

Everything Change--Volume I: Multidisciplinary Teaching Resource

This resource was created for Brookdale Community College's Global Citizenship Project (GCP) by Kelsey Maki, faculty liaison to the International Education Center. GCP has selected "Everything Change" as the text for the Spring 2021 Global Read, a common intellectual experience in which faculty from various disciplines assign a text that speaks to climate change. These questions address subject matter in a variety of disciplines: Anthropology, Art, Biology, Business, Earth Science, Economics, Education, Engineering, English, Environmental Science, Gender Studies, Geography, Health Sciences, History, Literature, Music, Philosophy, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, and Speech. If you have any suggestions, corrections, or comments, please email international@brookdalecc.edu

Why assign fiction?

Paolo Bacigalupi: "Fiction is able to move you past the political identity debates. A lot of times, I can set a story in a future where the world is already broken by climate change. I don't need to have characters representing the green perspective versus the industrial perspective. I can just have a bunch of characters who run around in a devastated world. That fictional world makes the argument about how serious climate change is, so the characters don't have to. And that means that you can tell stories to people who otherwise would be completely unwilling to look at climate change, or take it seriously . . . Beyond that, fiction has this superpower of creating empathy in people for alien experiences. You can live inside of the skin of a person who is utterly unlike you. And if I can live inside of the skin of somebody who is a different gender or a different race or from a different class background and suddenly imbibe their concerns and live inside of their concerns, that's really powerful" (207-208).

Foreword by Kim Stanley Robinson

Quotation

- "We decide what to do based on the stories we tell ourselves, so we very much need to be telling stories about our responses to climate change and the associated massive problems bearing down on us and our descendants" (x).

Questions

- What stories has the US been telling itself about climate change?
- How does the dominant narrative in the US compare with the stories that other countries tell? Bonus: In your response, reference this Grist article: "[How do Countries Cover Climate Change?](#)"

Intro by Manjana Milkoreit, Meredith Martinez, & Joey Eschrich

Quotations

- "Today, all we can do is imagine our possible climate futures. Using Margaret Atwood's words, we have to imagine the "Everything Change." We have chosen her thought-provoking turn of phrase as the title for our anthology not just because it reflects the scale of the task ahead, but also because it captures the substance of the twelve stories we present here: climate-induced changes in all aspects of human experience, ranging from individual emotions and aspirations to family life, professional trajectories, the shape of communities, and the organization of societies" (xiii).

- “We believe that stories are empathy machines, devices that enable us to connect with people in drastically different circumstances, in futures we have not yet glimpsed but are even today helping to create with our decisions to act, or to not act” (xviii).

Questions

- Is Atwood’s phrase appropriate? Why/why not? What other phrases might be used to describe the effects of climate change?

Sunshine State by Adam Flynn & Andrew Dana Hudson

Summary

Set 2040, this story begins in Galveston, with an insurance saleswoman named Ramses, who journeys to Florida with her army buddy, Jefferson, to learn more about “the myth,” a natural repair system for the environment, which was designed by a scientist named Nina, and is managed by a diverse team. When the government learns of the project, the team forms an alliance with a group of refugees and uses social media to gain support for their cause. After a hurricane brings destruction to the area, the myth adapts to function as a home to displaced people.

Questions

- HISTORY & GEOGRAPHY: In the story, people who once belonged to nations are now without land. Using your knowledge of history and geography, predict which countries will see the greatest percentage of its people displaced?
- ANTHROPOLOGY & SOCIOLOGY: Compare and contrast the way in which “the myth” functions in the story to the way in which myths typically function in cultures. How are they different? How are they similar?
- SCIENCE, ENGINEERING, & TECHNOLOGY: What recent technological developments or innovations are similar to “the myth”?
- BUSINESS & ECONOMICS: In what ways do the people working on the myth subvert or overturn market-based economies?

Shrinking Sinking Land by Kelly Cowley

Summary

The story paints an apocalyptic vignette of urban England in the future. The protagonist, Flea Wheeler, is a sixteen-year-old girl squatting in a flat with her mother (Shell) and brother (Wes). Flea attempts to rescue her mother, who has fallen through a sinkhole in the living room, but ends up abandoning her on the cusp of the G.M.H. (Global Mandatory Hibernation).

Questions

- HISTORY: Scarcity of resources creates chaos in the story. Compare the chaos depicted in the story to similar situations in history.
- ANTHROPOLOGY & SOCIOLOGY: Explain the structure of the family unit that’s depicted in this story and the way in which political and economic forces have impacted this family.
- ENGLISH: How are parenting and caretaking enacted by the characters? Is caring for one’s family a metaphor for our responsibility and connection to the planet? Why/why not?
- PSYCHOLOGY: Are the behaviors and fears of the characters indicative of larger mental issues? Explain.
- SCIENCE, ENGINEERING, & TECHNOLOGY: Using only the items and technologies that are mentioned in the story, could you design a way for Flea to help Shell escape the sinkhole?

Victor and the Fish by Matthew S. Henry

Summary

Victor, a retired ecology professor who now works as a fishing guide in Montana, takes a father and son on a fishing trip. When the boy catches a cutthroat trout, a fish that the government believes is dead, Victor releases the fish so they're unable to photograph it, as he fears the government's reaction and eventual mismanagement. To prevent such mismanagement, Victor has secretly set up a spawning area for the fish, but as forest fires continue to burn, the fate of Victor's fish appears grim.

Questions

- POLITICAL SCIENCE: How is the FWP depicted in this story? Does this confirm or overturn what you believe to be true about government agencies?
- SOCIOLOGY & PSYCHOLOGY: What social and psychological forces may explain Victor's behavior, particularly his desire to save the fish?
- BIOLOGY & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE: Henry writes, "[s]tressed by overzealous fishing, an already vulnerable cuttie population had been outcompeted by the browns, hybridized beyond recognition with the rainbows and, improbably, devoured by a once-threatened bull trout population" (48). Are these obstacles common to a struggling species? Explain.

Acqua Alta by Ashley Bevilacqua Anglin

Summary

An eleven-year-old female protagonist cares for her ninety-eight-year-old grandfather in their native Venezia (Italy), after her father and his new wife have relocated due to rising seas. They're living off the grid when a toxic spill and storm surge forces them to evacuate.

Questions

- ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY: In the story, the characters communicate through rings that seem to have a similar functionality to that of cellphones. Is it feasible that this technology will one day become the norm across societies? Why/why not?
- HISTORY: A book about Marco Polo is referenced in the story. Are these references historically accurate?
- SOCIOLOGY: Explain the practice and norms of caretaking in the society that's living off-the-grid in this story. Compare and contrast these norms with those that currently dominate in the US.
- ENGLISH: Authenticity of place is a motif in this story. Explain the significance of this motif and the way in which it relates to the larger theme of conservation.

The Grandchild Paradox by Daniel Thron

Summary

Set on an island called "The Boats," this story centers on an unnamed protagonist and his friend Kimmy, both of whom sell repaired bikes. The protagonist is in love with Kimmy and faces a conflict when Kimmy says she wants to have a baby with him after discussing how irresponsible previous generations have been in not addressing climate change as they continue to have children.

Questions

- SOCIOLOGY & ANTHROPOLOGY: The young people in this story feel powerless and angry at their elders for ruining their world. Is this a common generational experience or does the climate crisis make their experience unique?

- PHILOSOPHY: Explain the “Grandfather Paradox” in philosophy. How is this paradox represented in the story?
- GENDER STUDIES: How is Kimmy portrayed in the story? Do these portrayals subvert or reinforce gender norms?

Wonder of the World by Kathryn Blume

Summary

A first-person narrator named Jess expresses longing for human connection as she reflects on the ingenuity of her son Ben, a sixteen-year-old boy who uses recycled materials to design communication devices. During a rare snowstorm, Ben decides he wants to send a message around the world, a message that provides hope to many, including his mother.

Questions

- ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY: Draw a diagram for the tricorder that Ben builds.
- PSYCHOLOGY & ECONOMICS: Explain the way in which economic systems, as they’re represented in this story, shape people’s relationships and attitudes.
- ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE: What’s the climate like in this story? Is this consistent with current models and predictions?
- ENGLISH & HISTORY: In the story, language is fluid and people communicate in inventive ways. Historically speaking, is this typical or atypical?

Masks by Stirling Davenport

Summary

Julie, a young Chinese-American woman with a tumultuous past, lives in Beijing and works as a TA for Mark Northland, who is an expert on transgenic plants and a professor of Agro-Biotech at China Agricultural University. The story, which explores power and inequality, centers on a proposition from Li Wei, a wealthy and handsome Deputy Minister.

Questions

- ART: How are art and nature represented and commodified in this story?
- SOCIOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY, & GENDER STUDIES: How are structures of power, wealth, and gender represented in the story? What theories and sociocultural lenses provide a useful framework for understanding these representations?
- HEALTH SCIENCE: In the story, smoggy conditions are the norm. Explain the health consequences of this and the large-scale challenges of caring for this population.
- ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY: Mark is asked to “design a prototype for a home that would be self-generating and self-sustaining, not only in terms of energy, but in terms of food and water” (114). Is this possible? If so, how would it look? If not, why not?

Thirteenth Year by Diana Rose Harper

Summary

A post-apocalypse prose poem in eighteen stanzas that depicts a world where infertile people live below ground. The title is a reference to natural cycles, change, and renewal.

Questions

- EARTH SCIENCE & BIOLOGY: Make a conjecture about what, exactly, happened during the “Bang” that killed most people.
- PSYCHOLOGY & NEUROSCIENCE: Explain what Harper means when she writes “But the amygdala / is the advisor / not the monarch” (130).

- **SPEECH & ENGLISH:** Why did Harper choose to compose a prose poem? Was this rhetorical choice effective?
- **ART & MUSIC:** The poem asserts that art and music continue to define us as humans. What support can you provide for this assertion?

LOSD and Fount by Henrietta Hartl

Summary

The story centers on Fount, a lonely water engineer who lives on an island with an artificially intelligent robot used for data collection and companionship. Fount builds a boat to leave the island, but is stopped by LOSD.

Questions

- **PSYCHOLOGY & HEALTH SCIENCES:** In the story, isolation is considered a serious threat to human health. Explain the current research on the way in which social connections impact our overall health.
- **PHILOSOPHY:** LOSD's duty to collect data and his responsibility to provide companionship create a dilemma when Fount wants to leave the island. Is LOSD's solution to this dilemma ethical?
- **ENGLISH:** "Drowning" is used in both literal and metaphorical ways in the story: a literal drowning from rising seas and a metaphorical drowning in data. Which use of the term creates a more powerful image? Why?

On Darwin Tides by Shauna O'Meara

Summary

A narrator named Maslina works in a market selling items to "Last Chance" tourists. Set in Malaysia, the story presents a world rife with disease and death. The decay of natural resources has created turmoil and scarcity, both of which have forced Maslina and her brother Tadi to engage in illegal activities to survive.

Questions

- **BUSINESS:** In the story, handmade items are more valuable than those that are mass produced in poor working conditions. Explain the way in which labor and value are determined in a capitalist system.
- **HISTORY:** The narrator refers to violence and rioting on the streets of Indonesia. Use your knowledge of history to offer a conjecture about the circumstances that led to this breakdown.
- **ANTHROPOLOGY & SOCIOLOGY:** Clothing often signals one's status and identity. How do the different outfits described in the story represent privilege and culture?
- **BIOLOGY & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE:** Explain the causes and consequences of algal bloom.
- **PHILOSOPHY:** Is it permissible to break the law when one has no other options? Explain your response using an ethical framework.

Standing Still by Lindsay Redifer

Summary

An unnamed American narrator comes to Madagascar as a Peace Corps volunteer in 2005. She ends up staying to work as a teacher as natural disasters ravage the islands and render them

unrecognizable. The narrator confronts xenophobia, but is ultimately accepted by Larissa, a respected local who gives the narrator's students a gift before leaving the island.

Questions

- EARTH SCIENCE: In the story, a tsunami is the central catastrophe that the people of Madagascar face. Research recent tsunamis and explain the way in which climate change may affect the prevalence and frequency of such events.
- EDUCATION: Do you believe the narrator is a successful teacher? Support your answer with textual evidence.
- ANTHROPOLOGY & SOCIOLOGY: Food is closely tied to culture. Do you believe that a loss of native dishes necessarily indicates that a culture is threatened or endangered?
- LITERATURE: What do plants symbolize in the story? Compare and contrast Redifer's depiction of vegetation with that of other writers of fiction.

Into the Storm by Yakos Spiliotopoulos

Summary

A hurricane hits Ottawa as Anwar, the protagonist, waits in Parliament for Henry, an opposition leader who is--ironically--invested in the status quo. The central conflict arises when Anwar asks for Henry's support in overthrowing a government that isn't taking climate change seriously. After recalling a defining event from his childhood, Anwar resolves to move forward without Henry's support.

Questions

- ECONOMICS: How does income inequality and campaign finance impact the political system depicted in the story? Explain the broader ways in which economic systems shape environmental policies.
- POLITICAL SCIENCE: Explain the system of government depicted in the story. Compare and contrast this system with that of the US.
- HISTORY: Are there historical parallels for the type of government takeover that Anwar is plotting? Explain.
- PSYCHOLOGY: In the story, Anwar finds his resolve in a childhood memory. In what ways do prior challenges and traumas shape people's behaviors? Refer to recent case studies to support your response.
- SPEECH & ENGLISH: How can Anwar make his argument more persuasive to Henry?