

As part of the **Everything is Connected** season in partnership with the Cultural Programme at the University of Oxford, The Story Museum is collaborating with authors and artists to imagine a brighter future. Leading writers Patience Agbabi, Piers Torday, Sita Brahmachari and Ben Okri have each created a short story that shows their visions of the future, encouraging us all to reflect on the potential of a brighter world through the power of stories.

Human Nature

By Patience Agbabi

Part 1: Pre-reading activities

Present the key words: **Environmentalism**, **Sustainability** and **Climate Emergency**. What do the words mean to you? Make a mindmap on the board of associated words.

Watch news items from BBC Newsround related to these concepts, such as the following:

Canadian wildfires: What it's like there?

Wildfires: What's happening in Turkey and Greece?

Flooding: What is it and what are the different types?

India and Bangladesh floods leave millions stranded

Record-breaking heatwave set for India and Pakistan

Climate change: What is it and why is everyone talking about it?

Newsround topics: Climate change and pollution

Ice is melting across the globe at a faster rate than before

How your love of fashion could be harming the environment

Eco School: Reduce, reuse, recycle

Do you want to be 'plastic clever'?

The Regenerators: Meet the young people helping you to be more sustainable!

After exploring and discussing the three concepts, work in pairs to write a simple definition for one – environmentalism, sustainability and climate change.

Share with other pairs who had the same word to find similarities and refine the definition before sharing with the class. If useful, share the definitions from the Oxford English Dictionary:

- **Environmentalism:** *Concern with the preservation of the natural environment, esp. from damage caused by human influence; the politics or policies associated with this.*
- **Sustainability:** *Designating forms of human activity in which environmental degradation is minimised, especially by avoiding the long-term depletion of natural resources.*
- **Climate emergency:** *The increasing risk of hazardous, irreversible changes to the climate, resulting from global warming.*

In pairs or threes, list roles or jobs that fall into these ideas. The students can be a little creative in their naming – this will be revisited later.

For example: recycler, reuser, reducer, wind farmer, solar collector, food farmer or animal protector (NB: in the story hunting is illegal in Greentown and could provide a good talking point on how sustainable hunting animals for food is, especially on the large scale.)

Share the roles/jobs to create a class list to refer to later.

Further pre-reading activities

<div>1. What's in a name?</div>	<div><div>Introduce the character names from the story:</div><div><div><div></div><div>Sky the Planter</div></div><div><div></div><div>Jasmine the Gatherer</div></div><div><div></div><div>Rosehip the Forager</div></div><div><div></div><div>Rivers the Baker</div></div></div><div><div>Discuss:</div><div>What do you notice about these names? Each name is linked to something found in nature – sky, jasmine, rosehip, rivers – and there is an epithet – ‘the Planter’, ‘the Gatherer’, etc.</div><div>What does the epithet mean for that character?</div></div><div><div>Each student chooses a story name</div><div>linked to nature in some way – a flower, plant, animal or physical geographical feature (river, lake, mountain, valley, etc) and then draws from the previously constructed list of sustainable roles to create their story name. <i>For example: Roach the Cleaner or Hawk the Grower</i></div><div>The two parts could be linked like Sky’s suggestion at the beginning of the story – Earth the Planter or Crab the Seaweed Farmer</div></div><div><div>Share their names in groups/with the class</div><div>and give a short explanation of their role.</div><div>For example: <i>Hawk the Grower is a person who grows plants for food, or Hawk the Grower grows plants to help recycle and refresh the air or Hawk the Grower grows the knowledge and understanding of the community (like a teacher).</i></div><div>It could also be a combination of these.</div></div><div><div>This activity is developed further after the story is shared and the names can be saved to use during the writing process.</div></div></div>
<div>2. Themes freeze frame</div>	<div><div>Students walk around the room in a relaxed, neutral way.</div><div>Teacher calls out a number - e.g. 3 - and the class form small groups of the given number.</div><div>Teacher calls out a word (see below) and the group quickly create a freeze frame/tableau to show their interpretation of the word:</div><div><div><div>community</div><div>nature</div></div><div><div>story</div><div>destruction</div></div><div><div>sustainability</div><div>job/role</div></div><div><div>change friendship</div><div>curious/curiosity</div></div></div><div><div>All the words relate to themes in the story but not all of them need to be used in the activity.</div></div></div>

Part 2: Share the story activities

Discussion Questions and Topics

The following questions use Aidan Chambers' 'Tell Me' strategy as a framework:

o **What did you like about the story?**

*Were there any characters or ideas that came up you particularly latched on to?
Why did these parts interest you?
What stories would you like to hear in The Beanstalk?*

o **Were there any descriptions you liked?**

*For example: the way Kale is described, could you picture him in your mind?
What about any other characters? Were they reminded of anyone they know? For example: Rivers the Baker with 'an answer for everything'*

o **What about dislikes?**

*Was there anything in the story you didn't like – characters, description, ideas?
Why did those parts not appeal?*

o **Were you puzzled by any part of the story? Can you help each other solve the puzzles?**

For example: do you understand where the story is taking place? Is it above or below ground? How do you know? Why does Kale not have an epithet? Does this mean he does have an assigned role? Can you decide on one for him? Why does he climb into the beanstalk to tell his story?

o **Did this story or anything within it make you think of another story/film they know?**

For example: The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins (books and films) where each area of their society and world has a different role – farmers, foresters, miners; the Divergent series by Veronica Roth (books and films) or The Maze Runner by James Dashner (books and films)

o **What evidence in the story is there that shows this society is trying to be more sustainable?**

For example: 'techniveg,' meat growing from 'cells' rather than farming animals, 'growyourown tunics', 'reclaimed trainers'

o **Consider Sky the Planter. She says she plants 'seeds that sprout into techniveg, cells that morph into meat, ideas that flower into film.' What do you think this means?**

What is 'techniveg'? Can meat be grown from cells in a lab rather than the traditional way? 'Ideas that flower into film' – does this mean part of Sky's role is to 'plant' new ideas in people through the medium of TV or movies?

Part 3: Post-reading activities

<p>1. Drama response</p>	<p>In pairs, imagine you have been sitting with the other characters in The Beanstalk and have heard Kale's story.</p> <p>Create a short duologue focused on one of the claims he makes. What do you think of what he says? Can you argue with him about it?</p> <p>Suggested claims made by Kale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Humans were made to rule nature. From the birds in the air to the fish in the sea. From the plants to the plains.' • 'But as more humans populated the planet, they needed more and more space to live. They built cities and lost touch with nature.' • 'Humans are superior to nature...' • 'Icebergs were melting, forests were burning and humans knew it had something to do with human behaviour. But they did nothing to change it.' • 'Human nature. Only acts when it faces extinction.' <p>Once the pairs have had chance to practice their scenes, share them with each other and the whole class. Have any duologues created any further points for discussion?</p> <p>This may develop into an open debate activity, for which Resource A can be utilised.</p>
<p>2. What's in a name? Writing activity (Links to What's in a name? Pre-reading activity)</p>	<p>Take the natural story name you thought of earlier and the simple introduction you shared.</p> <p>Write a more developed introduction to the character including what their role is, how it helps the community of Greentown or beyond, what they particularly like about their role and if other roles help in any way.</p> <p>See Resource B for a scaffold and modelled example.</p>

Part 4: Creative writing development

Human Nature is unusual because it has no evil characters in it. The 'evil' comes from the story Kale tells – from human nature.

Students write a story set within the world of Sky, Jasmine and Kale but with a very real and present threat that they overcome.

Students choose one of the characters – Sky the Planter or Jasmine the Gatherer from the shared story or use the character they have created. Something terrible has happened within their area of responsibility. For example:

- Sky turns up at the greenhouses to find the glass smashed and all the plants uprooted – who/what has caused this?
- Jasmine is out picking apples in the orchard and finds lots of the apple trees are sick and dying – why?
- Hawk the Grower is out in the forests and notices that the birds are leaving, nests are abandoned, and the chicks left to die – Why are the birds leaving?

How is the character going to solve the problem? Will any other character help? Will the solution provide a larger solution to a problem faced by the people of Greentown? Will any of the characters learn an important lesson, such as change their human nature in some way?

See **Resource C** for a modelled example and **Resource D** for a story scaffold.

Part 5: Extension task

Focus on the section: “But,” says a teenager voice, warm as the west wind, “it’s not how a story is told but who tells it that makes it new.”

Introduce how celebrities will become involved in causes that they feel passionate about and how their fame helps to get the cause noticed and in the news.

For example: During the pandemic Marcus Rashford was in the news about his support of free school meals: [Marcus Rashford: Feeding Britain’s Children - inside his campaign to tackle child hunger](#) - BBC Sport

Discuss in pairs, groups or as a class:

- Have you heard of any other celebrities supporting environmental causes?
- Why do you think having a celebrity support a cause/environmental group can be important?
- Is it always a good idea? What cause would they support and why?

Prince William and conservationist David Attenborough launched the Earthshot Prize in 2020, a new award for environmentalist innovation – Protect And Restore Nature, Clean Our Air, Revive Our Oceans, Build A Waste-Free World, Fix Our Climate

[The Earthshot Prize: Urgent Optimism & Action to Repair the Planet](#)

- Explore the website to find out about the innovations being made in the past years.
- What do you think about the prize – will it help?

Further reading

Books (age ranges are an indication only)

- *Greta and the Giants* by Zoe Tucker/Zoe Persico (4- 7 years)
- *Maybe You Might* by Imogen Foxall (4- 8 years)
- *The Fog* by Kyo Maclear (4- 8 years)
- *George Saves the World by Lunchtime* by Jo Readman (5- 7 years)
- *The Boy Who Grew A Forest* by Sophia Gholz (5- 8 years)
- *Follow the Moon Home: A Tale of One Idea, Twenty Kids, and a Hundred Sea Turtles* by Deborah Hopkinson and Philippe Cousteau (5- 12 years)
- *The Window* by Jeannie Baker (5+ years)
- *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss (5+ years)
- *"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not". Dr Seuss in The Lorax*
- *The Great Kapok Tree* by Lynne Cherry (6- 12 years)
- *The House of Light* by Julia Green (9-11 years)
- *Where the River Runs Gold* by Sita Brahmachari (10-13 years)
- *FloodWorld* by Tom Huddleston (10- 14 years)
- *The Wild Folk* by Sylvia V Linsteadt (10-12 years)
- *The Dog Runner* by Bren MacDibble (12- 14 years)
- *Exodus* by Julie Bertagna (13+ years)
- *Earth Heroes: Twenty Inspiring Stories of People Saving Our World* by Lily Dyu (non-fiction)
- *The Children of the Anthropocene: Stories from the Young People at the Heart of the Climate Crisis* by Bella Lack
- *Si'ahl and the Council of Animals: A Story of Our Changing Climate for Children* by Jane Lister Reis and Margie Lister Muenzer
- *The Adventure of Polo the Bear: a story of climate change* by Alan J. Hesse

Films

- *The Great Realization* – 2020 film by Tomfoolery
- *The Lorax* – 2012
- *The Last Airbender* (2010)
- *Avatar* (2009) and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022)
- *Wall-e* – 2008
- *Bee Movie* – 2007
- *Princess Mononoke* (1997)

Resource A

Debate

Paragraphs	Your notes
Sentence Starters	
First argument	
Second argument	
Third argument	
Counter argument <i>still make it work for you</i>	
Conclusion	

Useful ideas and language to include			
Introduction <i>First of all, I'd like to point out...</i> <i>The main problem is...</i>	Formal language <i>In addition to that...</i> <i>Moreover...</i> <i>Furthermore...</i> <i>Another example of this is...</i> <i>Consequently...</i>	Emotive language <i>Including:</i> <i>It seems to me that...</i> <i>I feel that...</i> <i>I'm absolutely convinced that...</i> <i>In my opinion...</i>	Facts to support each point Try to include facts to support your argument
Rhetorical questions Pose a rhetorical question to support your argument	Repetition After each point made, repeat main argument to reinforce it in the listeners	Counter argument <i>On the one hand... on the other hand...</i> <i>Some people think that... others say that...</i>	Strong conclusion <i>The obvious conclusion is...</i> <i>The only possible solution/conclusion is...</i>

Resource B

What's in a name?

Questions and sentence starters	Your responses <i>Don't forget to write in the first person</i>
What is your character's name? <i>Hi, my name is...</i> <i>Hello, I am...</i> <i>...is what everyone calls me</i>	
What is it they do? <i>I...</i> <i>My job is to...</i> <i>Every day I...</i>	
How does their role help others? <i>It's a role that...</i> <i>I'm forever...</i> <i>What I really love about this is...</i> <i>There's nothing better than...</i>	
What do they like doing the most? <i>I really like...</i> <i>My favourite thing is to...</i>	
Does it help with their role? <i>Do you know...</i> <i>It's surprising but...</i>	

For example

Hi, I'm Hawk the Grower. I tend to the trees growing round the edge of Greentown ensuring they grow tall and strong. Without the trees the air over the town would be murky, dirty and bad to breathe. You could say I look after the lungs of the town, cutting out the cancerous cells and safeguarding everyone's health. It's a role that takes me out in all weathers – come rain or shine there I am, clambering around in the branches checking every little leaf, watching for signs of decay and celebrating each new flower blooming in the sunlight, every insect spotted or fledgling taking wing for the first time. In my spare time I love going to The Beanstalk to listen to the new storytellers the Foragers have found. I tell the stories to the trees, and I swear it helps them to grow better.

Resource C

Example story outline

Story structure		Simple modelled example
Opening	Hawk the Grower spots abandoned nests while out in the forests.	Hawk the Grower is tending to the forests when he notices the absence of bird song, then finds empty nests and abandoned chicks calling for their parents.
Build up	Hawk looks for a reason.	They climb to the top of a tree to look out over the canopy. With their good eyesight they spot flocks of birds flying away towards the distant mountains. In the other direction the forest looks dark.
	Hawk goes for help.	They find Jasmine the Gatherer while returning to Greentown. Jasmine is worried about the fruits she's collecting – flowers are left on some plants instead of developing into fruits, while others are ripening too quickly and rotting. She thinks there's something wrong with the pollinating insects. This makes Hawk wonder if the birds are searching for insects to eat which is why they are flying from the forest.
	They decide to investigate together.	The two of them set off in the direction of the 'dark forest' Hawk spotted from the treetop.
Problem	They discover the problem.	In the darkened area of the forest there is a small healthy area with a collection of buildings right in the middle. A group calling themselves 'the Wildlife Helpers' or 'the helpers' for short have been developing a 'super insect' – a turbo boosted pollinator. They have tested it in the forest around their lab and this is the healthy area with lots of flowers, fruits and healthy trees but once the man-made insect spread beyond the range of the lab, they begin to destroy the other insects and disrupt their life cycles. This has led to the dark areas of dying forest (unnoticed by the Helpers).
	Hawk and Jasmine must solve the problem.	It's now up to Hawk the Grower and Jasmine the Gatherer to convince the Helpers that what they are doing is not helping at all. They take the group out into the dark forest to see how many insects can be spotted but only the man-made insects can be found, and they are seen munching on a few dead insects. Hawk takes everyone up into the canopy so they can see how far the damage has spread.
Ending	Hawk the Grower helps the Helpers to grow they knowledge and understanding.	The Helpers realise that although they were trying to make everything better, they have upset the connections between the plants, insects and birds – the interdependence. Together they work to restore the forest habitat. It takes a long time, but Hawk the Grower helps them to develop their understanding of how insects are an important link between plants and animals.

Resource D

Story scaffold

Story structure	Questions	Story notes
Setting & character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where is your main character? What are they doing at the start? How are they feeling? 	
Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What happens next? How does the story hint at the problem to come? Does the main character team up with a friend/helper character? 	
Climax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What goes wrong? How does this affect the characters? Does this affect anyone/ anything else and in what way? 	
Resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do the characters solve the problem? Is there a twist to the story? 	
Ending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember – it's a happy ending! Have any of the characters changed or learnt something? How does everyone feel at the end? 	