



Climate Flash Fiction Lesson Plan

Topic:

Climate Writing Awards Flash Fiction

Duration:

45-120 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Writing materials (for students)

Grade Level(s):

9-12

Standards:College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards:

- R.CCR.5. and R.CCR.6. Reading: Craft and Structure (grades 9-10)
- R.CCR.5. and R.CCR.6. Reading: Craft and Structure (grades 11-12)
- R.CCR.7. and R.CCR.9. Reading: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (grades 9-10)
- W.CCR.1., W.CCR.2., and W.CCR.3. Writing: Text Types and Purposes (grades 9-12)
- W.CCR.4., W.CCR.5., and W.CCR.6. Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing (grades 9-12)
- SL.CCR.2. Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration (grades 6-12)

Outline:

1. Read + Respond (20 Min)
2. Consider (10 Min)
3. Brainstorm (15 Min)
4. Write (15-30 Min)
5. Revise (30 Min)

Climate Flash Fiction - Overview

Sisters searching for refuge in a flooded city. Farmers facing unprecedented drought. Whale pods navigating warming water and shifting currents.

"Cli-fi"— or climate fiction—encompasses stories and novels that engage with the defining crisis of our time: climate change. Set in the present moment, or in the near future, cli-fi narratives are not far-fetched. Instead, they seek to illuminate the real threats that our planet is facing in order to elevate this topic in readers' minds, making what can sometimes seem abstract very real on the page.

For this prompt, pen your own cli-fi story in 500 words or less. What climate-related conflict will drive your plot? What mood will your setting conjure? How will you incorporate visual details to portray ecosystems in peril, and a prevailing connection to our home?

Cli-fi allows us to inspire change through our words, dear writers. We look forward to reading yours.

1. Read + Respond (20 Minutes)

As a class, read the opening excerpt of the short story “Starved”. As you read aloud, have your students circle or underline any details that tune the reader into the context of climate change.

Starved
by Zleyla (age 16)

Dear Diary,

Day 32. I never thought I would miss the squeaky floors of our school gym, or the 2-mile walk along the main road back home, or Math class with Mr. Reed, but here we are. When you haven't been outside in over a month, you tend to miss the everyday things - the things that are emblematic of normalcy, of routine. It's funny, because if you had told me a year ago that come Thanksgiving break I would be locked inside of a windowless bunker, dreaming about the disgusting mystery meatloaf that the lunch ladies used to slop on my plate, I would have laughed in your face. Now, though, the thought of any food at all is enough to make my mouth salivate and my stomach growl.

Looking back, I should've seen the warning signs. Mornings when I woke up late and groggily made myself a bowl of oatmeal, the TV would be playing, news anchors discussing "potential food shortages if crop yield continues minimal production." These fearful words never really registered, back then; they were just a part of the mellifluous melody of daybreak, background music to accentuate my morning routine.

The first crop to fail was corn - a direct result of the 4° increase in atmospheric temperature that had been building for over a century. Without corn, livestock couldn't survive; meat and dairy no longer adorned the shelves of the local corner store. After that, it was like a domino effect, a ripple that propelled me to where I sit today: cold, gray cement in a cold, gray room.

Ask students to share aloud which details pertained to climate change. How did the writer portray this important context, without telling the reader directly?

Next, have students jot down responses to the following questions. Discuss as time allows.

- What is the value or benefit of reading about climate change?
- What is the value or benefit of writing about climate change?

2. Consider (10 Minutes)

Consider with your students the main impacts of climate change, referencing the partial list below. Have each student focus on one physical element of a changing climate, and then extrapolate how that change will impact humans and/or animals.

- glaciers and ice sheets are shrinking
- river and lake ice is breaking up earlier
- plant and animal geographic ranges are shifting
- plants and trees are blooming sooner
- sea ice loss
- accelerated sea level rise
- longer, more intense heat waves
- more severe hurricanes and storms
- warmer winters
- drought
- forest fires

3. Brainstorm (15 Minutes)

Next, have students brainstorm what story they would like to tell. If time allows, you may have them create (or *begin* to create) a story arc, referencing [this image](#) as they map the arc of their own planned narratives. Some writers like to begin with an outline/story arc, while others let their stories unfold organically as they draft. Regardless of the chosen writing processes of your students, talking through the elements of a story arc will help them keep the essential components in mind as they draft and revise their stories:

- What is the **inciting incident** that shapes the main problem or conflict in your story?
- How does the problem develop over time—what is the **rising action**?
- When does that problem reach its most intense point, aka the **climax** of the story?
- What is the aftermath of the problem—aka the **falling action**—as the story moves toward a sense of resolution?
- How does the story reach a **conclusion/resolution**?

4. Write (15-30 Minutes)

Time to put it all together! As your students begin the drafting process in earnest, post these guidelines about writing flash fiction for reference.

Flash Guidelines

- **DON'T SWEAT THE WORD COUNT (AT FIRST).** Write with abandon, letting your story unfurl and wander as necessary. Then start the editing process. Clip a sentence here, prune a paragraph there, shaping your story down to its essence.
- **NARROW YOUR VIEWFINDER.** With just 500 words, flash fiction that focuses on a specific event/experience/memory is often most captivating. Let “depth over breadth” be your mantra.
- **DIVE INTO ACTION.** You don’t have time to wax poetic for a paragraph before getting to the heart of your story, so jump into the juicy stuff in your opening lines, sketching in the backstory later if necessary.
- **LEAVE BREATHING ROOM.** Like an iceberg, flash fiction only reveals part of the story. Celebrate the power of suggestion. As you write, ask yourself: What thought or question or feeling will this sentence leave the reader with? How can I open a door without revealing everything on the other side?
- **MAGNIFY MOOD.** A small space doesn’t lend itself to elaborate plots or a cast of characters. But you can create mood. As your narrative develops, step back and consider what feeling you want the story to elicit in your reader, and then choose your words carefully to help conjure that mood or atmosphere.
- **WORK THE WORD COUNT.** Your piece must, in its final form, be 500 words or less! Cutting down a long draft might sound like an arduous task, but concision will help you hone in on what’s most important and find the most essential story.

If students are feeling stuck, have them revisit their answer to the values questions in Step 1. What climate issue do they feel passionately about? How can they shed light on this issue through storytelling?

5. Revise (30 Minutes)

Keeping a story under a given word count can be challenging. Assign reviewing pairs or groups and have students peer review one another’s drafts, then make revisions based on the feedback they receive.

Peer Review Questions

- What drew you into this story? How did the writer pique your interest?
- Flash fiction requires the writer to use the power of suggestion—planting an idea or question in the reader’s head without explaining fully. Where did the writer do this successfully?
- Were there any places where maybe too much was left unsaid, leaving you confused?
- If the draft is over 500 words, where might the writer cut?
- What words of encouragement do you have for this writer as they continue drafting their story?