Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

Climate Change Fiction for Students and Teachers

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Introduction

Part of the problem of climate change is that the apocalyptic consequences of our carbon use are emerging slowly and globally, rather than in a single newsworthy disaster, making it difficult to muster the vision and motivation to fight it. Fiction and poetry exploring the possibilities of a changed and changing climate can be a powerful way to make these abstract futures more immediate.

Below are lists of literature to consider reading and discussing with students.

The first list includes poems, short stories, and novels that take a positive, visionary approach to the subject of climate change, focusing on fighting and adapting to climate change. Through envisioning cultural tools and social strategies for transitioning to a post-carbon world, these stories offer inspiration and guidance for how we might address our very real problems—not just through magical new technology, but through cultural shifts that make use of the technology we already have.

These texts could be used for whole-class reading, and could enrich a larger unit on climate change or even lead to students researching and creating their own artistic explorations of futures altered by climate change. Questions for discussion follow each listing.

The second list includes various other climate futures for students interested in reading further. It includes YA and adult fiction that is focused on the social and practical effects of climate change. Many of these latter texts focus on vividly conveying the emotional weight of various disasters that come with climate change. Some are straightforward climate dystopias, while others work as direct allegories.

Finally, a short list of films and tv shows explores climate fiction in film.

Poetry

"Earth Eyes," by former U.S. poet laureate Amanda Gorman, is available in her full-length collection Call Us What We Carry (2021). "Earth Eyes" builds on her earlier poem "Earthrise" to explore the interwoven losses of racism and climate change – both symptoms of humans' extractive greed. Exploring youth's perspective on environmental inertia, she writes, "Generations / of the past order, be our recruits, not our rescues. Oh, / how we want our parents red & restless, as / wild & dying for a difference as / we are."

Discuss: Is it true that young people care more about the earth than older people? What can be done about that?

"Let's Make More Minutes Count," by Solli, a 14-year-old Australian slam poet, appeared in 2019 as a video performance.

Discuss: How does Solli use internal rhyme and rhythm? Does the poem give him power? Why or why not?

"On Climate Denial," by high school senior Jordan Sanchez, appeared at the first Climate Speaks event in 2019, where NYC teenagers performed their own original climate poetry. Any of the poems from this event can serve as powerful examples for young writers, such as those by Elizabeth Shvarts and Andreas Psahos.

Discuss: Why do people deny climate change? What are some of the differences and similarities between NYC and San Juan in Sanchez's poem? Why does she juxtapose these images?

"Break Free," by Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, a teenage activist, was published as the title track of his rap album in 2018.

Discuss: How does Martinez connect his Indigenous identity with his climate justice fight?

"Dear Matafele Peinem," by Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, was published in Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter (2017). The poem contrasts fear for her child's future with hope that change can happen. Jetnil-Kijiner reads the poem aloud in a video essay that makes its imagery and rhetoric extremely vivid and accessible to middle school and high school readers. Other relevant poems by Jetnil-Kijiner include "Utilomar," "Tell Them," and "2 Degrees."

Discuss: How does this poem use metaphors and anaphora to convey its emotional weight?

"From the People in the Houses of Earth in the Valley to the Other People Who Were On Earth Before Them," by Ursula Le Guin, from her majestic 1985 novel-in-fragments, Always Coming Home (University of California Press, 2001). This poem is a message from the Kesh, a post-apocalyptic hunter-gatherer-gardener people of the future, to us in the present, imagining how even "in your time when everything was fuel [...] we were among you" (405). Similarly, "The Inland Sea" describes the "old cities" of modern civilization, drowned under risen seas, as a world of "old souls" roaming, "hungry for birth" (390-1). For a quick glimpse into the broader culture of the Kesh, read "An Exhortation from the Second and Third Houses of the Earth" (76).

Discuss: What emotion or attitude do these poems express toward our present world vs. their own future world? What is surprising about that?

Individual Short Stories

"Those They Left Behind" by Jules Hogan, is in Everything Change Volume III, edited by Angie Dell and Joey Eschrich (2021, published at Arizona State University's Center for Science and the Imagination). This story contrasts the privileged who depart a dying Earth with those who, by force or by choice, stay behind. Whether through art, agriculture, or science, those who stay find a purpose in working to remedy the damage created by their ancestors.

Discuss: Would you have left on the Ascents? Why or why not?

"Factory Air," by Omar El-Akkad, is one of four climate fiction stories in the 2019 Climate Fiction issue of Guernica. Of those stories, it is the one most concerned with the problem of how to fight the large-scale economic structures causing climate change.

Discuss: Why does Cassie make the decision she makes at the end of the story? Would you make the same decision or not, and why?

"Sunshine State," by Adam Flynn and Andrew Dana Hudson, in Everything Change Volume I, edited by Milkoreit, Martinez, and Eschrich (2016, published at Arizona State University's Climate Futures Initiative). This short story imagines a secret solarpunk collective in the Everglades, working to adapt humans and ecosystems to climate change as the next big storm hits Florida.

Discuss: What are the legal, social, and economic barriers to transitioning away from our current fossil-fuel system? What tools and strategies help overcome those barriers in this story?

Short Story Collections

Imagine 2200: Climate Fiction for Future Ancestors

The collection Imagine 2200: Climate Fiction for Future Ancestors (2022, published at Grist) includes twelve stories in which intersectionality shapes hopeful visions of a more sustainable world. These might be excellent stories to contrast with one or two other more dystopian futures: Ask students to argue for which versions of the future seem most likely to come true and why. Some of the most memorable are:

- **"Benni and Shiya are Leaving,"** by Jerri Jerreat, offers an everyday utopia through the eyes of a mother and her child, as the mother moves for a new job and the two renegotiate their relationship. Along the way, it introduces us to the solar trains, rewilding projects, and communes of their world.

  Discuss: What are the challenges Benni and Shiya face in adapting to a new community? How has their world adapted to the challenges of climate change?

- **"A Holdout in the Northern California Designated Wildcraft Zone,"** by T.K. Rex, is a humorous story of the burgeoning friendship between a forest hippie and an ecological management drone assigned to remove her.

  Discuss: Why is the drone supposed to remove the human from the wilderness? Does the drone make the right decision at the end of the story?

- **"Seven Sisters,"** by Susan Kaye Quinn, explores the everyday struggles of running a tea farm in an unstable climate– while caring for each other along the way.

Discuss: What are the positive and negative aspects of this story's world? How do the "sisters" care for each other amidst the stress of their situation?

- **"The Florida Project,"** by Morayo Faleyimu, imagines how a post-flooding Florida could become a wilderness area, replanted with native vegetation by those whose history on the land gives them a special love for it.

  Discuss: Why do Tray and Cora decide to go back to Florida? What makes family relationships similar to our relationship with a landscape?

Imagine 2200: Climate Fiction for Future Ancestors

The 2021 collection of Imagine 2200: Climate Fiction for Future Ancestors was published at Grist. Twelve different stories from different styles and genres, with illustrations, take divergent approaches to imagining a climate future that is at least somewhat hopeful. Here are four:

- **"The Cloud Weaver's Song,"** by Saul Tanpepper, imagines a far-future city above the Horn of Africa, where the desert drought has forced the people to build towers in the clouds where they can harvest water.

  Discuss: How do various people in the story respond to the idea of change? Which ways of responding to change are healthier, and which are less healthy?

- **"Tidings,"** by Rich Larson, strings together five vignettes to imagine how our descendants might use technology not to destroy the natural world but to renew and reconnect with it and with each other – through a plastic-eating biological robot, livestreams, virtual reality, animal translation, direct neural connection…

  Discuss: In what ways has the world in this story become a more dangerous, damaged place? In what ways has it become more beautiful and connected?

- **“A Worm to the Wise”** by Marissa Lingen. In a decaying near-future world, a young journalist works to reclaim and nourish the soil in a demolished housing development. The way she reorients her goals and rethinks her future might model society’s process as well.

  Discuss: Why does Augusta choose to work at the soil reclamation farm initially? What new reasons does she find for working there by the end of the story?

- **“El, the Plastotrophs, and Me,”** by Tehnuka Ilanko, is set in a communal household living in Aotearoa (New Zealand), practicing “devolution.” They use indigenous practices to lead the transition from an industrial world to a more sustainable future. Conflicts between heritage and belonging and between ideals and the necessity for compromise animate this story. Maori vocabulary might challenge students.

  Discuss: What does it mean to belong to a community whose heritage you do not share? To what extent can we live with imperfection in our quest for balance and sustainability?

The Weight of Light

The Weight of Light, edited by Joey Eschrich and Clark A. Miller (2018, published at Arizona State University's Center for Science and the Imagination). The short stories in this collection envision the social possibilities and challenges of different kinds of solar power.

- **“For The Snake of Power,”** by Brenda Cooper, explores the conflict between one young woman’s work at a public solar plant and her origins in the low-income community her company serves.

  Discuss: How might climate change affect the gap between the rich and the poor? What does fair energy distribution look like? What can individuals and communities do to make sure energy is fairly distributed?

- **"Under the Grid,"** by Andrew Dana Hudson, is set in a decaying city under an emergency government, where solar infrastructure is funded by foreign investors, and local collectives manage people's compliance with the new energy laws.

  Discuss: As we make the collective transition to green energy, is there still room for individual freedom and choice? What are the advantages and disadvantages of individually owned solar in the story? How does the story represent the U.S. economy compared to China, and why?

- **"Big Rural,"** by Cat Rambo, explores the challenges for a rural community as coal mining jobs disappear and a new solar plant arrives, bringing few new jobs and altering the landscape.

  Discuss: What special cultural and economic challenges do rural communities face in transitioning away from fossil fuels? Who should make major energy decisions such as whether to build a huge solar facility in a particular area: corporations, the federal government, local communities, or some combination of the three? What are the pros and cons of each?

- **"Divided Light,"** by Corey Pressman, is a story about two competing communities in a desert after the end of fossil fuels. A city has built a giant corporate sunshade over itself, while nearby lives an artistic techno-utopia oasis in the desert, embedding biopowered solar panels into every self-sustaining machine, organism, and building.

  Discuss: What might be the artistic, cultural, and practical merits of these two different communities' approaches to powering our lives?

Drowned Worlds: Tales from the Anthropocene and Beyond

Drowned Worlds: Tales from the Anthropocene and Beyond, edited by Jonathan Strahan (2016), includes fifteen stories set in a post-climate change future.

- **“Elves of Antarctica”** by Paul McAuley is set within the next century, after much of the Antarctic ice sheet has melted and drowned many coastal and island cities. A worker for “one of the transnational ecological remediation companies” explores the new life emerging as the ice retreats.

  Discuss: Is there a conflict between using technology to try to slow climate change, vs. accepting the beauty of the natural world even amidst its changes?

- **“Venice Drowned”** by Kim Stanley Robinson depicts how people might stay and live on the rooftops and towers of Venice even after a devastating rise in ocean level, which has transformed it into a destination for extractive tourist divers.

  Discuss: what are the differences in how Carlo feels about Venice, his home, vs. how the tourists feel about it? What allows him to let go of his pain and anger by the end of the story?

Loosed Upon the World: The Saga Anthology of Climate Fiction

Loosed Upon the World: The Saga Anthology of Climate Fiction, edited by John Joseph Adams (2015) includes two dozen stories, of which several stand out for their explorations of the social causes of climate change and efforts to stop it.

- **“Truth and Consequences,”** by Kim Stanley Robinson (2015), excerpted from The Green Earth a.k.a. the Science in the Capital trilogy, depicts scientists and politicians working to fight climate change with massive terraforming projects after natural disasters strike the world.

  Discuss: What would it take for our governments and industries to make similar changes today? Do these fictional visions give us energy to make them reality, or just allow us to relax and do nothing?

- **"Entanglement,"** by Vandana Singh (2014), is a hopeful novella telling five interconnected stories of people in the near future fighting climate change in different ways, from the Arctic to India to America.

  Discuss: Can small actions have large effects in the world? How is this novella like an ecosystem itself?

- **"The Precedent"** by Sean McMullen (2010) is an extremely disturbing dystopian story about how the post-tipping-point generation takes revenge on those responsible. (Be aware: depicts torture and execution.)

  Discuss: How should we balance individual and collective responsibility for climate change? Who is responsible for the suffering of future generations, and should that suffering be punished?

- **"The Day It All Ended,"** by Charlie Jane Anders (2014), is a hilarious satire of consumer culture in which a hip tech company has a secret plan to save the world without anyone noticing.

  Discuss: Is it accurate that people would be more likely to spend money on frivolous gadgets than carbon-capture technology? How or why might that happen?

- **"The Tamarisk Hunter,"** by Paolo Bacigalupi (2006), is also at High Country News. The story is about rural life in a water-starved American Southwest of the near future.

  Discuss: How do Lolo's individual motivations and actions conflict with the collective goals of those paying him? Is that conflict inevitable? How are conflicts over water rights already shaping people's lives today?

- **“Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet,”** by Margaret Atwood (2009), is also at The Guardian. This 2-page letter from an extinct human race offers no explicit strategies for averting climate change, but its compactness makes it useful as a quick in-class read.

  Discuss: why is it important in the story that the gods had horns, beaks, or feathers? How did money become a god? Why did humans create deserts? What economic, cultural, or spiritual changes would need to occur for us to prevent the outcome in this story?

Novels

***The Light Pirate* by Lily Brooks-Dalton (2022).** This novel explores the devastation of hurricanes, floods, and the loss of civilization in a surprisingly peaceful and optimistic mode. The novel tracks the birth and life of Wanda, whose connection with the Florida coastal ecosystem guides and sustains her through change and loss. The story works on three levels: it is a plot-driven survivalist adventure, a psychological exploration of the balance between loneliness and love in various types of relationships, and a dreamlike, speculative vision of an emerging relation between humans and the land to which they belong (a vision which, as noted in the author's acknowledgements, owes a debt to the Indigenous tribes of Florida who lived it first.) The book's vision of social change is not in rallying civilization to fight climate change, but in imagining how the survivors of these changes might in turn relate to nature in a changed way, recognizing that security is an illusion and relationships require risk. In that, it reminds me of the visionary ecofictions *Always Coming Home* (1985) and *Earth Abides* (1949), but it addresses climate change and sea level rise much more directly than those novels do.

Discuss: How do different characters (Frida, Kirby, Phyllis, Lucas, Corey, Bird Dog) respond to climate change in different ways, and what are the key factors that help Wanda survive? If you had to survive in your local area without modern technology, what would you eat and drink, and what other needs would you have? What would change the most about your life, and what would remain the same?

***The Deluge,* by Stephen Markley (2022).** This novel balances six narrators, each presenting a different response to the climate crisis through the chaotic span from 2020 to 2040. Including a radically bipartisan climate activist, a marketing strategist working to greenwash heavy industry, and a drug addict who falls in with ex-military eco-terrorists, among others, these narrators demonstrate the emotional weight of different paths people might take in their efforts to respond to a changing world. Set in the U.S. amidst dust storms and derechos, industrial wastelands, ubiquitous digital surveillance, and congressional subcommittee meetings, the book explores the way class, gender, race, and political identity

shape our responses to climate change, particularly the tension between being a useless purist and being a selfish sell-out.

Discuss: What makes some people respond to disasters with despair, and others with energy and joy? What emotional, ideological, and material sacrifices do various characters make to preserve humanity's future, and are they worth it? Be aware: depictions of drug abuse, violence, and sex are probably not enough to make this 880-page novel attractive to any but the most determined teenage readers.

***Termination Shock* by Neal Stephenson (2021).** Adventurous, ironic, and lighthearted despite its subject matter, this novel follows wildly disparate characters, including the Queen of the Netherlands, a Texan hunter of wild hogs, and a Sikh martial arts kid. Their lives intersect in intricate and surprising ways, as each becomes involved with a businessman's plan to go rogue on climate change by geoengineering the stratosphere. Ultimately, the slow, unreliable wheels of democracy cannot compete with the power of individual genius and/or propaganda in this action-packed narrative, though that action gets somewhat derailed at times by impressively-researched, lengthy details of mechanical engineering and geopolitical history.

Allusions to *Moby Dick* and *The Iliad* offer rich parallels. Discuss: When people go rogue with world-changing actions like building a sulfur gun without permission, are they courageous heroes or destructive lunatics, and is our society even able to tell the difference? When considering how to be safe in a rapidly changing world, do you think Uncle Ed is correct that "it was better to live somewhere obviously dangerous, because it kept you on your toes," or not (534)?

***The Ministry for the Future,* by Kim Stanley Robinson (2020).** This novel imagines life in the 21st century as the effects of climate change—starting with a deadly heat wave in India—slowly begin to change the social order on earth from the bottom up. Through the international web of activists, terrorist cells, farmers, banking systems, and government coalitions that populate its pages, the book imagines in startling detail how the world might reverse its current course. The title refers to a new international organization working to enforce the Paris climate agreements, nicknamed "Ministry for the Future" because it is fighting

for future generations. This is a terrifying but ultimately optimistic view of what that fight might look like and how it might turn out. Though this is another doorstop of a novel, the haunting tour-de-force of a Chapter 1 can stand alone as a text for discussion.

Discuss: What response could or should a country like India make to climate change in light of its experiences in this book? Is violence in defense of the climate justified or not? Which of the solutions or actions to fight climate change as described in this book are the most plausible?

***The Disappearing Shore,* by Roberta Park (2019).** This is a short, mystical little novel-in-parts about our present and our future, with each layer of the story responding to the one before. In short vignettes, fictional farmers, activists, lawyers, and rock stars meditate on the natural world and the human forces of emotional/cultural inertia as climate disaster approaches. The final portions of the book ask what kind of new life humanity/nature can make in the ashes of trauma.

Discuss: Which of the characters' stories in Part 1 do you most identify with? Which perspectives seem most odd or confusing to you? What changes have happened to humans between Part 1 and Part 2 of this story? In what ways might those changes be bad? In what ways might those changes be good? What has stayed the same?

***Dry*, by Neal Shusterman and Jarrod Shusterman (2018).** What happens when the flow of water suddenly runs dry? This powerful YA dystopia follows a group of California teenagers as their lives suddenly go from "normal" to a horrifying fight for survival. All it takes is a drought bad enough that a few states upstream seize the remaining water for themselves, and California starts quietly losing its mind. The most striking part of this book is how long it takes for everyone to realize that everything has changed. It's so easy to deny and ignore what's happening in the quiet background of life, until suddenly you can't anymore.

Discuss: What are some of the most surprising ways that the lack of water changed life for the characters in this story? What are some of the most important reasons people survive or don't survive in this story? What advice do you think the

characters at the end of the book would give their past selves at the beginning of the book? What advice would the characters give us today?

***New York 2140,* by Kim Stanley Robinson (2017).** This massive novel imagines New York after fifty feet of sea rise has put Lower Manhattan underwater, and creatively (and often optimistically) explores the ways that buildings, food, transportation, politics, and economics might change in a new world after carbon, through a cast of characters including homeless water-rat kids, an airship viral video star, a self-important financial trader, and more.

Discuss: How does our economic system encourage climate change, both now and in this novel? What would it take to enact the renewable energy changes in the novel sooner? In what ways is life in this novel surprisingly like life today? How is it different? How would your life change if the sea rose fifty feet? How would you feel about living in such a world?

***Exodus* (2002), Zenith (2009) and Aurora (2011), by Julie Bertagna.** These novels comprise an accessible YA trilogy set around 2100, when rising seas have submerged much of the world, sending refugees in search of a new home. The series explores the tension between technological and natural ways of living in a changed reality, and the counterintuitive value of compassion in a harsh world.

Discuss: Why do those with so much keep it for themselves, rather than sacrificing in order to share? What are the advantages and disadvantages of technological escapism vs living in the "real world," especially as the real world seems to be falling apart?

***The Carbon Diaries 2015* and *The Carbon Diaries 2017*, by Saci Lloyd (2009-2011).** This YA novel and its sequel humorously depict a teenage girl and her family dealing with electricity rationing and carbon taxes in London after extreme global weather events in the near future.

Discuss: How would similar laws change your life? What would you spend your carbon points on? How bad would climate change have to get before politicians would be willing to enact such laws? What would it take to convince the public to accept them? How do selfishness and fear worsen the energy crisis? A discussion guide from the publisher is here.

Fiction for High Schoolers and Adults: Dystopias and Allegories

***Even if Everything Ends* by Jens Liljestrand (2023).** Translated from Swedish, this story captures the boredom and panic of modern day first-world consumer culture as the people desperately try to ignore or escape the impending disasters small and large in their lives. 4 successively younger narrators will each be affected by climate change for more of their life, and are each dealing with that sense of doom in different ways. As Sweden burns from protests and wildfires, none of the characters in this novel can believe that the social breakdown they expect in other countries is actually happening "here." In their selfishness, in their smug pride in their orderly, comfortable, environmentally responsible homeland, the characters are easy to mock, but ultimately they are far too similar to us, their readers, for comfort. The book offers a painfully satirical contrast between the trappings of privilege and the sudden humiliations of suffering.

***Blue Skies* by T.C. Boyle (2023).** This novel delivers as rousing a satire of America's near-future climate collapse as Liljestrand does of Sweden's. Here, the wealthy congratulate themselves on their eco-friendly practices while recklessly buying, consuming, and wasting. Disasters approach so slowly that people don't notice; they adapt seamlessly to the new normal as they lie to themselves about how bad it has become. The overall tone is hopelessness in the midst of a boring apocalypse, as each self-absorbed character uses alcoholism to dull the pain and deny their reality. Thoughtlessness and irresponsibility all of a sudden come home to roost as nature bites back.

Birnam Wood by Eleanor Catton (2023). Guerrilla gardeners become entangled with a tech billionaire on the edge of a New Zealand national park. The various ambitions of the main characters lead to unexpectedly disastrous consequences, as the allusion to Macbeth would suggest. While this book does not deal with climate change specifically, its focus on environmental devastation and repair frames a psychological thriller concerned with arrogance, idealism, attempts at control through technology, and the ways we deceive others and ourselves. With all our technological and social capital as a

species, why are we so unable to stop our own environmental destructiveness? This book provides, if not answers, at least a detailed outline of the problem.

***Denial* by Jon Raymond (2022).** Set in a near future in which technology and criminal trials have dramatically reduced carbon emissions, this book follows a journalist who is about to expose a convicted climate criminal he has discovered living in hiding. But, the journalist begins to wonder, as he faces a terminal diagnosis and contemplates the throughlines of civilizations throughout history, what will this accomplish? Neither a utopia nor a dystopia, this somewhat hopeful vision of a changed future nevertheless expresses realism about the unstoppable effects of climate change, and more fundamentally, about our tendency to willfully ignore what we do not want to accept.

The Unbalancing, by R.B. Lemberg (2022) depicts a community's attempt to cope with warnings of apocalypse when all seems well. Nonbinary gender identities symbolize alternate ways of knowing and encountering the world. In the tension between escaping and healing a disintegrating land, characters seek love, patience, rest, and hope, despite disaster. The mode is more poetic, personal, and fantastical than socially incisive.

The Scholomance Trilogy, by Naomi Novik, including A Deadly Education (2020), The Last Graduate (2021), and The Golden Enclaves (2022). This YA trilogy is an ironic take on the magical school genre, featuring a witty and somewhat unreliable narrator, close attention to class and power, and a beautifully-constructed 3-part plot with cliffhangers that pay off. Most importantly, the trilogy offers an inescapable allegory of environmental disaster and the need for climate justice, as those with the least power suffer the most from a doom selfishly (and knowingly) created by the privileged. Sacrifice and collaboration lead to an optimistic conclusion.

Everything Change Volume III, edited by Angie Dell and Joey Eschrich (2021), includes "Invasive Species" by Amanda Baldeneaux, a near-future story in which people are caught and stalled in the midst of slow ecological and economic disintegration, and yet life goes on without fanfare, and "Redline" by Anya Ow, about a rescue mission while clinging to survival in a heat-stricken Singapore.

Everything Change Volume II (2018) includes "Monarch Blue," by Barbara Litkowski, in which the extinction of pollinating insects has left the job of pollinating to the poor, and "The Last Grand Tour of Albertine's Watch," by Sandra Barnidge, which illuminates the economic and social tensions of disaster tourism. Everything Change Volume I (2016) includes "On Darwin Tides," by Shauna O'Meara, in which a young girl struggles to survive without legal papers in a rapidly warming Malaysia, and "Victor and the Fish," by Matthew S. Henry, in which wildfires slowly destroy not only fish but also the communities built around them.

***Weather* by Jenny Offill (2020)** traces the hyperaware depression of a librarian who becomes overwhelmed by a sense of oncoming climate doom, even as the banalities of daily life continue. The novel is mainly about the narrator's efforts to accept and cope with loss: the loss of her health, the loss of her original career, the loss of ecosystems, the loss of a sense of safety, the loss of her hopes for her child's future. Her struggle against depression is mystical, poetic, and won moment-by-moment, like the sobriety of her addict brother. If the world is indeed dying, as we all are, how do we appreciate it and care for it anyway? I also enjoyed the book's companion website, obligatorynoteofhope.com.

***The New Wilderness* by Diane Cook (2020)** imagines a few lucky escapees from the choked global city who are set loose into the world's last remnant of protected wilderness, and left alone to survive or die. In this future, all in-between suburban spaces of comfortable natural beauty have vanished; the story suggests they were all just unsustainable delusions anyway. Our real choice is more stark, it suggests: to live connected to the land in awe and peace though under the constant threat of sudden death, or to kill ourselves slowly in the social and physical smother of our cities. In the end, if we do not take action, the choice may be made for us as all wildernesses disappear.

The Interdependency Series, by John Scalzi (2017-2020) (The Collapsing Empire, The Consuming Fire, The Last Emperox). This series explores a far-future space empire that has thoughtlessly developed around a natural phenomenon it exploits without fully understanding. When scientists predict that cataclysmic change is coming, the profit motive and inertia make it difficult

for society to take the drastic action needed to stave off disaster. While it's not explicitly about climate change, the allegory is clear and could help students analyze the present moment. Be aware: mild sexual content and excess swearing.

After the Flood, by Kassandra Montag (2019), imagines a scenario in which water rapidly covers the world and dramatic social change ensues, as a mother searches the increasingly lawless ocean for her stolen daughter. While it's scientifically unlikely for the American Midwest to be flooded anytime soon, this novel's depiction of the rapid unmooring of our modern society and way of life is devastating.

The Overstory, by Richard Powers (2018), makes trees the unexpected protagonists through a dazzling use of symbolic connections, deep-dive science, and the epic interwoven timelines of multiple human and arboreal characters. This book turns the ordinary tree outside your window into an alien lifeform living on an entirely different timescale. A motley band of ecoterrorists defending a forest forms only one of several powerful narrative threads.

The Broken Earth trilogy, by N.K. Jemisin (2015-2018), includes The Fifth Season, The Obelisk Gate, and The Stone Sky. This series depicts a fantasy world in which society is shaped around the need to survive recurring geological disasters, an allegory of the social and physical devastation of climate change. It also explores how power shapes racial and social identities, tying into issues of environmental justice.

The Marrow Thieves, by Cherie Dimaline (2017) and sequel Hunting By Stars (2022). In this YA dystopian series, Native Americans flee mainstream settler culture, which is hunting them as a resource. The melting ice and rising oceans of a devastated climate future form a distant backdrop for this story, which focuses instead on the struggle to hide and survive in the still-beautiful wilderness of a broken world.

American War, by Omar El Akkad (2017). When I first read this book several years ago, I thought its premise of a second American civil war, fought this time over the right to burn fossil fuels, was a little far-fetched. Who would be willing to fight and die for that? But as climate change continues to worsen, and as science denialism shows itself to be far stronger than even immediate threats to human life, it seems more likely that any realistic climate action America takes could be either too little/ too late, or violently opposed by much of the population. What comes after that? This book mostly focuses on the refugee crisis and political turmoil that climate change would cause.

Tales from the Warming: Envisioning the Human Impact of the Climate Crisis **by Lorin R. Robinson (2017).** These 10 "slice of life" vignettes offer exposition of possible futures, punctuated by frequent action and romance sequences. The most memorable stories include "Exodus," concerning Polynesian islanders' decision to leave their home, Viatupu; "The Perfect Storm," in which a Bangladeshi man becomes a second Noah, following God's prompting to save his family; and "Starting Over," about Midwestern refugees moving to Greenland to farm.

Ship Breaker, The Drowned Cities and Tool of War, by Paolo Bacigalupi (2011-2017). This YA series depicts a post-apocalyptic world of radical inequality after sea rise and warming. The novels explore similar themes as some of Bacigalupi's adult stories and novels, including The Water Knife (2016), which is a thoughtful thriller that imagines corporations, states, and a reporter battling over water in the American Southwest as global warming takes a toll. Be aware: The Water Knife depicts sex, rape, and torture. The YA series (Ship Breaker) does not.

The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future, by Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway (2016). This short book is not really a novel. It uses a non-fiction style as if written from the perspective of a historian four hundred years from now, chronicling how climate change destroyed civilization. In this imagined future, democracies cannot muster the political will to act against climate change in time, and only dictatorships like China respond fast enough to save their citizens.

Fragment, by Craig Russell (2016), starts out as an eco-thriller about a collapsing Antarctic ice shelf, but develops into a tender exploration of interspecies communication and solidarity. Of the dozen or so narrators Russell weaves together, the most interesting is a blue whale.

Gold Fame Citrus, by Claire Vaye Watkins (2015). Having lost its water, the most essential of its various mirages, California has become a land of scavengers and outlaws. Makeshift families find purpose through building communities amidst physical devastation, but the human appetite for self-induced fantasies persists. The novel meditates on the varieties of ecological collapse (drought, nuclear waste, and a truly epic vision of desertification in the American West). The narrative style is complex and encyclopedic, threaded with a personal story of hope and failure. Be aware: some fairly explicit sexual content.

Clade, by James Bradley (2015). This interconnected series of brief snapshots tells the epic story of three generations of one family as they experience the slow burn of climate change over time. It examines the intergenerational relationships and emotions that emerge from long-term change of this magnitude.

Loosed Upon the World: The Saga Anthology of Climate Fiction, edited by John Joseph Adams (2015). Besides the stories listed above, this large volume explores different human relationships and emotions in the context of climate change, including standout tales about a Midwestern family facing desertification ("A Hundred Hundred Daisies," by Nancy Kress), ecosystem destruction in the Pacific Northwest as humans move there to escape climate change ("The Myth of Rain," by Seanan McGuire), journalists covering drought refugees in Arizona ("Shooting the Apocalypse," by Paolo Bacigalupi), a family struck by a tropical pandemic ("Outer Rims," by Toiya Kristen Finley), an environmentalist fighting technological solutions to climate change ("Eagle," by Gregory Benford), a marriage crumbling along with dikes against the storms ("The Netherlands Lives With Water," by Jim Shepard), and a meditation on denial as water rises ("Quiet Town," by Jason Gurley).

Orleans, by Sherri Smith (2013). This YA dystopia depicts a post-hurricane Gulf Coast where a blood disease has restructured society into tribes based on blood type. It explores issues of rebuilding communities and the power of technology vs. the power of relational bonds, through the perspective of a young Black girl trying to survive.

Flight Behavior, by Barbara Kingsolver (2012). This poetic novel looks at climate change through the perspective of a rural Appalachian woman who finds monarch butterflies in the forest, after climate change has pushed them out of their native Mexico. This book deals explicitly with the contemporary problem of climate change denial.

"The Alchemist," a novella by Paolo Bacigalupi (2011), later collected in *The Tangled Lands* (2018). In this fantastical allegory for climate change, any use of magic causes the growth of more and more deadly bramble, which threatens to sicken children and swallow towns. Ironically, the protagonist is secretly practicing magic in order to heal his own daughter from bramble disease.

Cloud Atlas, by David Mitchell (2004) is a difficult but rewarding read, told through six different stories, each embedded within the last and successively jumping forward in time. Collectively, they deal with how power inflicts violence on the powerless and how communities of empathy might develop against cultures of greed. Ecological devastation is a central theme, though war and nuclear weapons are more direct causes here than climate change.

Earthseed series (Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents), by Octavia Butler (1993-1998). These two novels, groundbreaking early YA dystopias, feature a young woman who journeys in a disintegrating, overheating world to spread the message of a new religion in the face of relentless change. Unique in its own time and even more relevant today.

"The New Atlantis," by Ursula K. Le Guin (1975). This novella imagines a future America in which the combined forces of government control and corporate ownership have made art, knowledge, nature, and meaningful work all equally obsolete– or at least driven them into hiding. As the sea begins to invade the

decaying continents of the old world, a new world may be arising from its depths.

If you're interested in post-apocalyptic visions, you may like ***Earth Abides*** by George Stewart (1949). Though its initiating apocalypse is a pandemic, rather than climate change, its central focus is the reciprocal relationship between people and their world, and how each changes the other. After the majority of people are gone, how does the earth change? And how do those changes, in turn, change the people who are left? As technological knowledge fades, the story explores whether we might ultimately be happier and wiser to let much of civilization go.

Climate Fiction in Film

How to Blow Up A Pipeline (2023), by Daniel Goldhaber. This fictional film, working in the heist thriller genre, imagines how an intrepid crew might directly attack fossil fuel infrastructure in order to interrupt climate change. Even more powerful, however, is its thoughtful and sympathetic portrayal of the various environmental and personal reasons why each member of this crew chooses to take this desperate action.

Extrapolations (2023), by Scott Z. Burns and Dorothy Fortenberry. This series extends 30 years in the future to imagine how people's everyday lives (or more specifically, the lives of multiracial, upper-middle-class Americans) might be affected by climate change, forcing its audience to consider "What would I do?" Each episode can essentially stand alone. The message is fatalistic and offers little hope for solutions; the emphasis rather is on the frightening future that awaits us, and how selfish we might allow ourselves to be along the way.

Don't Look Up (2021), by Adam McKay. This satirical film starts with the classic disaster movie trope of an asteroid hitting the earth, but removes all the triumphant heroism or unified patriotic fervor. Instead, we get denial, misinformation, and capitalist shortsightedness, epitomized in one character's line to her anxious daughter, "Your father and I are for the jobs the comet will provide." Even in a situation far more immediate and easier to stop than climate change, society is paralyzed. There is no miracle solution offered here, only a relentless diagnosis of the political and social inertia of our decadent and distracted culture.

First Reformed (2017), by Paul Schrader. This film represents in a beautifully personal and dramatic way the spiritual crisis of a man coming to terms with ecological destruction. The protagonist, an alcoholic pastor, becomes radicalized when he realizes that his church is supported by fossil fuel money. His response to this information places him in the space between madman and prophet.

Blog: Using Fiction to Teach on the Climate Crisis

Reading and discussing fiction gave my students time and space to respond creatively to the climate crisis—and consider how to use their own power to address it.

By Sarah Outterson Murphy

In a 10th grade English class last year, I taught a unit on climate fiction. I found that examining the climate crisis through the lens of fiction gave my students the time and space to respond more openly, emotionally, and creatively to this issue – not just analytically or according to their preexisting views.

We started with deciphering the complex theme in Margaret Atwood's "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet," which we paired with the instant class favorite, Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner's poem "Dear Matafele Peinem."

For a longer text, I gave students a choice between what I pitched as a silly, sarcastic, and shorter story, "The Day it All Ended" by Charlie Jane Anders, and a disturbing and depressing story, "The Precedent" by Sean McMullen. Anders' story was more challenging to read with its vocabulary and humor, but reading collaboratively helped students figure out the ironies. McMullen's story appealed to a lot of my horror fans, though at 20 pages, it was too long for some readers to fully process.

I asked students to put all these pieces together into an essay about what power we may have to stop climate change. I also built in some climate change lessons from the Zinn Education Project: the Thingamabob Game and the Climate Mixer.

I was surprised by how cynical many of my students were about the future of our climate, even at the beginning of the unit. Many were already very aware of

the ongoing damage we are inflicting and expressed no hope that we'd be able to change it in the future. Why, I asked? Because people these days are too selfish and too busy to care, they told me.

Other students felt quite the opposite: They had already made up their mind that climate change was not real. A few expressed, very honestly, that they believed God would never destroy humans like that. (I asked them if God ever prevented people from suffering or dying due to the actions of others, but I quickly became uncertain of the appropriate boundaries for religious conversation in public school. You may do better than I.)

In any case, the conversation about climate change was certainly not new to my students. Their positions were already well-established within cultural allegiances.

I found that focusing our attention on climate change fiction and poetry allowed us to set those allegiances aside for a moment and just enter the writers' imaginative worlds. When we're debating what a text means or what the author is working to convey with her choice of imagery, we can temporarily set aside hardened disagreements over that message, and return to them later, perhaps with a deeper understanding of that author's perspective.

I also found that poetry and fiction helped students access and express emotions over climate beyond political anger and disdain for "the other side." Students were able to name how in "Dear Matafele Peinem," Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner uses imagery to make us feel protective of her baby's future, or how Charlie Jane Anders uses irony in "The Day It All Ended" to help us see the foolishness of our economic incentives.

Ultimately, I asked students to use the texts we looked at to analyze their own power to stop climate change. Many remained cynical, but even in that cynicism some expressed a powerful need to choose hope anyway. I want to lean into that hope even more in the future, to help both students and me cope with the realities of this unit.

That's why, when I teach the unit again this fall, I plan to add more creative writing opportunities to draw on my students' rhetorical skills and deep social conscience. Teen artists like Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, Solli, and

the ClimateSpeaks poets offer a model for how students can claim their own authority to protest and channel their anger and despair.

We will end by writing our own protest poems and imaginative stories about climate change, or other transformative social disasters. Amid the coronavirus, there is certainly no shortage of parallels to the challenges that we can expect from our future under climate change: distrust of science, deepening inequalities, social disintegration, and death.

With all that in mind, it is even more important to give students the time and space to respond creatively to this crisis—and invite them to consider how to use their own power to address it.

If you have stories about using any of these texts to teach about climate change, please share them with me at soutterson@gmail.com.