

SUITCASE STORIES IN YOUR HANDS

Exploring climate adaptation through
participatory storytelling with young people

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 ISJ@yorks.ac.uk



For young
people
aged 7–11

Suitcase Stories is a drama-led approach to climate education that uses storytelling to explore climate adaptation. Climate change can be an emotionally overwhelming topic; the Suitcase Stories approach brings to it a spirit of curiosity and open-ended questioning, and allows young people to steer the process.

This short guide will support you to lead a Suitcase Stories project with your own class or youth group. It provides suggested activities for five phases of the project, although they might intertwine as you follow your students' interests. It will enrich the process if you or your students can connect online with a group of young people living on the 'climate frontlines' (e.g. sub-Saharan Africa, Australia) for story sharing – however we have provided a range of freely available online true stories covering a wide range of experiences.

If time permits, you may be able to spend one or two sessions on each phase, or condense them into a shorter period by simply engaging with one stimulus story, and using the activities below selectively. Ensure you leave enough time for young people to rehearse their stories and share them with the school or wider community.

Why climate adaptation?

Learning from the stories of how those on the climate frontlines are adapting focuses young people's attention on climate justice, and practical solutions to build community resilience.

Why suitcase stories?

The activity involves researching true stories, but also working imaginatively to create performances that pack into suitcases, so that students become empowered storytellers of the climate crisis.

You can read more about Suitcase Stories and watch the project films at:

www.yorks.ac.uk/research/institute-for-social-justice/research-themes/ecological-justice/suitcase-stories

PHASE 1: Exploring storytelling and climate adaptation

Establish yourself and students as storyteller explorers

Encourage listening to each other: 'One Word Story'. In pairs, make up a story one word at a time.

Encourage playfulness, imagination and enthusiasm: 'Yes And'. In pairs, A makes a suggestion beginning with 'Let's', B agrees, they play out the suggestion together, and then B adds to the suggestion.

Explore basic story structure:

1. Beginning (set the scene, introduce the characters)
2. Problem (our characters or their community face a challenge)
3. Middle (we see the consequences of this problem)
4. Solution (a character or characters solve the problem)
5. End (characters and community are better off than they were at the beginning)

In small groups, ask the students to tell a story one sentence at a time, each person taking responsibility for a different part of the story. For example:

1. Once upon a time there was a cat, who sat on a sunny wall.
2. But along came a group of children that sprayed the cat with water!
3. The cat hated this, screeched at the children and showed them her claws!
4. Just then an eagle swooped down and stole the children's water pistol.
5. The cat and the eagle became friends and sat on the wall together enjoying the sunshine.



Create your story land

On a large piece of paper allow students to draw the land in which they wish their stories to exist. They should work as a group, paying attention to what each other is adding. 'What is missing?' Ask questions such as, 'Where do the people live?' 'Is there a river, or a forest, or a city?' 'What's the weather like?'

Saying one sentence at a time, tell a story that exists in this land. Each student could describe something that someone else has drawn. Ask questions about who lives in this place? What challenges do they face?

Discussion: Use the challenges that exist in the storyland to form a discussion about challenges that people face in today's world. The challenges should be embedded with the landscape and therefore related to water, food, air, forests, fuel.

Use this to introduce ideas around climate change and climate adaptation.

PHASE 2: Listening and telling as research

Split students into small groups of between 3 – 5. Prepare a suitcase for each group. Using the examples of climate adaptation below, fill each suitcase with 'clues' to help students discover the story within. For example, the suitcase for the Floating School included a bottle of water, some string, an article about the School, some images of Nigeria, and a toy boat. Invite the children to become storytelling researchers, look at all the clues and discuss: what do they think the story is about? Who are the characters? What challenges are they facing and how are they adapting to this crisis?

Invite each group to share their Suitcase Story with the wider group, always considering the skills of a strong storyteller. Use this as an opportunity to discuss the experiences of people all over the world adapting to the climate crisis in different ways. Use the examples at the bottom of this document to give you examples to share with the group.

Go back to your 'storyland' and add details from the Suitcase Stories. What details do we wish to include in our story? Do we want to add a dam to the river? Do we need a well? Do we need big storm clouds?

Modelling storytelling: *Facilitators' Stories*

Model the power of storytelling by telling students a Suitcase Story of your own. Research a story of climate adaptation using the example stories at the end of this document, your own experience, observations, or wider reading. This could be used as an opportunity to highlight climate issues

in the UK, such as energy bills, flooding, erosion, food poverty. Prepare by filling a small suitcase with some props that help you tell your story. Tell it informally, without a script, lifting out each prop in turn to help students visualise what happened. Afterwards, ask students to give you feedback on your storytelling style and how you could have made it more vivid or compelling.

PHASE 3: Choosing your destination and forming storytelling groups

Going back to the 'storyland', ask the students to consider on which part of the land they wish to focus their story. Use their preferences to form small groups. Hopefully you will end up with a variety of locations: 'city group', 'river group', 'farm group'.

Using the 1–5 story structure, invite them to invent a story that is set in their chosen location.

Share back to the group and allow the audience to give feedback. Is the story simple enough? Does it clearly demonstrate a climate change problem and adaptation? At this stage it only matters that the basic story structure is in place (1 or 2 sentences per section is enough). Remind the students they should be telling their story to the audience, rather than acting it out.

PHASE 4: Devising as research

Beginning to perform your Suitcase Story

Key images/physical storyboarding: Ask students to make a still image of each section of their story.

Adding words: Ask students to add adjectives and verbs to each still image.

Packing your suitcase: Students should choose an object that would best enhance each still image. They need to think practically (what can you get your hands on and what fits in your suitcase?) as well as representationally (could you use a piece of string to demonstrate the depth of the river?).

Using objects to thicken the story:

This Is Not A Shawl

Place a simple object like a shawl in the centre of the circle. Any young person can come forward and explain how it fits into their story (this will involve developing details of the story), saying for example "This is not a shawl, it's the cloth Tamara's granny gave her to filter water from the well". Now place numerous objects in the centre (you might ask each student to bring a selection of objects from home to contribute to the process). Young people can come forward and 'claim' them for their own stories and their own suitcases, by explaining their link to the story.

PHASE 5: Telling your story

By this stage your groups should be confident with a structured story - it can include physical images or movements, key words and phrases, objects from their suitcase.

You may wish to start your performance with the whole group working as an ensemble, describing their storyland. They can then split off and tell their individual stories in smaller groups. Consider the role of the students in the other groups. They could be used to support the performances with sound effects, holding props, reacting.

Performing your Suitcase Story

Talk to the group about what audiences they want to reach with their stories. Stories could be performed in school assemblies, community festivals or events, or filmed for students to share with online audiences. Ensure there is time for audience Q&A and feedback following the stories, so students can reflect out loud on their process and intentions. You might want to follow up by talking about the work of local or international organisations which support climate adaptation or community resilience, to encourage the audience to contribute or get involved with them.

"...ask students to give you feedback on your storytelling style and how you could have made it more vivid or compelling."





Photographs of Suitcase Stories project carried out with We Are Seacroft, 2022

Real-life stories of climate adaptation with simple videos/audios – UK EXAMPLES:

- 1 *Surplus To Purpose* intercept food that is going to landfill and redistribute it: www.surplus2purpose.com
- 2 *Season Well* teach people to forage and cook seasonal food that is often growing in our towns, cities and parks: www.seasonwell.co.uk
- 3 *Cornwall Beaver Project* – rewilding landscapes to boost biodiversity and protect towns from flooding: www.youtube.com/watch?v=evEgbnouPd8
- 4 *We Are Seacroft* are creating a community response to the energy crisis. For example, they have funded 1000 slow cookers to be distributed across the community, as a slow cooker uses less energy than oven or gas. They have engaged www.groundwork.org.uk/projects/green-doctor to visit hundreds of houses and give advice to people about how they can save energy.

Real-life stories of climate adaptation with simple videos/audios – GLOBAL EXAMPLES:

- 1 The *Floating School* in Makoko, Nigeria, designed so that children can have a year-round education: www.theguardian.com/cities/video/2016/feb/23/water-world-makoko-floating-school-lagos-kunle-adeyemi
- 2 The *Palestine Heirloom Seed Library*, sharing cultural knowledge and seed varieties suited to the climate and soil: www.mothersofinvention.online/s3-ep-4
- 3 The solar-powered ironing cart invented by 14-year-old *Vinisha Umashankar* to improve health, air quality and incomes: www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfEmRCnPiJo
- 4 *William Kamkwamba*, Malawian teenager who designed windmills to bring electricity and irrigation to his village: www.youtube.com/watch?v=arD374MFk4w
- 5 Indigenous knowledge of ancient potato varieties being used to build farmers' resilience to climate change in the Andes and Himalayas: '*Guardians of Diversity*' film: www.iied.org/film-documents-visit-guardians-diversity-potato-park (could be paired with the UK example *Season Well*).
- 6 The charity *Practical Action* shares numerous innovative approaches to climate adaptation, www.practicalaction.org/news-media/2022/01/13/reusing-waste-to-adapt-to-climate-change

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