



# HELPING OUR HURTING PLANET

*An interdisciplinary* EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP on  
CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

## Guidance for Teachers

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# Overview

**Helping our Hurting Planet** explores the climate and biodiversity crisis and how pupils can use their leadership skills to effect individual and systemic change to create a more sustainable and fairer world.

The workshop includes presentations as well as art and writing activities. The art activity facilitated by artist Sarah Strachan encourages pupils to think about the quality of the air they breathe both at home and outside, and the causes of air pollution. The writing activity by Rosie Wright from Hope for the Future supports pupils in exploring the importance of writing to and engaging with members of parliament in Westminster, Holyrood and/or the Senedd.

Each activity is linked to the National curriculum in Wales and England and the Curriculum For Excellence in Scotland.

The following document provides guidance on each activity and presentation including equipment needed, curriculum links and the main concepts covered.

We recommend watching the presentations and completing the activities in the suggested order below. Please feel free to also pick which activities you would like to do and choose which presentations you would like to watch.

For enquiries, please email [education@sustainabilityfirst.org.uk](mailto:education@sustainabilityfirst.org.uk).

## Sustainability *first*

The United Nations Global Goals for Sustainable Development were developed in 2015 to provide an agenda for the future of sustainability. The Goals are used across member states and sectors to assess and understand progress and have developed into a common language to discuss sustainability. Many teachers across the globe use the SDGs to embed sustainability within education.

The following workshop series supports the realisation of various Global Goals, including:



## Presentations and Activities

**Presentation 1: Helping our hurting planet.** Sonya Peres gives a presentation on the current ecological crisis the Earth is in and the different ways we can help address climate change.

**Activity 1: How to write to your MP run by Hope for the Future.** This workshop looks at how to engage with local MPs to address issues of concern, such as climate change. It provides a step-by-step guide to researching your local MPs interests and parliamentary record and then strategically contacting them via correspondence and building common ground to improve your chance of making change happen.

Resource: pen, paper, access to the internet.

Activity 2: **Sound art workshop run by Sarah Strachan.** Sarah looks at how our perception of, and belonging in the world affects our ecological awareness. The workshop gets pupils to think about the quality of air they breathe and then produce a collaborative sound clip of breathing.

Resources: Your body and a voice recorder (most phones are fine), access to a computer, free editing software such as Garageband or Audacity.

## Equipment:

- Device to share video
- Pencils, paper and/or computers for pupils' to write questions, comments, concerns etc.

## Main concepts:

- Exploring the causes and impacts of the climate and biodiversity crisis
- Exploring how water gets to our homes
- Understanding the impacts of the climate crisis on water systems

## Curriculum Linking:

- **England**

Citizenship: KS3: Citizenship – Pupils will understand the roles played by public institutions and voluntary groups in society, and the ways in which citizens work together to improve their communities, including opportunities to participate in school-based activities.

- **Scotland**

Social Studies: I can describe the factors contributing to a major social, political or economic change in the past and can assess the impact on people's lives. (SOC 3-05a)

I can explain some of the processes which contribute to climate change and discuss the possible impact of atmospheric change on the survival of living things. (SCN 3-05b)

- **Wales**

Geography: Pupils should be given opportunities to study tomorrow's citizens: issues in Wales and the wider world of living sustainably and the responsibilities of being a global citizen

Geography: Pupils should be given opportunities to study threatened environments: characteristics of, and possibilities for, their sustainable development

## Step by Step Guidance:

- Watch the video with pupils
- Afterward, encourage pupils in groups, or as a class, to explore the topics covered in the video, perhaps by considering the following questions:

1. Is the climate crisis the responsibility of everyone, or just certain countries?
2. How could we have had improvements in healthcare without encouraging societies globally to rely on fossil fuels? What during the industrial revolution could have changed to make our world fairer and more sustainable?
3. What is the most beautiful place you have visited? How might the climate and biodiversity crisis impact this place. How can you use your leadership skills to try and protect it?
4. Why is it important to use the term "climate and biodiversity crisis" not just climate change?



**Make sure to upload your work [here](#) so we can learn with you and share your work widely with experts at our pupils' assembly**

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We're going to talk about the climate and biodiversity crisis and how we can use leadership skills to take action. We'll focus on how anyone, no matter their age, level of education, where they live, their interests, can be a leader and tackle the climate crisis

What is the Climate and Biodiversity Crisis?

Isn't planet earth an amazing place to live? From rolling hills, domineering mountains, deep, dark, mysterious lakes, stormy seas, green meadows, lush jungles, dry and endless deserts ... the beauty of the planet is absolutely astounding. Where is the most beautiful place you've ever visited or seen on a wildlife programme?

Aside from all the beauty, the earth is our home – it protects us by giving us shelter, food and water, a place to rest, furry and human companions and pretty much everything we need to be healthy and happy!

Unfortunately, humans do not always treat the earth the way it treats us. In fact, we are in a climate and biodiversity crisis, and as many people – particularly young people – have recognised, we urgently need to act.

The climate crisis is a term used to describe changing average weather across the earth, like hotter or rainier summers and extreme weather events like hurricanes and flash floods. The biodiversity crisis refers to the extinction or endangerment of a wide array of plants, animals, insects, marine life, and other living things due to changing weather, air, and water pollution, for example. All of this has been caused by humans and the way we live.

A lot of what we do, like driving in cars, flying in airplanes, heating our homes, turning on the television, making clothes, furniture, and computers in factories, uses energy. Now, a lot of this energy comes from a group of sources called fossil fuels which includes oil, gas, and coal. To get energy from fossil fuels, we need to burn them. Unfortunately, this releases carbon dioxide into the air.

But why is this bad? Carbon dioxide is a type of greenhouse gas. Greenhouse gases trap heat in the atmosphere. We need some greenhouse gases to make sure the planet does not get too cold, but across the world, we have been using so much energy to make things to buy, and to drive and fly and do things, there are actually too many greenhouse gases in the atmosphere now, and that is causing changing temperatures. Higher temperatures can destroy the habitats that many plants and animals live in, decreasing biodiversity and a whole host of other, interrelated problems which I will talk about in a moment.

The history of the earth and its ecosystems and temperatures is often categorised into periods of time – these are called geological time scales. Many scientists informally call the current period of time we are in the Anthropocene Epoch. Anthro is a Greek term for "human." They use this term to describe the period in the Earth's history when human activity started to have a significant impact on the planet's climate and ecosystems.

Sea levels are rising due to glaciers and ice sheets melting from increasing temperatures. Increasing global temperatures also contribute to increasing temperatures of sea water. As warmer water occupies a greater volume, or takes up more space, the sea expands.

Rising sea temperatures and sea levels affect life in the oceans. For example, the great Barrier Reef in the Indian Ocean near Australia is home to 25% of all known marine species. But as temperatures rise and oceans get warmer, the beautiful corals that make up the Great Barrier Reef become bleached and die, which means the reef has less capacity to provide a home for marine life. With nowhere to live, many species suffer or die.

Rising sea temperatures and melting glaciers also contribute to flooding which can affect communities that live near the sea. Some countries, like Bangladesh in South Asia, are especially vulnerable to coastal flooding due to most of the land being low-lying and only 5 meters above sea level. With 28% of the population living by the sea and in extreme poverty, it is difficult for many people there to move home to avoid floods or have the resources that will help them recover when flooding happens. It is estimated that by 2050, if the climate crisis continues on the same path, 18 million people in Bangladesh will have to move from sea level rising alone – that's the equivalent of almost a third of the UK's population today.

Flooding due to the climate and biodiversity crisis is not just caused by rising sea levels but extreme weather events like hurricanes and heavy rain. In the UK, many inland communities are already experiencing flooding from heavy rainfall, and this is expected to worsen if the climate crisis progresses. Heavy rainfall can cause rivers to flood and overflow into nearby communities and can also cause surface flooding in roads and towns. In the UK, some areas are protected by flood defenses, like dams or walls that protect areas from overflowing water, but other areas aren't – unfortunately, often it is the poorest people in the UK who are more vulnerable to flooding.

The impacts of the climate crisis and human activities also contribute to decreasing biodiversity. Biodiversity is the variety of plants and living things on planet earth and more specifically, in an ecosystem. We need biodiversity to ensure healthy and functioning ecosystems that can recover from challenges like droughts, or storms, or flooding, for example. An ecosystem is all the living things in an area – like in a lake, or a sea or a river. Ecosystems work delicately in perfect harmony – plants and animals rely on one another in different ways – creating a healthy environment for all living things. If one species is struggling, all other species in an ecosystem will suffer as well. For example, if we don't grow enough flowers for insects like bees to collect nectar from, their populations will go down and we might not have enough insects to pollinate the crops that we need to survive on – like the wheat that you may have eaten in your pasta last night or in your toast this morning.

Let's learn more about the other impacts of the climate and biodiversity crisis by talking about trees. Trees are magnificent beings – as you know from your science lessons, to give themselves the energy needed to grow, absorb, or breathe in carbon dioxide, water and sunlight in a process called photosynthesis. This means trees are helpful in taking excess carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.

Trees also provide so many other benefits to living things on earth. Large trees, for example, provide shade for animals and people, making sweltering summer days much more enjoyable! In fact, research has found that planting one oak tree provides as much shade and cooling as five air conditioners working for 20 years. This is going to be increasingly important given the hotter summers we will get with climate change. Trees also manage rainwater and help against flooding, clean the air of pollutants, protect soil so that we can grow food and other plants, provide a home for animals and insects, are spiritually and religiously significant to groups around the world and are just plain stunning to look at as well!

The Amazon is the world's largest tropical rainforest spanning different countries in South America: Brazil, Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia. Unfortunately, the Amazon is experiencing mass deforestation, or the cutting down of trees. In fact, an area the size of a football pitch is cut down every minute in the Amazon to raise cattle or mine for gold.

When deforestation occurs, animals that rely on trees for their homes struggle. This leads to a loss of biodiversity.

Many Indigenous communities rely on trees for shelter, food and medicine. Additionally, the smoke from burning trees to clear land pollutes the air and is not good for the health of people living in those areas. You may have noticed that throughout this presentation, I've mentioned that people in vulnerable situations, like those living in poverty in the UK and abroad, will experience the worst impacts of the climate crisis, despite not contributing as much to the crisis as people who aren't living in poverty. This is called climate injustice. It is important for us to remember that the climate and biodiversity crisis is not just a scientific or technical challenge, but a social challenge. We know what we need to do to stop the crisis, now we need to convince people that the climate and biodiversity crisis is worth tackling and that the people who are experiencing the worst impacts of the climate crisis deserve our support and protection and need to be involved in developing solutions to the problem.

So, what can we do to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis?

We must use our leadership skills to inspire those around us, including our friends, teachers, families, politicians, local shops and more, to take serious and urgent action against the climate and biodiversity crisis.

I want to spend the rest of this session discussing what it means to be a leader and how we can act as leaders to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis by making individual and system wide changes.

Individual changes are things you and me can do in our daily lives to contribute less to the climate crisis. System changes are larger changes in areas such as laws, government policy, economic systems, – and even things like the subjects and curriculum that you are taught at school.

I'd like to start off by saying that you don't need to know everything about the climate and biodiversity crisis to be a leader – you just need to want to help protect people and nature from these challenges! So don't worry if you don't know all the science about melting glaciers or all the history of the industrial revolution. Let's just take action in whatever ways we can.

What or who do you think of when you think of a leader? Some of us may think of politicians, we may think of someone famous, like environmentalist David Attenborough, youth climate activist Greta Thurnberg or a celebrity like Harry Styles.

The truth is, anyone can be a leader, because anyone can develop leadership skills! You don't need to be famous or have a lot of money or power.

So, what is a leader? A leader is someone who does the right thing and inspires people around them to also do the right thing. A leader makes people feel confident that they can contribute to change. Many people say that leaders, "act in service of others" or, they try to make life better for people, including themselves.

What are some specific qualities that would make a good climate leader? Or someone who encourages others to take action to tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis?

Climate leaders will need to have:

1. **Empathy** – to understand that the climate and biodiversity crisis affects people differently, some worse than others. There are some people experiencing the impacts of the crisis right now, and even if we don't experience these impacts now, we need to be empathetic to those people who do and try and help them as much as possible.
2. **Listening skills** – the climate and biodiversity crisis is the biggest challenge the world is facing. Many people are experiencing the crisis differently, some people are afraid, others don't care, some people are worried they will lose their jobs in the changes taking place or that they may lose their homes to flooding, others are worried perhaps they wouldn't be able to get to safety in a flood because they are in wheelchair. Leaders listen to other people – they make sure they hear everyone's concerns, needs and priorities and try and support as many people as possible.
3. **Critical thinking** – Critical thinking means considering evidence, facts, different people's perspectives, and all sorts of things before you make a decision or form an opinion. Leaders question everything! The climate and biodiversity crisis is caused by human activity that is bad for the planet, like using fossil fuels for energy and cutting down the rainforests to raise cows for beef. It is important to question why we keep doing these things – who does it benefit? What would our world look like if we stopped doing these things? And how can we live more sustainably?
4. **Bravery** – A good leader is brave enough to imagine a better world. Sometimes people don't want to go through the effort of making a change because they are afraid of change or how their lives may be after the change happens. Leaders are brave enough to imagine a world better than the one we have now, with a healthy planet and healthy, fairer societies where all people are able to thrive and be happy. Leaders are also brave enough to stand up and ask important questions and look for answers – to really get out there and talk to people!
5. **Self-care** – Leaders need to know how to take a break, rest, relax and ensure they are feeling well, emotionally, and physically. We can't protect the planet's health if we're not healthy ourselves! We can't work to help communities across the world be healthier and happier if we're not feeling great. Taking care of our emotional and physical health is different for everyone. Some people may feel rested and happy being out in nature, like swimming in a lake or hiking in a forest! Some may like eating some chocolate while they watch their favourite television show, others may want to get some exercise or play a sport, and some may just want to be around their friends and family. Whatever it is, make sure you take some time out for yourself!

6. **Collaboration** – We're all in this together! A good leader works with others to achieve a goal. No one person has all the answers to the climate and biodiversity crises. When we collaborate and unite, we bring together many different skillsets, interests and values which means our work can be more impactful!

This leads me to an important point: oftentimes, we think of leadership as a solitary activity or a position that only one person can take. That's not true! Leadership can be a collective pursuit.

Now, let's talk about four ways we can use our leadership skills to start tackling the climate and biodiversity crisis.

### 1. Speak out/educate

The first thing we can do is speak out about the impacts of the climate and biodiversity crises and the importance of acting now. Tell everyone you know! You'd be surprised how many people are unaware of the impacts of the climate and biodiversity crisis and how this may impact them. Make sure to listen to people, their concerns, their questions, and remain empathetic about what challenges they may be facing. Talk to your friends, family, and teachers. Write to your local newspaper, post flyers, talk to your neighbours! There are many ways to communicate with others about what is going on.

### 2. Greening your school

Your school can be a powerful center for climate action. At your school, you can try and work with teachers, teaching assistants and other staff to make changes in many different areas. For example, you can work with your teacher to talk about sustainability and the climate crisis in every subject and see how it is relevant. You can work with catering staff at your school to try and limit food waste or to encourage local, seasonal foods to be served. You can work with your headteacher to make sure all events and activities are as sustainable as possible.

You can show leadership by setting up or joining a climate or environment club in your school to encourage your friends, parents, and teachers to put climate action into practice. You can ask your school to take part in the Eco Schools Green Flag accreditation which supports your school to reduce energy and water usage, reduce carbon emissions in school journeys and improve biodiversity. The programme celebrates your achievements by awarding you a Green Flag accreditation. By showcasing what you can do at school, you can persuade others to act.

### 3. Hold government and businesses accountable

The third thing we can do is hold governments, businesses, and people with power accountable. Holding someone accountable means asking them to explain why they are doing what they are and how they have put their promises, commitments, and legal obligations into practice. Governments should be acting quickly to make sure we no longer need to do things such as use fossil fuels to heat our homes or to travel and to provide information and education for everyone in the UK to understand the crisis we are facing.

One way we can check in on the government is by writing to our members of parliament, members of Scottish Parliament or members of the Welsh Senedd. These politicians represent the area we live in in the UK-wide parliament and in Scotland and Wales. They can speak on our behalf to contribute to laws and decisions that can affect the health of the planet and our societies. Writing to politicians ensures our voice can be heard in decision making. There are many resources to learn how to write to politicians, including an activity as part of this workshop! Writing to politicians involves using our critical thinking skills, bravery, and our collaboration skills to be able to work them to make change! When you write to members of parliament, you can invite them to come to your school so that you, your friends, and teachers can ask questions and learn more about their plans to tackle the climate crisis.

Whilst politicians only stand for election every four or five years and you must be a certain age to vote, we can 'vote with our wallets' for a fair climate future every time we go to the shops or buy something online. You can ask the supermarket where you buy your lunch, for example, what they are doing to ensure that the food in your sandwich has been produced sustainably and without adding to harmful carbon emissions. Many businesses are also making promises about what they will do to protect the environment. This sort of action can help hold them to account for this, or check in to see if they are keeping their word.

### 4. Green Jobs

What it means to be a climate leader may change as you get older. When you are an adult, there will still be many ways you can work to ensure a healthy planet and happy communities. One way is through your job! You may have heard the term "green jobs" - green jobs often refer to jobs that directly work to protect the planet and nature from the climate and biodiversity crisis, in industries like renewable energy and forest management. However, any job can be a "green job" if it in anyway helps to protect people and planet! For example, being a teacher can be a green job if you teach your pupils about how to take care of planet earth. Working as a social worker, or a carer or a nurse, can be a green job if you're supporting people to take care of their wellbeing so that they can tackle the climate crisis. Think about what you want to be when you leave school, how can you turn this into a green job to ensure that through what you're doing, you're protecting people and planet?

The climate and biodiversity crisis is a big challenge, but I feel hopeful that together, we can develop and use our leadership skills to make an enormous difference! There is no better time than today, so let's get out there and all be climate leaders.

## Equipment:

- Device to share video
- Pencils, paper and/or computers for pupils' to write questions, comments, concerns etc.

## Main Concepts:

- How can pupils engage with their member of parliament to contribute to systemic change?
- How can government create sustainable societies?
- How can pupils most effectively write letters to their MPs and find common ground?
- Learn about what Hope For the Future calls a Relationship Based Approach

## Curriculum Linking:

- **England:**

Citizenship KS3: Pupils will understand the roles played by public institutions and voluntary groups in society, and the ways in which citizens work together to improve their communities, including opportunities to participate in school-based activities. “

English KS3: Write clearly, accurately and coherently, adapting language and style in and for a range of contexts, purposes and audiences

- **Scotland**

Social Studies: I can use my knowledge of current social, political or economic issues to interpret evidence and present an informed view. (SOC 3-15a)

I can identify the possible consequences of an environmental issue and make informed suggestions about ways to manage the impact. (SOC 3-08a)

English: I enjoy creating texts of my choice and I am developing my own style. I can regularly select subject, purpose, format and resources to suit the needs of my audience. (LIT 3-20a)

- **Wales**

Geography: Pupils should be given opportunities to study tomorrow's citizens: issues in Wales and the wider world of living sustainably and the responsibilities of being a global citizen

Pupils should be given opportunities to ask and answer the question “how can my actions and those of other people make a difference locally, nationally and globally?”

English: Pupils learn to communicate for a range of purposes, e.g. recount and present information, instruct, argue and explain a point of view, discuss an issue, persuade, question and explore interpretations, convey feelings.

## Step by Step Guidance:

- Look at the timetable of an MP and think about any patterns you can see. What does it tell you about the life they lead? How is time split between parliamentary and constituency work?
- How could you get your MP involved with your school to discuss climate change? Learn about what Hope For the Future calls a Relationship Based Approach to contact your MP and get them involved.
- Use the three stages before meeting your MP of 1) Research 2) Finding common ground 3) Creating an 'ask'.
- Use Theyworkforyou.com to research your local MP's record on climate change or other issues. You can supplement this with Hansard and any MP's own website/social media.
- Draw out a scale of where you are compared to your MP on an issue you care about
- Draw a ven diagram of your MP's interests and yours and where they overlap or find common ground, If there are no common interests, being reelected is a source of leverage for you.
- Make your ask SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely)
- Use a template when writing to your MP, tailoring any letter by explaining 1) who you are, 2) say why you're writing, 3) make your SMART ask, 4) sign off. Write to both constituency address and parliamentary address and possibly also email.
- See letter templates on the HFTF website
- Can you remember the three steps to the Relationship based approach? What should you include in a letter?
- Remember: no one is too small to make a difference and everyone can get involved. You don't have to do it all at once. See more at [www.hftf.org.uk](http://www.hftf.org.uk)



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## Equipment:

- A mobile phone with recording ability
- Access to free editing software such as GarageBand or Audacity
- A computer

## Main Concepts:

- Getting pupils to think about climate change and air quality within an art practice.
- Raising awareness about the importance of the quality of the air pupils and their families breathe both in and outside the home.
- Consider what causes air pollution
- Think about ways to raise awareness about air quality and its connection to climate change
- Produce a recording of your breath and other sounds relating to air quality with others and editing it using free software

## Curriculum Linking:

- **England**

Art and Design: Pupils should be taught to develop their techniques, including their control and their use of materials, with creativity, experimentation and an increasing awareness of different kinds of art, craft and design.

- **Scotland**

Expressive Arts: I can create and present work that shows developing skill in using the visual elements and concepts.

Expressive Arts: I have the opportunity to choose and explore an extended range of media and technologies to create images and objects, comparing and combining them for specific tasks. (EXA 2-02a)

- **Wales**

Art and Design: Pupils should be given opportunities to 1. describe and make comparisons: • between their own work and that of others 2. experiment with and examine the methods used by other artists, craftworkers and designers from different: period, places, cultures and to investigate the natural and made environment using a variety of materials.

Pupils should be given opportunities to experience a wide range of techniques and media to: realise their ideas, express their feelings, communicate meaning

They should, where appropriate, apply to their own work relevant findings collected from: videos, digital-based resources, the internet.

## Step by step guidance:

- Get pupils in groups to think about and discuss the air they breathe, how it affects them, family and friends, both locally and further afield. Reflect on your experience and discuss within your group.
- Discuss as a group or as an individual some of the causes of air pollution
- Think about how you as an individual or as a group could raise awareness about the air we breathe
- Think about the sound of breathing of your own breath or that of others
- Record a 30-60 second of the sound of your breathing and or that of others. Compose a collaborative set of different sounds of breathing. What do you want to evoke/achieve? You can also add royalty-free sound clips (BBC Sound Effect, Free Sounds etc)
- Take time to discuss creative ideas
- Use free editing to produce a sound clip or share your recording with Sarah via her website [www.sarah-strachan.co.uk](http://www.sarah-strachan.co.uk)



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so we can  
learn with you!**

**Make sure to upload your work [here](#) so we can learn with you and share your work widely with experts at our pupils' assembly!**