

Climate Resilience Toolkit:

Arts-based activities for
changing climates

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Introduction

In an era where climate change poses one of the gravest challenges to our global community, we must harness every tool at hand to foster resilience, hope, and empowerment. The overwhelming barrage of scientific data and foreboding narratives surrounding climate change has inadvertently nurtured a pervasive sense of climate anxiety, particularly among younger generations.

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This toolkit provides activities that seek to transcend traditional climate change communication and engagement strategies. It outlines arts-based activities to get people thinking about climate change and taking action in ways that aim to minimise climate anxiety and help empower communities to imagine and enact positive changes.

Context

This first iteration of this Climate Resilience Toolkit explores the transformative potential of art-based activities in nurturing climate resilience within communities.³ It aims to bridge the gap between the often abstract nature of scientific data and the tangible reality of individuals' lives, thereby fostering a deeper, more empathetic understanding of the climate crisis.

The curated selection of five activities, designed and trialled with diverse groups in Sydney (Australia) and Auckland (Aotearoa, New Zealand), is intended to help engage people with climate change in a manner that emphasises hope, empowerment, and collective action.

Art, in its many forms, possesses the unique ability to engage people in complex meaning-making in an accessible and emotionally resonant manner.⁴ This toolkit seeks to inspire individuals and communities to envision and work towards a sustainable future by leveraging the power of visual arts, theatre, poetry and participatory activities.

Activities within this toolkit are designed to acknowledge the psychological impacts of climate anxiety and empower participants with the agency to contribute meaningfully to climate resilience discussions and efforts.

This toolkit is part of ongoing research and collaboration with artists, educators, and climate scientists. The activities presented here aim to connect the dots between individual action and community resilience, scientific understanding and emotional engagement, and offer ways of working through challenges and future solutions.

We hope this toolkit will support pathways towards climate resilience and inspire new narratives rooted in hope, empowerment, and the power of collective action. Let us harness the transformative potential of art to navigate the complexities of climate change and build a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable future for all.

Arts-based Activities

Description of arts-based activities to support
climate resilience with communities



1. Climate Justice Tree

PURPOSE

Through this activity, participants will develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of climate justice. They'll see how the causes, impacts, and solutions to climate change are interconnected and require a fair and equitable approach.⁵ The collective creation of the Climate Justice Tree is designed to foster a sense of shared responsibility and trust-building,⁶ and inspire participants to take climate action.

DESCRIPTION

This activity is designed to foster understanding and discussion of climate justice. Participants will collaboratively create a "Climate Justice Tree," with roots representing the causes of climate change, the trunk representing current issues and effects, and the leaves representing the solutions, hopes, and visions for a just future. A simplified approach encourages drawing and descriptions via Post-it notes. A more involved arts-informed variation can encourage participants to create a Climate Justice Tree collage by providing magazines or images that can be cut out and stuck to different parts of the tree.

ACTIVITY DURATION

One hour

MATERIALS

- Large sheet of mural paper
- Markers, coloured pencils, or crayons
- Post-it notes or small pieces of coloured paper
 - Alternatively, provide magazines and scissors for collaging
- Glue or tape

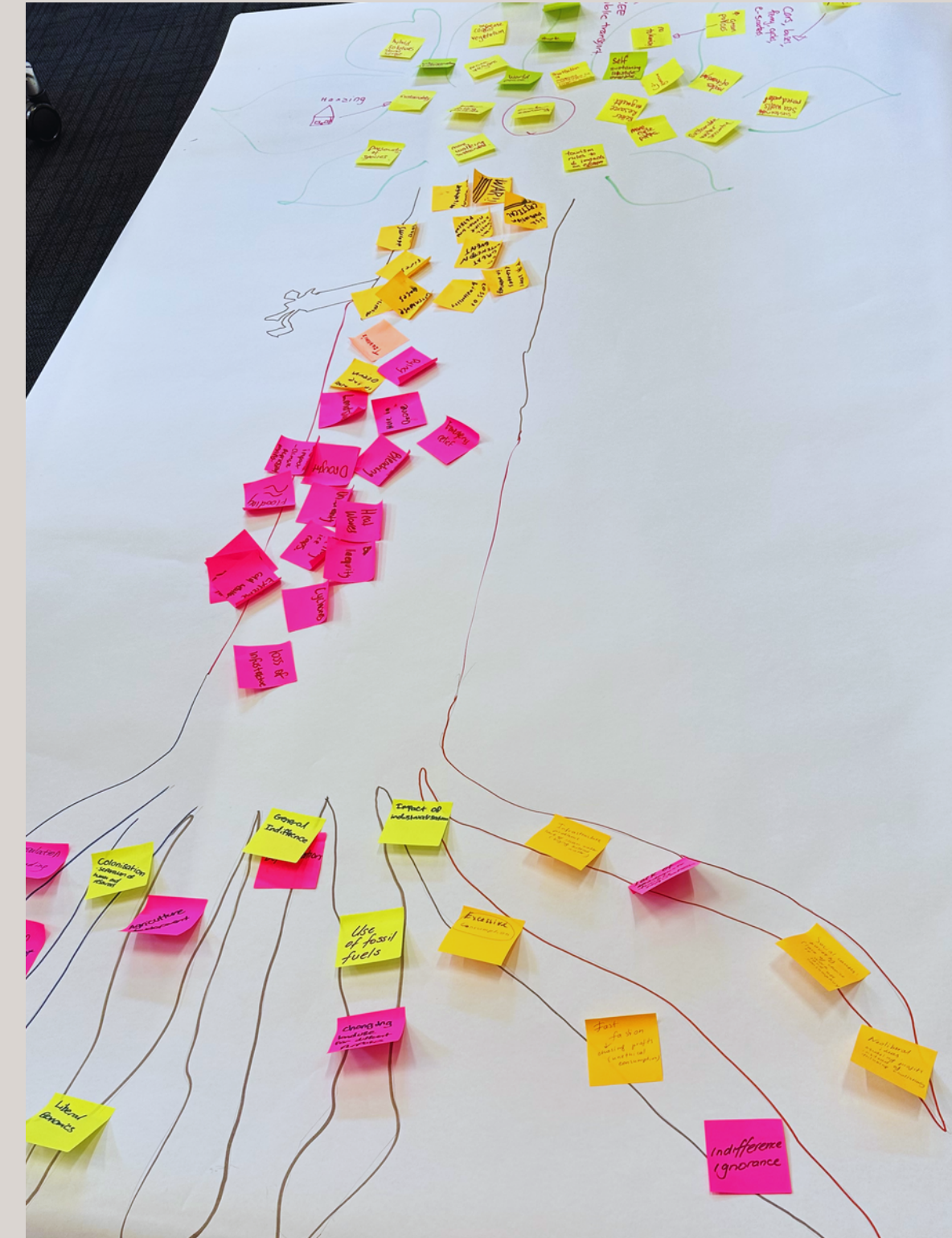


IMAGE: By Meg Parsons, photograph of a climate justice tree produced with participants using a workshop

1. Climate Justice Tree

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduction (10 minutes): Begin with a brief discussion about climate justice, its importance, and its various aspects, such as equity, responsibility, and fairness in addressing climate change.[You can prepare a 10-minute presentation introducing the concept of climate justice and different aspects of it with examples to the audience. Also, introduce the activity]

2. Drawing the Tree (5 minutes): On a large sheet of paper, draw a big tree with extensive roots, a strong trunk, and a wide canopy without leaves.

3. Group Work (10 minutes) - Divide participants into three groups and assign each group to a part of the tree: roots, trunk, or leaves.

- The 'Roots' group will brainstorm and write down the underlying causes of climate change, such as excessive consumption, reliance on fossil fuels, deforestation, etc.
- The 'Trunk' group will focus on the current impacts and issues related to climate justice, like how climate change disproportionately affects certain communities.
- The 'Leaves' group will consider solutions, hopes, and visions for a just future, considering global cooperation, renewable energy, policy changes, etc.

4. Building the Tree (15 minutes): Ask each group to write or draw their points on Post-it notes or coloured paper pieces and stick them onto the corresponding part of the tree. (Or use collage materials).

5. Reflection and Discussion (20 minutes): Once all the notes are in place, facilitate a group discussion about the Climate Justice Tree, the connections between the roots, trunk, and leaves, and how we can work towards a more just and sustainable future. See possible reflection questions on the next page.

FACILITATOR NOTES

- **Preparation:** Familiarise yourself with climate justice issues and examples to share during the introduction. Before the session, ensure all materials are ready, and the space is set up for the activity.
- **Group Dynamics:** Be mindful of the group composition when dividing participants into groups. Aim to mix skills and backgrounds to enhance discussion.
- **Time Management:** Keep a close eye on the time, especially during group work and discussion phases, to ensure all parts of the activity are completed.
- **Facilitating Discussion:** Encourage participation from all attendees. You can use the reflection questions as a guide, but be flexible and encouraging based on the group's interests and responses.
- **Visual Aid:** Ensure the tree drawing is large and visible to all participants. This visual representation is critical to understanding the interconnectedness of the issues discussed.
- **Metaphorical thinking:** You may wish to encourage participants to tap into metaphors to help brainstorm different causes, impacts and visions. We regularly use metaphors in everyday conversation to communicate abstract concepts.⁷ Metaphors can also reveal different assumptions, beliefs and values. Engaging with collage can support participants in metaphorical thinking.
- **Conclusion:** Wrap up by summarising the points raised during the discussion, for example, by highlighting the importance of collective action and individual responsibility in addressing climate justice.

1. Climate Justice Tree

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Questions that could be used to support discussion and reflection. Choose 4 or 5 questions most relevant to your research and engagement.

Personal Reflections and Insights:

- Which aspect of the Climate Justice Tree resonated with you the most and why?
- Can you share any personal or community experiences that connect to the concepts explored in this activity?

Community and Global Perspectives:

- How do you see climate justice being pursued or challenged in your local community or the world?
- What does equity and justice in climate action mean to you, and how is it represented in the tree?

Action and Implementation:

- What actions can individuals, communities, or governments take to promote climate justice?

Challenges and Barriers:

- What challenges or barriers might hinder the pursuit of climate justice?
- How might these challenges be overcome, and how is this reflected in the Climate Justice Tree?

Ethics and Morality:

- What ethical or moral considerations arise when dealing with climate justice?
- How can these considerations be balanced with practical or economic concerns?

Future Vision:

- How does the Climate Justice Tree help us envision a more just and sustainable future?
- What part of the tree would you like to see grow or change, and how might that be accomplished?

Collaboration and Group Dynamics:

- How did working together on this activity influence your understanding of climate justice?
- What did you learn from others' perspectives and interpretations of the tree?

RELEVANT RESOURCES

For more resources on climate justice, explore the following:

- 350.org: A global grassroots movement working to address climate change through campaigns, projects, and public mobilisations aimed at reducing CO2 levels to 350 parts per million. Website: <https://350.org/>
- [Climate Justice Alliance \(CJA\)](https://climatejusticealliance.org/): An alliance of over 70 community-based and movement support organisations working towards a just and equitable transition away from extractive energy models. Website: <https://climatejusticealliance.org/>
- [A New Social Contract for Global Climate Justice: TED Talk by Huma Yusuf.](#)
- [Climate justice can't happen without racial justice: Ted Talk by David Lammy.](#)

2. Adaptation Pathways: A Climate Change Journey

PURPOSE

The primary aim of this adaptation pathway activity is to encourage individuals to creatively delve into the process of climate change adaptation. The pathway activity involves participants thinking about, discussing, and visually presenting their understandings about, experiences of, and aspirations for climate adaptation through the creation of a three staged adaptation journey at a local level. It allows participants a creative way of exploring the crucial ideas and stages in the process of climate adaptation within their community.

DESCRIPTION

This activity is inspired by climate adaptation scholarship. Participants will create a group art piece representing their journey of climate adaptation as a path from awareness of climate change to implementing actionable strategies for adaptation.

ACTIVITY DURATION

One hour

MATERIALS

- Large roll of craft paper or a long strip of mural paper
- Markers, coloured pencils
- Magazines or newspapers
- Scissors
- Glue sticks

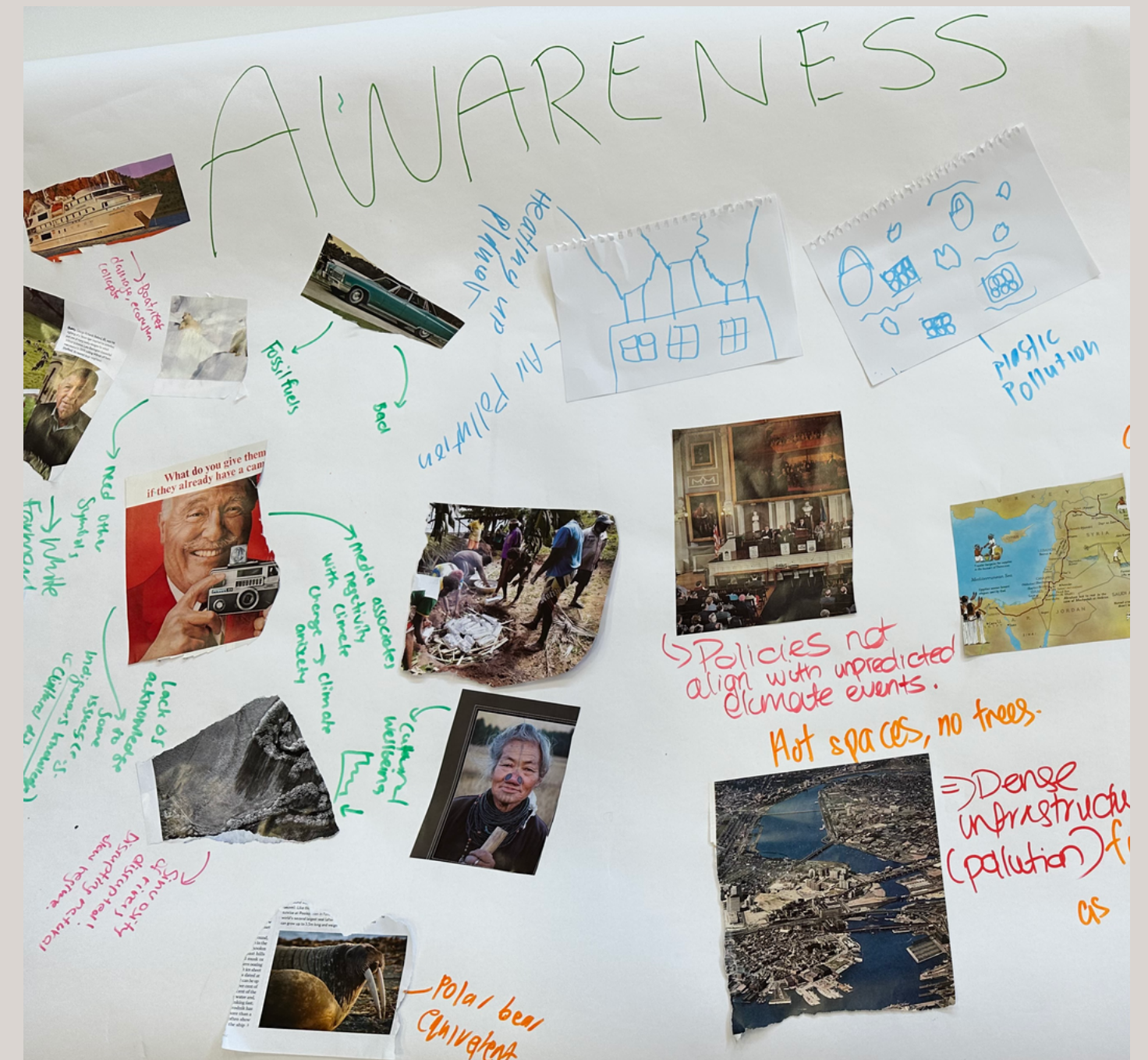


IMAGE: By Olivia Corbett, photograph of one of the adaptation pathway visualisations created during a workshop

2. Adaptation Pathways

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduction (10 minutes): Begin with a brief discussion about climate change and adaptation, referencing simple ideas (see Mark Pelling's book of Climate Adaptation). Explain how the journey to climate adaptation involves understanding the issues, realising the role we can play, and taking actionable steps for change. (End by explaining the activity) [Create a 10 minute presentation]

2. Pathway Creation (2 minutes): Unroll the craft paper and divide it into three sections to represent stages of the adaptation journey: Awareness, Engagement, and Action.

3. Group Work (3 minutes): Divide participants into three groups and assign each group to one of the sections.

- The 'Awareness' group will depict the discovery and understanding of climate change, its causes, and its impacts.
- The 'Engagement' group will focus on moments of personal and collective realisation about the need for adaptation, demonstrating an emotional or intellectual response to climate change.
- The 'Action' group will illustrate the tangible actions we can take at individual, collective, and societal levels to adapt to climate change.

4. Creating the Journey (20 minutes): Participants can draw or use cut-outs from magazines or printouts to represent their stage of the adaptation journey. Encouraging drawing or collage can support creativity and metaphorical thinking.

5. Sharing and Reflection (20 minutes): Once the pathways are complete, each group presents their section and explains how their images represent the adaptation journey. Encourage a group discussion about the interconnectedness of the stages and the importance of each step in the adaptation process. (We can record the conversation and ask questions like it is a group interview). Take a look at the reflection questions on the next page.

FACILITATOR NOTES

- **Contextual Introduction:** Start with a clear and engaging explanation of climate change adaptation, using simple examples or stories to illustrate the concept.
- **Creative Freedom:** Encourage creativity and personal expression in the pathway creation. Remind participants that there are no wrong answers or representations.
- **Collaboration:** Foster a collaborative atmosphere among groups, suggesting they share ideas and materials as needed.
- **Reflective Discussion:** Guide the discussion to connect personal experiences with broader climate adaptation efforts. Use the reflection questions to spark dialogue, but also be open to where the conversation naturally leads.
- **Visual Storytelling:** Encourage participants to explain the symbolism behind their visual representations, facilitating a deeper understanding of their perspectives.
- **Summary:** Conclude by reinforcing the idea that climate adaptation is a journey that involves awareness, engagement, and action from all sectors of society.

2. Adaptation Pathways

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Below are questions that could be used to support discussion and reflection. We suggest choosing 4 or 5 questions that you think are most relevant to your research and engagement.

Understanding of the Stages:

- Which stage (Awareness, Adaptation, or Transformation) resonated with you the most, and why?
- How do you perceive the connection between the three stages in real-life scenarios?

Reflection on Awareness:

- What new insights or understandings about climate change did you gain from the 'Awareness' stage of the journey?

Adaptation Strategies:

- What strategies for adaptation did you find most compelling or practical in your community context?
- How might some of these adaptation strategies be implemented in your local community or in your own life?

Transformation and Long-term Changes:

- What does "transformation" mean to you in the context of climate change?
- Can you identify any barriers or challenges to achieving transformation? How might they be overcome?

Personal Impact and Action:

- How has this activity influenced your perception of climate change adaptation?
- Are there any specific actions or changes you feel inspired to make after participating in this activity?

Collaborative Learning:

- How did working in a group influence your understanding or feelings about the activity?
- What did you learn from others' perspectives, and how might this collaborative approach be applied to real-world climate adaptation efforts?

RELEVANT RESOURCES

For more resources on adaptation pathways, explore the following:

- NIWA, A framework for climate change adaptation: 'pathways thinking'. New Zealand. Website: <https://niwa.co.nz/education-and-training/schools/students/climate-change/pathways-thinking>
- CSIRO, Adaptation pathways: meeting the changes of global change. Australia. Website: <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/environmental-impacts/climate-change/adaptation-pathways>
- Climate resilient development pathways: applicability to navigating a just transition in South Africa. We Adapt. Website: <https://weadapt.org/knowledge-base/climate-resilient-development/climate-resilient-development-pathways-in-south-africa/>

3. United We Stand: Clay Figurines of Community Resilience

PURPOSE

This activity aims to stimulate understanding of how social capital—networks, relationships, and norms of reciprocity—can play a pivotal role in building climate resilience.¹⁰

DESCRIPTION

Participants will create individual clay figurines representing members of a community and place them together to form a resilient community combating climate change. This activity helps participants understand the importance of social capital in addressing climate change.¹¹ It promotes the idea that everyone can contribute to building climate resilience regardless of their role. The figurines stand as a symbol of unity and mutual support, key elements in adapting to the impacts of climate change as well as other challenges facing communities around the globe.

ACTIVITY DURATION

One hour

MATERIALS

- Air-dry clay or non-air-dry clay
- Sculpting tools (wooden or plastic)
- Work mats to protect surfaces (whatever you have handy)



IMAGE: By Olivia Eskrigge, photograph of one of the figurines created during a workshop

3. United We Stand

PROCEDURE:

- 1. Briefing (10 minutes):** Begin by explaining the concept of social capital and its role in climate resilience. Discuss how relationships, community networks, and norms of mutual aid can help communities adapt to and reduce the impacts of climate change. [See notes that could be used for presentation]
- 2. Idea Generation (5 minutes):** Ask participants to consider what roles different members of a community might play in building climate resilience. They will represent these roles in their clay figurines. [Write their ideas of white board or flip chart i.e. brainstorming]
- 3. Sculpting (15 minutes):** Distribute the air-dry clay (could be non-drying clay such as plasticine) and sculpting tools. Each participant will create a clay figurine that represents a member of a community contributing to climate resilience. [If people get stuck ask them to think about who in their community would help them or others during a crisis or who they feel encapsulates the concept of resilience].
- 4. Creating the Resilient Community (15 minutes):** Once everyone has finished their figurines, create a communal space where all the figurines are placed together, demonstrating how various community members, through their roles and collaborations, can build a resilient community.
- 5. Discussion and Reflection (15 minutes):** Facilitate a discussion about the roles each figurine plays in the community and how they contribute to climate resilience. Highlight the power of social capital and interconnectedness in building climate resilience. See possible reflection questions below.
- 6. After the Activity:** Allow the figurines to air dry as per the clay's instructions. If paints were provided, participants can paint their dried figurines at home. [The clay might be the non-drying type – so that it could be reused – so it might not be possible for them to take them home]

FACILITATOR NOTES

- **Background Information:** Provide a brief overview of social capital and its importance in climate resilience. Use simple examples to illustrate how communities can support each other.
- **Creative Encouragement:** Some participants may feel hesitant about their sculpting abilities. Encourage them by focusing on the message rather than the artistry of the figurines.
- **oSpace for Creativity:** Ensure there is enough space for participants to work on their figurines without feeling crowded.
- **Community Building:** Highlight the collective aspect of the activity by emphasising the importance of each figurine in the resilient community.
- **Discussion Facilitation:** Lead the discussion by asking open-ended questions that encourage participants to reflect on the importance of community roles in building resilience.
- **Follow-Up:** If possible, take photos of the resilient community created with the figurines and share them with participants as a reminder of the activity's message.

3. United We Stand

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Below are questions that could be used to support discussion and reflection, which will help deepen participants' understanding and engagement with the concepts of community resilience and social capital. We suggest choosing 4 or 5 questions that you think are most relevant to your research and engagement.

- **Personal Connection:** Which figurine did you create, and what role does it represent in community resilience? How do you personally relate to this role?
- **Diversity of Roles:** How did the variety of figurines created by participants reflect the diverse roles necessary for a resilient community? Were there any roles you had yet to consider before this activity?
- **Collaborative Strength:** How does placing the figurines together change or enhance the message of individual contributions to resilience? What does this visual representation tell us about the importance of community?
- **Interconnectedness:** In what ways did you see the figurines and their roles as interconnected? How does this reflect the real-world dynamics of community resilience?
- **Social Capital:** How does this activity deepen your understanding of social capital's role in climate resilience? Can you think of examples from your community where social capital played a crucial role in overcoming a challenge?
- **Empathy and Understanding:** Did creating a figurine representing a community role affect your empathy or understanding for people who occupy that role in real life? How so?
- **Challenges to Resilience:** Based on the roles represented by the figurines, what challenges to community resilience can you identify? How might these challenges be addressed collaboratively?
- **Creative Expression:** How did the process of using clay to represent community roles influence your thoughts on creativity and resilience? Do you believe creative expressions can help in understanding complex issues like climate resilience?
- **Inspiration for Action:** Has this activity inspired you to think differently about your role in your community? Are there actions you feel motivated to take to contribute to your community's resilience?
- **Learning from Others:** What did you learn from seeing the figurines created by other participants? Did any figurine or explanation provide a new perspective or insight on resilience?
- **Vision for the Future:** Imagine your community facing a future challenge. How might the roles represented by today's figurines come into play? What additional roles might be needed?

RELEVANT RESOURCES

For public resources on social capital and resilience, explore the following:

- “Social Connectedness Can Boost Climate Resilience, Study Reveals”, Climate Adaptation Platform, Website: <https://climateadaptationplatform.com/social-connectedness-can-boost-climate-resilience-study-reveals/>
- Robert Aldrich, Guest Lecture, “Climate change and social capital”, University of Sydney, 2 May 2023. Website: <https://www.sydney.edu.au/sydney-environment-institute/news/2023/05/02/climate-change-and-social-capital--professor-daniel-aldrich-visit.html>
- Daniel Aldrich, PrepTalks: Social Capital in Disaster Mitigation and Recovery, FEMA. Website: <https://youtu.be/z7A8m0zQ6T8?si=8mTEL-FL74KEy4TQ>

4. Theatre of the Resilient

PURPOSE

To engage participants in exploring power dynamics, vulnerability, and climate resilience through interactive theatre methods inspired by the *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

DESCRIPTION

This activity involves creating and performing short plays that explore power dynamics and climate resilience. It is inspired by *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which was developed by the Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal.¹² An approach to theatre-making which offers powerful tools for addressing social inequalities and power imbalances. In particular, we draw on one of Theatre of the Oppressed techniques called forum theatre, which involves creating short theatrical scenes that portray real-life situations where power dynamics are unequal, such as discrimination, oppression, or marginalisation. After the scene is performed, the audience becomes "spect-actors" and are invited to intervene by stepping into the scene, taking on the role of a character, and suggesting alternative actions to change the outcome.

Taking inspiration from Boal and scholarship on drama and resilience,¹³ this tool, *Theatre of the Resilient*, enables participants to explore different perspectives, challenge power imbalances, and envision alternative solutions to address inequality. For *Theatre of the Resilient*, the scripts can be generated by various methods, including using your imagination, collecting newspaper articles and using them to craft a story based on actual events, or using prompts to generate a script in Chat GPT. The play should, ideally, focus on climate resilience and power dynamics and represent different people (with different knowledges, subjectivities, and worldviews) coming together in some sort of forum (like a local government meeting) or event where specific voices/knowledges/expertise dominate over others.

ACTIVITY DURATION

One hour

MATERIALS

- Pre-written 5-minute play scripts focused on climate change adaptation.
- Printed scripts
- Space for performances and audience participation.
- Props and costumes (optional) to enhance the performance.

4. Theatre of the Resilient

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduction (15 minutes)

- **Welcome and Icebreaker:** Begin with a brief icebreaker activity to create a welcoming atmosphere.
- **Overview of Participatory Theatre:** Introduce the concepts of Forum Theatre and Image Theatre, highlighting their origins with Augusto Boal and their application in addressing social issues.

2. Forum Theatre Activity (1 hour)

- **Script Reading and Casting:** Divide participants into groups and distribute the pre-written scripts. Allow time for participants to read through the scripts and assign roles.
- **Performance:** Each group performs their script for the audience. Encourage the use of expressive body language and voice modulation to convey the characters' emotions and perspectives.
- **Spect-Actor Engagement:** After each performance, invite audience members to become "spect-actors" by stepping into the scene to suggest alternative actions and outcomes. Facilitate this process to ensure constructive and inclusive participation.

3. Discussion (15 min): Use the provided discussion questions on the next page to reflect on each play's themes, character perspectives, and power dynamics with participants.

FACILITATOR NOTES

- **Preparation:** Familiarise yourself with the Theatre of the Oppressed techniques and principles. If possible, practice some scenarios beforehand to feel more comfortable facilitating.
- **Inclusivity:** Ensure that all participants feel welcome to contribute, regardless of their acting experience or familiarity with the topics.
- **Safety:** Create a safe and supportive environment where participants feel comfortable expressing themselves and trying out new roles.
- **Flexibility:** Be prepared to adapt the activity based on the group's dynamics and the discussions that arise. The goal is to foster understanding and empathy, not to adhere strictly to the script.
- **Debriefing:** After each performance and intervention, facilitate a thoughtful discussion. Focus on the themes explored, the alternatives proposed, and the insights gained.
- **Encouragement:** Recognise the courage it takes to step into a role or suggest an alternative action. Praise participants for their contributions and insights.

4. Theatre of the Resilient

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

These discussion questions are designed to encourage participants to engage in thoughtful conversations, critically analyse the themes of the plays, and connect the fictional scenarios to real-world issues and solutions related to climate change adaptation, power dynamics, and social justice. Choose 4 or 5 questions that you think are most relevant to your research and engagement.

- **Theme Exploration:** What themes stood out to you in the play?
- **Character Perspectives:** Which characters' perspectives resonated with you the most, why? Did any character's viewpoint challenge your own perspectives on climate change adaptation and related issues?
- **Power Dynamics:** How were power dynamics depicted in the play? Who held power and influence, and how did it impact decision-making?
- **Intersectionality and Vulnerability:** Which characters or social groups were more vulnerable to climate change impacts, and why?
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Did the play emphasise the importance of equity and inclusion in climate change adaptation strategies? Were there instances where certain voices were marginalised or ignored? How did this impact the decision-making process?
- **Real-World Relevance:** Do you see parallels between the play's themes and real-world climate change challenges?
- **Community Engagement:** How did the characters and stakeholders in the play engage with their community members and each other? How can community engagement contribute to more effective and equitable climate change adaptation strategies?
- **Ethical Dilemmas:** Were there moments in the play where characters faced ethical dilemmas related to climate change adaptation? What were they, and how were they resolved? How can we address ethical challenges when making decisions about climate change adaptation?
- **Personal Reflection:** What actions can individuals, communities, and governments take to address the challenges presented in the play?
- **Moving Forward:** What can we learn from the characters' experiences and interactions in the play to inform our efforts towards more equitable climate change adaptation?

RELEVANT RESOURCES

For public resources on Theatre of the Oppressed and climate change explore the following:

- Theatre of the Oppressed. ImaginAction. Website: <https://imaginaction.org/media/our-methods/theatre-of-the-oppressed-2>
- A Summary of Theatre of the Oppressed and Participatory Research. Participatory Methods. Institute of Development Studies. Website: <https://www.participatorymethods.org/resource/summary-theatre-oppressed-and-participatory-research>
- Theatre of the Oppressed: challenging top-down approaches to climate change. University of Cape Town. Website: <https://assar.uct.ac.za/articles/2019-03-06-theatre-oppressed-challenging-top-down-approaches-climate-change#:~:text=Theatre%20of%20the%20Oppressed%20allows,a%20more%20emotional%2C%20humanistic%20pective.>
- ASSAR Project. Challenging predominant views on climate change with Theatre of the Oppressed. [Youtube Video.](#)

4. Theatre of the Resilient

ADVICE ON USING GENERATIVE AI FOR CREATING SCRIPTS

We experimented with using Chat-GPT to generate scripts, while being mindful of the ethical considerations in using generative AI, including energy concerns.

To develop the prompts for Chat-GPT we proposed that each script should include a minimum of five characters that represent different groups (within a community/region/nation) and suggested a 5 min play length. We gave Chat GPT prompts such as:

“write a 5 minute play for 5 actors that draws on Augusto Boal's "Forum Theatre", The Theatre of the Oppressed. The play is titled "Rising Voices to Adapt to Climate Change" and engages with key climate change concerns. The setting is a public consultation meeting at City Hall, where the Mayor and members of the local government committee are presenting the draft climate change adaptation plan. The play should explore issues of climate change adaptation, climate justice, indigenous knowledge, and power structures embedded in planning regimes and disaster risk reduction.”

“write a 5 minute play featuring 5 actors that is inspired by Theatre of The Oppressed. The play should be set in a city in a settler colonial society that is experiencing the impacts of climate change. The play should include characters representing diverse social groups and include characters engaging in a collaborative discussion on ways to enhance climate resilience and climate justice.”

By changing the wording and prompts you use in Chat GPT you can generate a variety of scripts which can take into account local contexts and events. Sometimes we imported small sections of interviews or historical newspaper articles into ChatGPT and asked ChatGPT to use the interviews/newspapers as inspiration for a play, which allowed us to generate very locally specific scripts that fitted with our workshop locations (Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia).

5. Erasure Poetry for Changing Climates

PURPOSE

By using existing texts, in this case, reports, people are invited to create poems by inking out words within the text. This creates opportunities for people to interact with the climate change reports in new ways that highlight emotions, beliefs and values through poetic engagement.

DESCRIPTION

This activity draws on an approach known as erasure poetry, a form of poetry that starts with a pre-existing textual work and adapts it by erasing or blacking out sections. It is a form of poetry also known under the broader umbrella term of “found poetry.” Scholarship on found poetry and climate change has demonstrated it can be a powerful tool for arts-based knowledge translation and supporting emotional connection, including in response to bushfire disasters.¹⁴ This poetic approach invites people to see language from reports in a new light in this toolkit variation. People transform excerpts from a report into a poetic work by selectively inking out words; they embrace serendipity and create new verses from the text.

ACTIVITY DURATION

One hour

MATERIALS

- Printed excerpts from reports, printed as large as possible
- Ink or black pens



IMAGE: By Paul Byrne photograph of participant inking out words to create a found poem at Incubate Studios, Bankstown Art Centre

5. Erasure Poetry

PROCEDURE:

- 1. Overview of Found Poetry (5 min).** Describe the process of creating “found poetry” by inking out words from the text and the purpose of the activity for your context, including where the report excerpts are from and why these were chosen.
- 2. Invite participants to read through the excerpt (5 min).** Encourage them to let the words wash over them and notice phrases, words, or sentences that stand out to them. Encourage looking for hidden meanings, emotions, or themes that make sense to them.
- 3. Identify Key Words (5 min):** As people read through a second time, encourage them to identify key words or phrases that resonate with them. These will form the basis of your found poem. They may wish to circle these or underline them.
- 4. Ink Out Unwanted Words (20 min):** Using a black marker, pen, or ink, participants start inking out words that are not part of their chosen phrases. They leave behind only the words that contribute to the poetic essence they envision.
- 5. Create White Space or Visual Elements (5 min / optional):** As people ink out words, they create a sense of visual contrast by leaving white spaces on the paper. These blank areas will emphasise the remaining words and enhance the visual impact of the found poem. They may wish to add visual elements like shapes, doodles or drawings to complement your found poem.
- 6. Share and Reflect on the poems (15-20 min):** Take a moment to reflect on the found poems that have been created. How have the excerpts been transformed from the original report? What new meanings or emotions have emerged?

FACILITATOR NOTES

- **Pre-Activity Preparation:** Choose report excerpts that are rich in language and relevant to your participants. Print these excerpts in a large, readable font to facilitate the process of inking out words.
- **Introduction:** Clearly explain the concept of found poetry to participants. Emphasise that this activity is about creative expression and seeing existing texts in a new light rather than about creating traditional poetry; the poems don't have to rhyme.
- **Creating a Comfortable Environment:** Acknowledge that not everyone may see themselves as a poet and assure participants that the focus is on the process and personal expression, not on producing "perfect" poetry.
- **Guiding the Reading Process:** Encourage participants to approach the text with an open mind and to pay attention to any words or phrases that jump out at them. Suggest that they look for themes, emotions, or interesting juxtapositions of words that they can highlight in their found poem.
- **Facilitating the Inking Process:** Remind participants that there's no right or wrong way to create their poems. Some may choose to black out large sections of text to leave behind a few keywords, while others might only ink out a few words. Encourage creativity and personal expression.
- **Sharing and Discussion:** Create a supportive atmosphere for participants to share their found poems. This can be a vulnerable process for some, so emphasise the importance of respectful listening and positive feedback. Ask participants how it felt to transform the report into something personal and whether the activity changed their perspective on the issue you're engaging with. Encourage them to reflect on any new insights or emotions that emerged through this creative process.
- **Closure & Follow-up:** Conclude the activity by thanking participants for their openness and creativity. Consider displaying the found poems in a communal space (if appropriate) or inviting participants to take their poems home as a reminder of the experience. You could consider creating a digital or physical collection of the poems to share with the group or a wider audience.

5. Erasure Poetry

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Personal Connection:

- How did the process of creating found poetry allow you to connect with the content of the climate change reports on a personal level?
- Did you discover any emotions or beliefs that you hadn't consciously considered before engaging in this creative exercise?

Impact of Creative Expression:

- In what ways do you feel that expressing climate change through found poetry differs from traditional ways of engaging with reports or information?

Communication and Awareness:

- How might found poetry serve as a form of communication about climate change to a wider audience? What unique qualities does it bring to the conversation?
- Reflect on the potential of art as a tool for raising awareness about environmental issues. How can creative expression foster a deeper understanding among diverse audiences?

Future Action:

- In what ways has this creative exercise influenced your perspective on climate change? Are there actions or changes you feel more motivated to pursue as a result?
- How might incorporating arts-based approaches into discussions about climate change inspire individuals and communities to take collective action?

Reflection on the Process:

- Discuss any challenges or surprises you encountered during the creation of your found poem. How did these moments contribute to your overall experience?
- Consider the role of language in shaping our understanding of climate change. How did selectively inking out words impact the meaning and emotional resonance of the reports?

RELEVANT RESOURCES

An iteration of this approach was trialled in 2024 with Bankstown Arts Centre during a residency at Incubate Studios. For the project “Hi-Vis Care” in collaboration with Sky Hugman (Western Sydney University) and the poet Ammar Randhawa.

For public resources on found poetry and climate change, explore the following: ¹⁴

- A 2024 open access peer-reviewed article: “The Black Saturday bushfire disaster: found poetry for arts-based knowledge translation in disaster risk and climate change communication” <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2024.2310861>
- A 2021 Conversation article, “How Poetry can help us understand the urgency of the climate crisis” <https://theconversation.com/how-poetry-can-help-us-understand-the-urgency-of-the-climate-crisis-170971>
- Definition of erasure poetry in the Academy of American Poets glossary of poetic terms <https://poets.org/glossary/erasure>

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