



Activity: Guidebook for Survivors

Purpose: Having students work within an imagined dystopian climate change scenario to come up with a guidebook for climate change survivors and then transforming gloom into purposefulness and pro-activity by having them consider if they and others could act on their guidebook now to avoid the global warming threat and to what effect.

Age level: 14-18

Time needed: 120 minutes

Resources:

- ✓ Chart paper
- ✓ Thick markers, paints, brushes, and water jars for each group of four students
- ✓ Masking tape

Procedure

Stage 1

Climate change writers such as James Lovelock and Mark Lynas¹ have imagined a world in which humanity has lacked the willpower and resolve to prevent dangerous climate change and human society has shrunk to a remnant living close to the Arctic Circle and sub-polar areas in a few contracting 'belts of habitability'.

For a few minutes students deep breathe, relax, close their eyes before being taken through the following guided visualization, read slowly with pauses, that is based on the Lovelock and Lynas scenarios:

The world has become a hot place. Pictures in books of tall leafy trees, green meadows, cool lakes, markets full of fresh fruit, having fun in winter snow just don't seem real. Nobody experiences 'the joys of spring' or 'winter delights' any more. Our parents brought us here. Their own parents had been the lucky - some would say unlucky - ones. They had escaped north as the big heating and big seas spread. They were pilgrims in search of any cool and fertile place. Millions moved north as the heat became intolerable, farms turned into desert, food became scarce, and there was



nobody or nothing to contain the wild fires. The sea spread inland and the interiors of countries turned to hot desert islands surrounded by saltwater. Refugees were not always made welcome. They were often turned away violently. The local people whose land they had entered had themselves so little to live on and, before long, they in turn became north-fleeing refugees. The world had become chaotic and hostile. So first our grandparents and then our parents fled to what was once a place of ice and cold, a place where life was just about possible; where the few remaining humans could scavenge an existence in a hot Arctic desert mercifully scattered with oases of green. They were survivors first of the journey and then of the time when too many people came to a place that could only sustain a few, and where most perished.

The dawn breaks and the sun throws a piecing light across our camp; slanting light from close to the horizon that once glittered off breathtakingly beautiful snowfields. The cool freshness in the air lingers for a while but is swallowed up as the heat of the day takes over. The camels wake, blink, and slowly rise on their haunches. The tribe gets ready to move on to another oasis in search of food and water. We eat a meager breakfast. Food is always scarce. Such is our climate survivor civilization. Through the generations to come there is one thing we must never forget: to learn and pass on the lessons of what has happened so that when, in thousands of years time, the cooling begins and green re-appears on now barren land, we are ready to live in an earth-friendly, sustainable way, as our long-awaited southward return begins.

The visualization over, students maintain reflective silence for a few minutes before, again silently, they paint their felt response to what they have heard. Paintings are hung on the class wall. Class discussion is at this stage avoided.

The teacher introduces the idea of a *Guidebook for Survivors* as proposed by Lovelock:

One thing we can do to lessen the consequences of catastrophe is to write a guidebook for our survivors to help them rebuild civilization without repeating many of our mistakesⁱⁱ:

Students, working in groups of four or five, are asked to think of themselves in the visualization scenario and to decide what would be the insights they would most want to pass on to generations of survivors of global heating, especially when, after many generations, the climate cooled and humans could move south again into a greening world. Each group prepares a one-sheet presentation. Groups report back. Class discussion follows.



Stage 2

The teacher makes the point that the 'belts of habitability' scenario is preventable and asks groups to re-form and imagine that they have just received their own *Guidebook* and should consider what they and others could do in the present day to prevent the scenario ever becoming a reality. Groups are asked to prepare an action plan on a sheet of newsprint. Groups report back and class discussion follows.

Extension

Students present their action plans to local community groups, prefaced perhaps by the guided visualization, by way of finding common ground for school/community projects.

Potential/Facilitation Guidance

This is a very powerful activity and may well engender a strong emotional response. It is best not to immediately discuss the painted responses to the visualization but to allow the emotional charge from the visualization and painting to inform the *Guidebook* work, engaging the class in discussion of the whole experience as groups report back on their insights. Students may wish to express shock, even, disbelief, at the scenario but they may equally express gloom, despondency and despair at the way the world is going. Here strategies such as those in the *Climate Change Despair and Empowerment Activity Sequence* (see above) may prove useful. The debriefing should begin at the emotional level using questions such as 'what feelings did you have at various points in the activity?' and 'what in the visualization affected you most?' At an appropriate moment, discussion should turn to students' decisions about what future generations need to know to avoid the same thing happening again. Crucial to the whole activity is the teacher helping students train their guidebook insights on the current situation using group action plans as a stimulus and asking 'what do your insights and action plans tell us about what we as individuals and societies should do now?' The activity is intended to take students through gloom, despondency and despair into empowerment and action-readiness.

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ⁱ Lovelock, J., *op.cit*; Lynas, M. (2007). *Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet*. London: Fourth Estate.

ⁱⁱ Lovelock, J., *op.cit*.