

NEH Institutes for K12 Educators:
Teaching Climate Justice with Young People's Literatures and Media
Hosted by the Center for Climate Literacy at the University of Minnesota

Dear colleague,

My name is Dr. Nick Kleese. I am the Associate Director of the Center for Climate Literacy at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, and I have the pleasure of serving as the Project Co-Director for the Center's first National Endowment for the Humanities-sponsored Institute for K12 educators: Teaching Climate Justice with Young People's Literatures and Media.

About the Institute

This three week Institute (June 30-July 3; July 14-July 25, 2025) will support 25 K12 educators from across the country in deepening their understanding of the power of stories to advance climate justice. Together, educators will work in three grade-band cohorts (elementary, middle, and secondary grades) to engage scholarly and literary texts, develop open-access resources for their specific classrooms, and build a community of practitioners who recognize that climate justice is a key demand of young people nationwide. While one week of the Institute will be online, two weeks will be held in-person on the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities campus.

Context

Human-induced climate change is the key existential issue of our time. On the biological and socio-structural levels, climate change threatens the survival of human and nonhuman ecosystems as well as the survival of the energy, economy, food, and other systems of the industrial civilization. On the cognitive, emotional, and psychological levels, climate change poses a threat to human understanding and thus to our collective capacity to act. While scientific and technical reports rarely engage with it directly, this challenge is the primary focus of vast scholarship in the environmental humanities and social sciences. These fields recognize climate change as a socioscientific issue that cuts across political, cultural, psychological, civic, economic, geographical, and other dimensions of human life.

Given this scope, humanities and social science scholars argue that appeals to scientific evidence alone are not enough to engender a societal transformation our world needs. Besides new technologies and legislation, addressing climate change will require profound changes that are social, cultural, and conceptual. This latter change includes the need to articulate a new story capable of mobilizing social adaptation to the realities of a climate-altered world. This vision would not be effective unless it reckons with the violence against the planet and its peoples—especially Indigenous and BIPOC communities—that have shaped ideologies, practices, and institutions responsible for ushering in the climate emergency.

Herein lies the importance of climate justice. Climate justice is a form of inclusive justice that addresses historical and ongoing socioecological inequalities head-on. It is grounded in recognition that climate change disproportionately affects marginalized, excluded, and (formerly) colonized populations. Aiming to reconcile climate change contributions with burdens, climate justice is a space where the

biological and social challenges of addressing climate change intersect with the cognitive, emotional, cultural, and psychological ones. Climate justice has also been—and will continue to be—a key demand of youth climate leaders worldwide.

Children’s and young adult literature provides a rich variety of texts to explore the complexities and entanglements of climate justice with issues of identity, race, social class, power, and culture. Our focus on award-winning fiction and nonfiction with clear climate justice themes, published within the past decade, will ensure that teachers develop strategies for discussing climate justice issues based on texts that engage young audiences, broaden their understanding, and inspire real-life action. The narratives will not be supplemental to theorizations of climate justice. Close reading and analysis will reveal them as central to grasping the context-rich and situated implications of climate justice as it impacts individuals and communities, be it an impoverished community in Kentucky offered a fracking deal at the cost of destroying their local ecosystem or a community in California’s mountains whose future is being rewritten by ever more frequent wildfires.

Institute Guest Faculty

- **Dr. Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak** (Associate Professor in Literature, University of Wrocław, Poland).
- **Dr. Lara Saguisag** (Georgiou Chair of Children's Literature and Literacy at New York University)
- **Krystal Two Bulls** (Co-Executive Director of Honor the Earth)
- **Dr. Emily Midkiff** (Assistant Professor in Literacy at the University of North Dakota)
- **Drs. Lee Fisher and Jasmine Tang** (Director and Co-Director, Minnesota Writing Project)
- **Jon Scieszka and Steven Weinberg** (Award winning author and illustrator duo)
- **Dr. Betsy Maloney Leaf** (Assistant Professor in Arts Education, University of Minnesota)
- **Dr. Samantha Lindgren** (Assistant Professor in Education Policy, Organization & Leadership, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign)
- **Katherine Applegate** (Newbery-winning author)
- **Jason Chin** (Caldecott-winning author-illustrator)
- **Dr. Asli Sezen-Barrie** (Chair of Climate and Environmental Education, University of California-Irvine)
- **Dr. Wahinkpe Topa** (aka Don Trent Jacobs) (Professor of Education, Antioch University)
- **Dr. Darcia Narvaez** (Professor Emerita of Psychology at the University of Notre Dame)
- **Emma Reynolds** (Green Earth Book award-winning author-illustrator)
- **Linda Buturian** (Award winning-educator and writer)
- **Adam Gidwitz** (Newberry-winning author)

Institute Facilitators

- **Dr. Marek Oziewicz** (Project Director)
- **Dr. Jana Lo Bello Miller** (Elementary Grades cohort lead)
- **Dr. Stephanie Rollag Yoon** (Middle Grades cohort lead)
- **Dr. Nick Kleese** (Secondary Grades cohort lead)

Participants and Applications

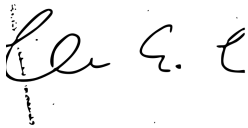
Please share news of this Institute widely among your networks of educator colleagues. We invite applications from all interested K12 educators. 24 total applications will be selected, with eight teachers in three distinct grade bands each: early grades (K-3), middle grades (4-8) and upper grades (9-12). Of these, a total of six positions will be reserved for early career teachers (those five or fewer years of experience). The Center seeks to cultivate a final cohort of teachers reflecting a broad range of teaching contexts, sociocultural identities, and subject expertise. Teachers of all content areas are welcome. BIPOC teachers are strongly encouraged to apply.

The application opens on December 13, 2024 and closes on March 5, 2025, 11:59pm Pacific. Selected applicants will be notified on April 2, 2025. Applicants must notify the Center of their acceptance by April 16, 2024.

Participants will be required to attend all sessions. Virtual sessions will be held via Zoom June 30-July 3, 2025. In-person sessions will be held on the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities campus July 14-25. Participants who successfully complete the Institute will be given a \$2850 stipend at the Institute's conclusion. The stipend is considered taxable income.

For more information about the institute, including application instructions, please visit the Institute website at <https://climatejusticek12.umn.edu>. You are also welcome to contact the Center for Climate Literacy at climatelit@umn.edu.

In community for the Earth,



Dr. Nick Kleese

Associate Director, Center for Climate Literacy

NEH Project Director, Teaching Climate Justice with Young People's Literatures and Media



Scan the QR code to visit the Institute's website
[<https://climatejusticek12.umn.edu>]

Or email us directly at [climatelit@umn.edu]