronistically bring climate change to the past to explore characters’ thoughts, reactions, and strategies.

Climate change fiction sometimes involves climate change events happening while characters, at least at first, are not taking adequate action to avert them. Students could intervene in works by inserting various climate change events and explore characters’ thoughts as they react, or fail to react. As Huck and Jim move down the river they come upon Pap’s house floating along, broken loose by a flood. Students could intervene by imagining and writing up increasing evidence of floods and climate change, and characters like The Duke and the King, Tom Sawyer, Aunt Sally, the Widow Douglass, or the even Pap could be explored/contrasted for their reactions. Holden Caulfield could learn about climate change and be frustrated with other characters in his world that hold what he considers superficial attitudes about it, perhaps until finally he and Phoebe decide to take some action. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Hurston, 1998) might trace a series of increasingly dramatic and realistic (to our present) climate change events impacting Janie’s life in Central and Southern Florida, including her stay in the Everglades.

Climate change fiction often looks at the events of climate change and how they impact different people or groups. Students reading *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1993) can focus on how climate change might impact farm workers like George and Lenny. Climate change events could start happening in *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 2013) with different consequences for different animals (some are more equal than others). Who knows, maybe the pigs would insist on their privileges at any cost or maybe they could join together with other farm animals to demand changes in the agricultural system that would address causes of climate change. *The* *Outsiders* might be set in a distant future climate dystopia where the greasers and the soc’s are competing over depleted resources.

Cli-fi can also look at how groups of characters band together to do something about climate change. Students could intervene in texts to explore characters acting in this way. The younger generation in *Romeo and Juliet* might come together to try to alert the adults about pending ecological disaster. Macbeth’s crime could be failing to address climate change and Banquo, Macduff and other thanes might unite to force action. Students reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1988) could write or imagine future chapters where Atticus, with the help of Scout, Jem and Dill anxious about their future, takes on environmental legal cases or advocates for laws to address climate change against powerful people with entrenched ideas. Or students reading *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury, 2012) could introduce climate change events and perhaps have Montag, Clarisse, and/or Granger attempt to educate and organize other characters like Mildred and Captain Beatty about dangers and harms of climate change by creatively using some of the new technologies or form a renegade group determined to draw their society’s attention to it.

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Randall Seltz, Jordan High School, Sandy, Utah

Movies often take a story and change elements of the setting to make it more relevant or interesting to contemporary audiences. What if students re-imagined different canonical texts set in an environment that has been ravaged by climate change? Re-imagining *Lord of the Flies* on an island that is sinking or on fire changes how the boys would interact, possibly causing them to unite despite their differences. What if *A Midsummer Night's Dream* didn't have a forest to take place in because it had been mowed down to make things we threw away?

From [*Teaching Climate Change to Adolescents: Reading Writing and Making a Difference*](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Teaching-Climate-Change-Adolescents-Richard/dp/1138245259), 2017