



 CINEREACH

# JUST PLAY

a game jam for climate futures

WITH ANIMA INTERACTIVE

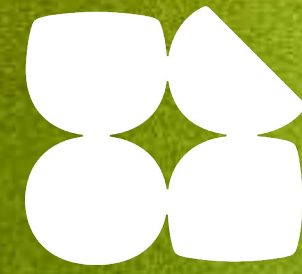
# TOOLKIT

*who are we?*

## HELLO FROM CINEREACH!

We are thrilled that you are interested in participating in this Game Jam to explore climate futures. Our goal as an organization is to cultivate intentional, fun and innovative ways to incubate stories that inspire narrative change around urgent cultural themes, like the state of our climate. One of our core beliefs is that effective storytelling that seeks to have social impact, starts with uncovering the roots and systems that are working to create the issue at hand. This is why we conduct **in-depth narrative research** to be in conversation with the communities that make up the ecosystem of impact and the impacted. Ultimately we are hoping to identify what role story can play to move the needle.





“...stories are how humans have always reckoned with the joys and tragedies of being alive. They think we started telling stories roughly 30,000, possibly longer years ago, mostly to help process change and loss and death, but also as a way of passing down information through generations, through communities, and the more memorable and good the story was, the more likely people were to remember the information, and so it’s just been such **an integral part of the human existence in our evolution for forever.**”

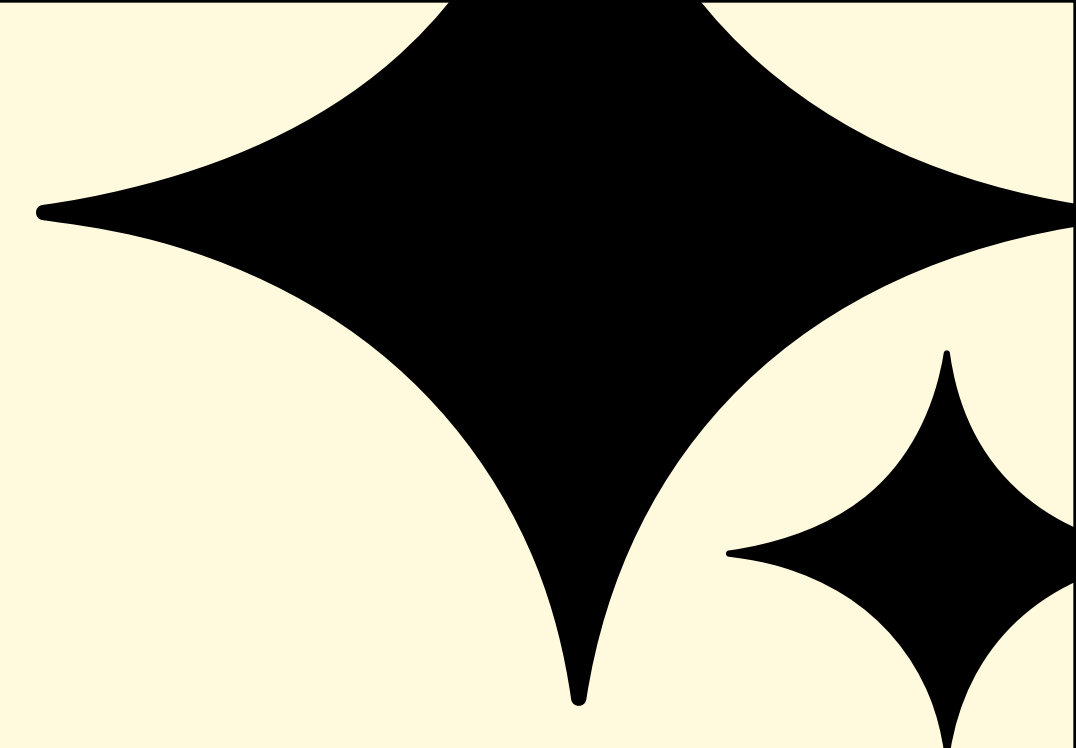
**-CLIMATE CHANGE LEADER, WEST COAST**

# WHAT IS THIS AND WHY SHOULD I READ IT?

This toolkit is a collection of narrative research findings and considerations we have explored as an organization over the last few years with a particular focus on our most recent endeavor done in partnership with the phenomenal folks at [Good Energy](#) (if you don't know them, you should). Together we sought out to map the broad ecosystem of folks working in and around the climate movement to understand the key narratives that could inspire change. Across the next few pages we bring that learning to you!



# WHY DOES IT MATTER?



Our world is changing at an unprecedented rate, and in order to mitigate the effects of climate change we need collective action. Where better to focus our efforts than a space that's inhabited by people all over the world? As developers you are exceedingly aware of the power of games to reach people and create powerful communities.

Climate change impacts not only the environment, but also

the health, safety and well-being of billions of people across the globe. The visibility of stories that highlight global warming's impact on humanity, especially the most vulnerable individuals, can aid in shaping narratives around climate change that promote immediate structural change

As such, we recognize that gaming is a great way to engage with climate change and all of the many ways it

impacts us whether players are well informed, new to the conversation, or somewhere in between! By building worlds that allow players to imagine beyond the moment we're in, and encouraging people who identify across all lines of difference to take on varied roles and levels of decision making power, you can foster a sense of excitement and possibility about working together towards a better tomorrow.

# WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH ALL OF THIS INFORMATION?

Our hope is that you find your own unique, fun, unexpected, original way to use these narrative nuggets to inform your game design, mechanics, worldbuilding and narrative.

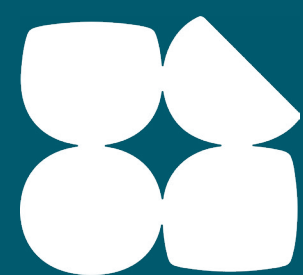
The key here is not to build “THE CLIMATE GAME!!” In fact, quite the opposite. You will see in this research that the true conversation about climate is its presence in every aspect of life. The way in which no matter your personal identity, location, profession, beliefs, we are all in constant relationship with the climate.



# WHY JUST PLAY: A GAME JAM FOR CLIMATE FUTURES?

We decided to invite folks to think specifically about climate futures because there is so much information out there about where we are right now. What stories have the ability to do is imagine and normalize a future in whatever way moves the storyteller – that future may not be perfect, it may be in progress, it may be near term, it may be generations from now – we look forward to experiencing the approach you choose to take when thinking about how to reflect the importance of the climate in the future you design...





# THIS IS HEAVY STUFF...

We know... so please keep in mind your game should be engaging to play, and given the subject matter, the world you build will be replete with complexity, hijinks, and decision-making dilemmas. We're serious about the urgent state of our climate, and are keenly aware that to reach a broad swath of players you'll have to lead with a good story that will keep them wanting more. We believe that because climate touches everything, **there is no one way to make a game about climate futures!**

**JUST PLAY** ✨





# QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Consider these questions inspired by  
our narrative research findings as you design:

# QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

## ABOUT YOU

What is your sensory and emotional experience of climate change? How does it look, feel, sound, taste, and smell?

Is there a moment in your life that changed the way you think about climate. How did your behavior and mindset change after that moment?

What tensions do you experience in your daily life when it comes to climate change?

## ABOUT YOUR GAME

Does your game imagine beyond the traditional dichotomy of a dystopian future or an unrealistically stable one? Be creative about depicting the in-between!

Does your game allow players to consider the impacts of climate change on communities in a way that does not compromise their dignity? Ex. ensuring that portrayals of impacted communities do not engage stereotypes.

We are not climate scientists, AND we don't expect you to be either... does your game invite all potential players to consider climate in some accessible way (even those who may not yet believe in the urgency of climate change)?



*true or false?*

**CLIMATE CHANGE IS  
SOLELY A NATURAL  
PHENOMENON.**

**JUST PLAY ✦**

# FALSE

**Overwhelming scientific evidence confirms that human activities are the primary drivers of the rapid changes observed in Earth's climate over the past century.** Dismissing human influence on climate change can lead to inaction or inadequate responses to the urgent need for mitigation and adaptation measures. By addressing common misconceptions about climate change, such as the belief that it is solely natural, game creators can provide players with scientifically accurate information that helps them understand the causes and consequences of climate change more fully.

[Photo by Roya Ann Miller on Unsplash](#)

*true or false?*

**WOMEN ARE  
DISPROPORTIONATELY  
AFFECTED BY CLIMATE  
CHANGE.**

**JUST PLAY ✦**

# TRUE

**“THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A SINGLE-ISSUE STRUGGLE BECAUSE WE DO NOT LIVE SINGLE-ISSUE LIVES.”**

**—AUDRE LORDE**

**Women and gender expansive people intersectionally speaking, as well as Black people, Indigenous, People of Color, and people navigating conditions of impoverishment** (Yes, we know that all of these groups overlap! as Audre Lorde said “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.”). So many parts of our world have been designed in a way that deliberately distances some groups from equitable access to power and natural resources. As a result, at the intersections of facets of identity like race, gender, social class, and countless others, many are already navigating disproportionate harm caused by a rapidly changing climate. Climate change affects everyone, but we would be remiss to imagine that it will affect us all in the exact same ways.

*true or false?*

**NATURAL DISASTERS ARE  
UNRELATED TO CLIMATE  
CHANGE.**

**JUST PLAY** ✦

# FALSE



**2010-2019 was the warmest decade ever recorded across the globe.** Global warming has brought about natural disasters like massive wildfires, hurricanes, droughts, and floods and forcibly displaced communities fleeing human rights violations, political and economic unrest, violence, and threats to their lives.

A direct byproduct of this is the issue of litter in the oceans and microplastics, which further exacerbate the issues above. Cities around the globe are under equipped to deal with these new arising problems and new solutions must be made to adapt.

[Photo by Mike Newbry on Unsplash](#)



*true or false?*

**THERE IS A ROLE FOR  
EVERYONE IN ADDRESSING  
CLIMATE CHANGE.**

**JUST PLAY ✦**

# TRUE



**Achieving systems level change in this context depends on both big and small actions and the relationships of people and actions in society.** Large corporate campaigns and initiatives to end fossil fuel extraction and shift towards alternative renewable energy should work in tandem with small individual actions in communities to reduce and limit energy consumption. Small individual actions can create a ripple effect that impacts these larger systems. Moving towards transformative progress over unattainable perfection is paramount in reaching a broader audience in collective systems change for a sustainable future.

Photo by John Englart

*true or false?*

**YOUR FAVORITE A/RPG  
CAN BE PERCEIVED AS A  
CLIMATE SIMULATIONS  
GAME.**

**JUST PLAY ✦**

# TRUE



**Any game that invites you to inhabit a character and a new world is making choices about the environment, its state, the choices reflected in how the environment is affected by game play.** Features like sudden, seemingly unforeseeable storms and drastic shifts that force your characters to reckon with changes in terrain are action-oriented ways to get players thinking and making rapid decisions as a direct result of changes in climate. In your game, you may consider addressing this through the ways that things like food energy, fuel, technology, community, health and a host of other elements emerge, as all of these are inextricably linked with climate.

Photo by Gorodenkoff Studios

# NARRATIVE RESEARCH TAKEAWAYS

In our most recent workshop, in partnership with Good Energy, we were able to connect with stakeholders across the climate ecosystem to ask their thoughts on the key thematic elements that are most important to touch on in climate narratives.

This chart outlines the kind of phenomenal folks we got to speak with:

Activist	Film Producer	Homesteader	Director of Research	Forging Educator
Doula	Climate Psychologist	Bird Watcher	Climate Campaigner	Eco-therapist
Marine Biologist	Homemaker	Social Worker	Urban Developer	Farmer
Head of Climate	Retired Educator	Parent	Mechanical Engineer	Wildlife Biologist

In addition to the array of professional and lived experiences, our workshops were enriched by the diversity of identities reflected by participants. Our participants convened across regions and time zones to grapple with what we believe to be among the most pressing issues of our lives. **The following pages contain some key themes that were uncovered and explored in those conversations.**

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# POTENTIAL FUTURES



Speculating about potential futures allows creators to educate audiences about the possible consequences of different climate change scenarios. By depicting various outcomes, from best-case to worst-case scenarios, creators can illustrate the importance of taking action to mitigate climate change and adapt to its impacts. Imagining alternative futures can inspire viewers to take action to create a more desirable outcome. By presenting hopeful and aspirational visions of the future, creators can motivate individuals, communities, and policymakers to work towards a sustainable and resilient world.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service

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# CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change poses significant and immediate threats to human societies, ecosystems, and the planet as a whole. Content that explores its consequences highlights the urgency of taking action to mitigate its impacts and adapt to changes already underway. Many people still lack a full understanding of the extent and severity of climate change and its consequences.

[Photo by Matt Palmer on Unsplash](#)





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# HONORING INDIGENOUS STEWARDSHIP



Indigenous communities around the globe have been distanced from their homes, and as recently as the last century many were forced into institutions that sought to strip them of their heritage, our workshops revealed a reverence for Indigenous stewardship. We recognize that many communities are actively working to maintain spiritual and cultural connections to the land and honor ancestral knowledge about local ecosystems, biodiversity, and sustainable resource management practices. At the same time, we recognize that linking Indigenous communities

to both the past and the land engages harmful stereotypes that act as a barrier to their inclusion in contemporary movements towards mitigating climate change among other efforts towards justice. Rather than seeking to tell these stories alone it is important to interrogate what lived experiences and mindsets we're bringing to our work—nothing is “neutral”. As such, finding ways to honor the aforementioned knowledge and create opportunities for co-authorship wherever possible is pivotal to telling stories that can meaningfully catalyze change at any scale.

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# BARRIERS TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

There are various tensions surrounding climate change, including a lack of understanding. There is concern that the issue may be too all-encompassing to solve effectively, with societal norms and stigma complicating efforts. Disbelief and a lack of interest are noted as barriers to action, leading to self-questioning and discourse within communities. For some, it may not feel as though the issue is sufficiently salient – in part, because although movements for environmental justice have historically existed across cultural communities, the most prominently featured leaders have not been broadly representative. Overall, these tensions underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of the challenge ahead.

Existing power structures perpetuate inequalities, injustices, and exploitation. There are many structures (and individuals within these structures) that use their power to perpetuate the practices that continue to exacerbate climate change. These range from promoting ideas of consumerism to policies that protect extractive practices to big oil. Power structures often marginalize and silence certain groups within society. Content that challenges these structures can shine a light on abuses of power and hold individuals, institutions, and systems accountable for their actions. By questioning established power structures, content creators encourage audiences to think critically about the distribution of power and privilege in society. This can lead to greater awareness of systemic issues and stimulate discussions about how to create more equitable and just societies. Content creators have the opportunity to amplify the voices of marginalized communities, challenge dominant narratives, and advocate for greater representation and inclusion.

[Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash](#)

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# CHALLENGING POWER STRUCTURES



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# IMPORTANCE OF CONSERVATION



Conservation efforts are essential for protecting the rich diversity of life on Earth and play a crucial role in mitigating climate change by preserving carbon sinks such as forests, wetlands, and oceans. . Healthy ecosystems provide essential services such as clean air and water, pollination of crops, regulation of climate, and protection against natural disasters. Content that emphasizes the importance of conservation can illustrate how these ecosystem services benefit society and highlight the economic and social value of preserving natural habitats.

[Photo by Tyler Butler on Unsplash](#)

When people feel a deep connection to nature, they are more likely to take action to protect it.

Content that encourages reconnecting with nature can raise awareness about the importance of environmental conservation and stewardship. Reconnecting with nature involves adopting sustainable lifestyle practices, such as reducing consumption, minimizing waste, and supporting eco-friendly initiatives. Spending time in nature has been shown to have numerous physical, mental, and emotional benefits, including reducing stress, improving mood, boosting creativity, and promoting overall well-being. By showcasing the beauty, diversity, and fragility of the natural world, creators can inspire audiences to appreciate and protect the environment.

[Photo by Eyoel Kahssay on Unsplash](#)

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# RECONNECTING WITH NATURE



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# MENTAL HEALTH

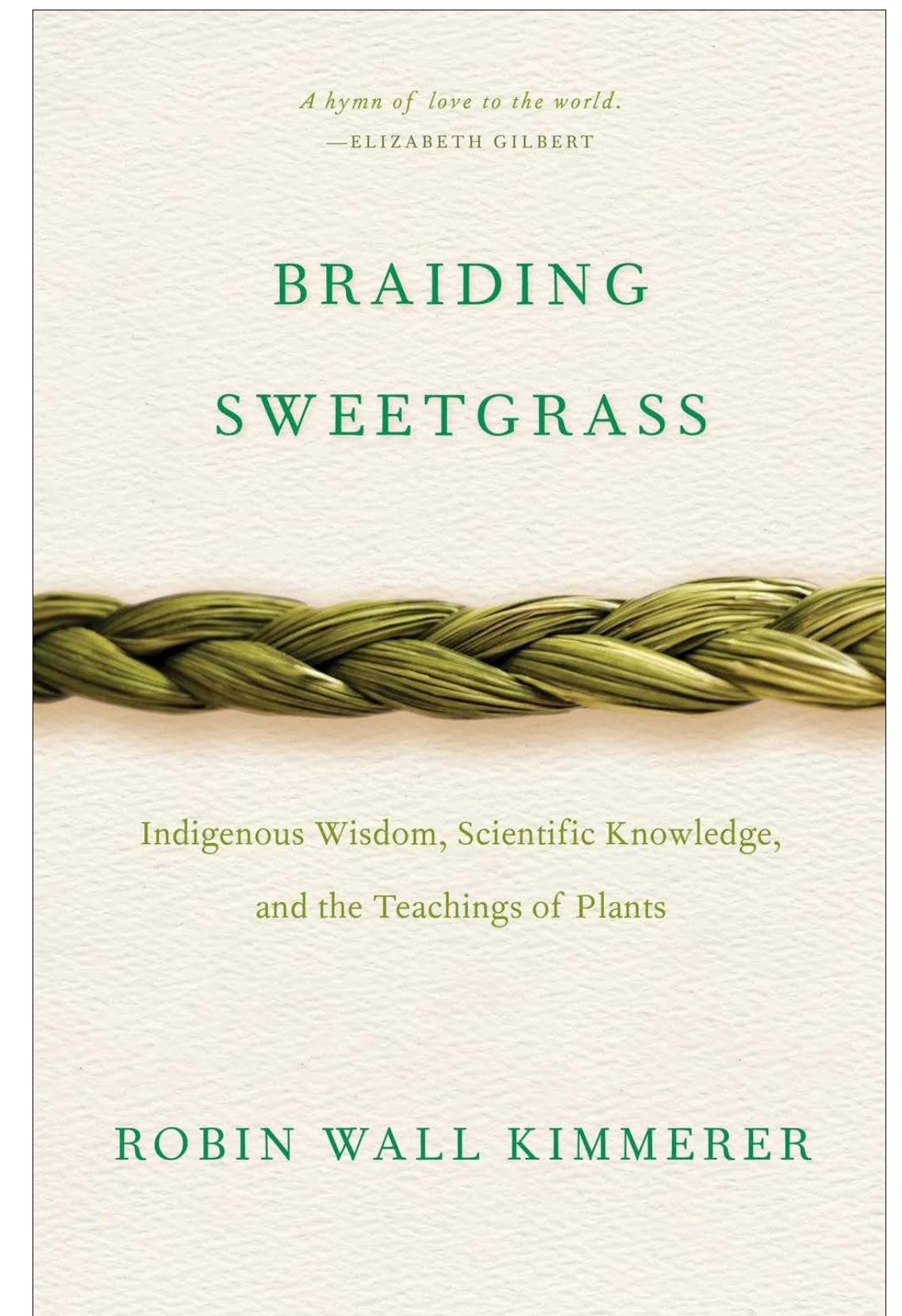
As climate change becomes more real to the individual life, mental health across communities is harshly affected. Feelings of dread, defeat, powerlessness, and despair are becoming more common. An internal battle occurs for individuals who may want to discuss climate change and take action, but also feel disempowered and unhelpful. For some, the rapid and unprecedented changes that are unfolding may contribute to these feelings of deflation. As climate change progresses more steps will be needed as a society to ensure the mental health of populations across all groups is considered and prioritized, not only to provide spaces for climate solutions but for our collective well-being.

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# HISTORY AND INTERDEPENDENT SYSTEMS

History provides a record of past experiences, successes, and failures, which serve as valuable lessons for present and future generations. By studying history, we can learn from the evolutionary experiences of our ancestors, understanding how they adapted to challenges, innovated solutions, and navigated complex social, environmental, and political landscapes. Many posit that solutions that could be responsive to this moment already exist. This knowledge informs our decision-making processes and helps us better prepare for and respond to current and future challenges, including those related to climate change, social justice, and sustainability.

Cover Art: Milkweed Editions



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# RESPOND TO AUDIENCE DESIRES

Audiences, especially younger generations, want honest and authentic portrayals of their lived experiences and opportunities to design their futures for themselves. Many would rather do without the patronizing attitudes that further stymie progress or foster a sense of dread in the climate movement ([New York Times](#), 2022). Leaning away from simplified “good versus evil” tropes in climate storytelling also allows for more nuanced stories to be shared about this complex global issue that should be representative of a collective movement that is inclusive of people across all lines of difference.

Photo by Li-An Lim on Unsplash





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# INTERDISCIPLINARY SOLUTIONS

Given the range of experiences reflected in our qualitative research process, participants explored the need for varied solutions and cross-sector coalitions unified by the cause of mitigating the damage done by climate change. From our vantage point, storytelling across mediums is pivotal to informing and engaging audiences, and when we say collective action we mean this beyond the individual level! It's not just about generating individual moral urgency, but also about ensuring that adequate funding is invested in all kinds of solutions.

# POSITIVE EXAMPLES ABOUND

Our participants noted the existence of media that educated and engaged them over the course of their lives. These examples ranged from climate-centered documentaries to children's shows like *Fern Gully*. Stories about climate change feel pressing at this moment, but they are not novel!



**FERN GULLY**



**GULLAH GULLAH  
ISLAND**



**WALL-E**



**HOW TO BLOW  
UP A PIPELINE**



**LAKOTA NATION  
VS. UNITED  
STATES**



# KEY TERMS

Below are a list of terms and popular language you may encounter throughout this toolkit or in any broader research you decide to do as your brainstorm. The following provide our definition and understanding of this language.

# KEY TERMS

## **INTERSECTIONALITY** (both definition and dispelling misuses)

Intersectionality is a term coined by legal scholar and Critical Race Theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. In examining the outcomes of workplace discrimination cases, she found that they had previously only considered one part of employees' identities. For Black women, there had not been a legal precedent at the intersection of race and gender. The term, then, speaks to the experience of compound oppression at the intersections of multiple historically marginalized facets of identity. Although it has existed for decades, the term has gained widespread popularity, leading to a lot of misconceptions about what it is and how it should be used. Many people incorrectly use it to describe holding multiple identities at one time, rather than accurately referring to the relationship between those identities and power/societal advantage.

## **SOCIAL EQUITY VS. EQUALITY:**

In the context of social identity, equity refers to people getting their unique needs met, whereas equality refers to all people gaining access to exactly the same resources irrespective of who they are and what they may need.

## **STABILITY VS. INSTABILITY** (in this context)

In the context of climate change, stability refers to predictable climate conditions over time. Conversely, instability refers to changes occurring at a pace that we have not prepared to withstand at scale as a direct result of climate change.

## **STORY**

A specific tale, real or imaginary, guided by characters, a world that is presented and an experience you are invited to go through with these characters.

## **NARRATIVE**

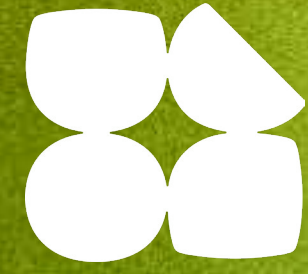
Collections of story contribute to broader narratives about particular themes, people and things. Narratives tend to be held by a broader collective of people and contribute to cultural norms and beliefs. For example, the narrative that “boys will be boys” is a notion that has been presented in stories as a given, for generations, and has been widely adopted by folks as true despite any factual evidence..

## **STORYTELLING**

Storytelling is one of the oldest traditions throughout the world. It is one way that humans are able to learn, connect, and gain empathy. It is a way to intrigue a wide range of people. Storytelling brings people together and encourages personal connection and personal revelations. Using storytelling in the climate change movement can create a space where the issue isn't so overwhelming. It can present the issues in a way that is accessible and interesting to different people with different beliefs and literacy levels.

## **INTERDISCIPLINARY**

This refers to collaboration across fields, which can include academic disciplines or different artistic mediums. As stated throughout this resource, climate change is an everyone and everything issue—it will require partnership across content areas.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to everyone who participated in our  
Narrative Research Workshops!

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