



9th Grade Language & Literature Unit: Critical Literacy and Climate Action

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Abstract

This 9th grade, 8-lesson Language & Literature unit centers on Critical Literacy and Climate Action by exposing students to climate-related texts from diverse genres. The goal is to foster critical literacy skills and build students' baseline understanding of the climate crisis and its solutions. The unit covers several Common Core standards related to media literacy, research, and inquiry-based writing. It culminates in a student-choice driven climate action research project through which students demonstrate their ability to apply climate literacy concepts to a specific climate solution.

Keywords

International Baccalaureate, critical literacy, collective action, [CLICK framework](#)

I designed and taught this climate change unit to three sections of International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) 9th grade Language and Literature at a Title 1 public high school in the suburbs of Minneapolis. I completed much of my idea generation and lesson planning while I participated in a teacher fellow program through the Center for Climate Literacy. My fellow cohort members supported each other's unit planning processes through collaborative discussions and workshops. The support I received from this interdisciplinary group of teachers was invaluable.

For the backbone of this 9th grade unit, I used the framework that I developed for my 11th grade Critical Literacy and Climate Literacy unit in 2022: 1) start by determining what students already know and what they're curious about; 2) teach key climate

concepts through vocabulary terms; 3) invite students to apply their knowledge through critical analysis of climate-related texts from a wide range of genres. However, I made a few key changes and additions too, based on my own reflections from the 11th grade unit and feedback from others.

Of these additions, I am most proud of the Climate Action Project (CAP) assignment which helped my students gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of climate action. Since I started teaching climate literacy, I have noticed that students often fixate on individual actions, like buying an electric car, as the main solutions to climate change. Despite leading conversations about the importance of collective action, I hadn't found a way to instill a more nuanced understanding of this concept until I devised the CAP. As part of CAP, students researched a climate solution of their choice from an online database of climate solutions called "[Nexus](#)" developed by [Project ReGeneration](#). Each database entry lists the actions that must be taken by "individuals," "groups," and "governance." Students then produced a mini collage about their chosen solution with a catchy slogan that encouraged a certain type of action, whether individual or collective. The CAP gallery walk on the last day of the unit was a joy to watch. Students appreciated their peers' collages and each student acted as the "classroom expert" about the solution they researched.

Narrative framing for climate literacy unit

This 8-lesson unit began with a "four corners" activity where students shared their agree/disagree responses to a series of prompts about the unit's key terms: climate change, biodiversity, anthropocentrism/ecocentrism, and environmental justice (see climate literacy term definitions in "Curriculum at a Glance" below). The following three lessons built on this activity, with one lesson dedicated to each term. Each term, in turn, was paired with a few related multi-genre texts, including picturebooks, news articles, videos, etc. (linked in "Curriculum at a Glance" below). Students were introduced to the four care domains of climate literacy from the [CLICK framework](#)—species care, kinship care, systems care, and people care—and they completed a critical analysis chart by recording which domain(s) of care they noticed each text advocates. The unit culminated in a Climate Action Project where students researched a climate solution of their choice from the "[Nexus](#)" database and created a mini collage with a catchy slogan to promote the solution.

Title	<i>9th Grade Language & Literature Unit: Critical Literacy and Climate Action</i>
Unit Time	<i>Eight Lessons Schedule: Daily 48 minute class periods</i>
Grade Level(s)	<i>Grade 9</i>
Core Text	<i>Students used the website ReGeneration Nexus to research climate solutions for this unit's final assessment project.</i>
Supporting Texts	Various
Climate Literacy Terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short Film Ice Merchants by João Gonzalez • Video What is Climate change? Produced by Al Jazeera • Picturebook The Fate of Fausto by Oliver Jeffers • Image "Thanksgiving Address" from Braiding Sweetgrass (YA) by Robin Wall Kimmerer • Video What is biodiversity? By David Attenborough • News article Food system biodiversity published by The Guardian • Picturebook by Over and Under the Pond by Kate Messner and illustrated by Christopher Silas Neal • Picturebook We Are Water Protectors by Carole Lindstrom and Michaela Goade • Climate justice tweets by Vanessa Nakate, Urban Air Quality, Mark Ruffalo, and Climate Justice Alliance
Objectives	By the end of the unit, students will be able to define and discuss vocabulary terms. They will be able to answer the unit's essential question: How can literature help us understand the diverse impacts of climate change? Through engaging in research about climate solutions and completing a climate action project, students will gain specific knowledge about a climate solution of their choice and develop communication skills by drafting a slogan and creating a collage.
Materials and Resources	Unit Calendar with links to resources Climate Action Project research and planning guide

Climate Action Project, Unit Culmination, and Going Forward

For the final three days of the unit, students worked on their CAPs. The CAP research and planning guide (linked in “Curriculum at a Glance” above) encouraged students to break down the action required by their chosen solution into categories: “individuals” “groups” and “governance.” This complicated many students’ preconceived understanding of climate action as a solely individual pursuit. Additionally, these projects allowed students to demonstrate the critical analysis skills they developed throughout the unit by requiring students to apply the care domains from the CLICK framework to their own collage. Each student wrote an artist statement that referenced the specific domain(s) of care their CAP promoted.

On the second to last day of the unit students voted on which collages and slogans were most inspiring. They also filled out a feedback survey about the unit as a whole. I enjoyed reading their answers that afternoon, especially for the question, “What is one thing you wish all adults knew about climate change?” Most called for adults to take action and to remember that younger generations are counting on them. A of my few favorite answers included unique insights: “PROFIT DOESN’T REALLY MATTER IF WE ARE ALL GONNA BURN IN 30 YEARS 🤔🤔;” “be more reasonable” and “Buying a Tesla doesn’t make you better than everybody else.”

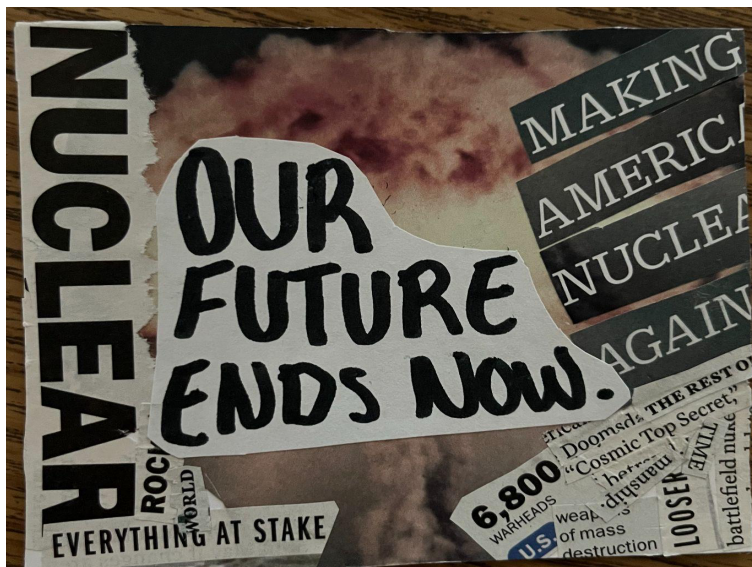
The final day of the unit was a celebration. I handed out eco-themed prizes to the contest winners and gave each student a blue marble to remind them to take care of our planet. Students enjoyed the celebration, but it was also the last day of school. I kept them engaged by promising that they could go play outside for the last 20 minutes of class. When the time came, they eagerly packed away their papers and we headed outside to enjoy the sun. The weather was unseasonably warm, and a thin haze of Canadian wildfire smoke made the sky white. I wondered if any students would apply their new climate literacy skills and identify the connection between our curriculum and the weather. If they did, they didn’t voice it. Instead, they teased each other as they played foursquare, gleefully discussed summer plans, and made daisy chains in the grass.

As with most of my climate change related thoughts, I felt a mix of despair and hope as I watched my students. I felt anxious looking at the sky, thinking of the climate

solutions students had just spent days researching, but knowing that time for implementation is running out. Yet the human joy, creativity, and connection I witnessed that day was also a reminder of what fuels my work. Humans will always seek connection with the outdoors, even in the face of the climate crisis. We must continue to educate our youth about climate change, both as a threat *and* a call to action. Teaching climate literacy units is my small act of radical hope.



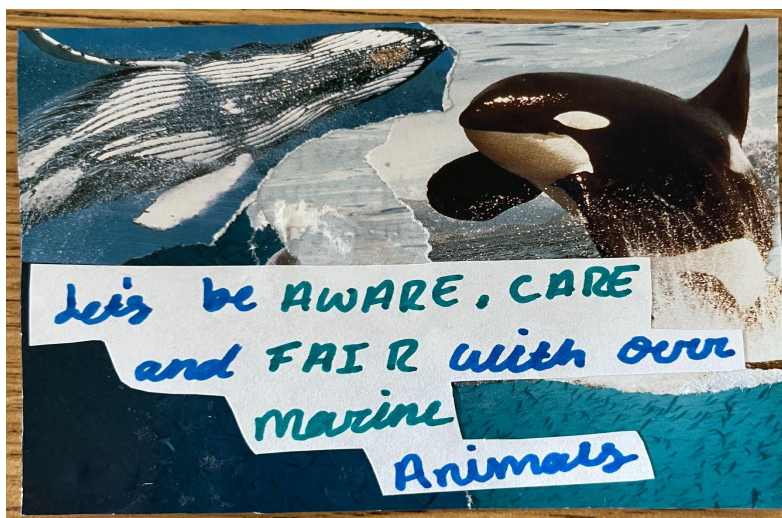
Kayda M., 9th Grade



Aiyanna S., 9th Grade



Nex N., 9th Grade



Fernanda A., 9th Grade



Gabby B., 9th Grade



Brianna E., 9th Grade