

Art activities for addressing eco-anxiety

with Dr Catherine Malboeuf-Hurtubise,
Dr Catherine Herba and Dr Jonathan Smith

Creative arts in the classroom

Catherine, Catherine and Jonathan champion the use of creative arts to help children explore, understand and communicate their emotions about the environment and climate change. “Creating art helps children express how they feel in a non-threatening, non-verbal way,” explains Jonathan. “Art-based approaches aim to promote self-awareness and emotion regulation.” The team encourages you to bring such approaches into your classroom.

Painting and drawing

You will need:

- Child-friendly paint and paintbrushes of different sizes
- Coloured pens, pencils and crayons
- Paper

“A typical project would involve asking the children to paint or draw the Earth 50 years from now,” says Catherine Malboeuf-Hurtubise. “We typically refrain from giving any additional instructions.” While some children may draw the deterioration of the planet, others might create something more hopeful – and the team encourages such diversity and flexibility of outputs. “Once students have completed their piece of art, those who want to show their creation can explain to the class what they chose to paint or draw, and why. This leads to philosophical discussions, typically centred around themes of change and identity.” This can include questions around what it means to change, whether change is inevitable, and whether our identity remains the same following change – but the idea is for discussions to be led by the children, rather than the teachers.

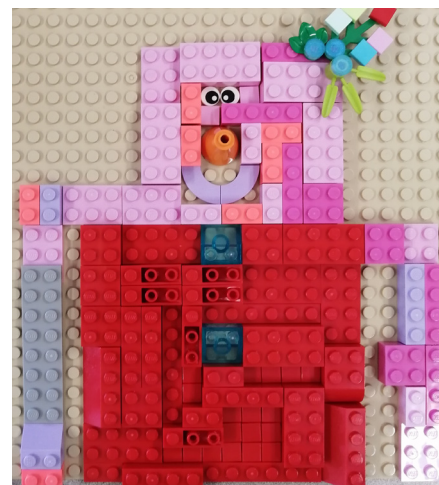


LEGO™ building

You will need:

- A variety of LEGO™ bricks and pieces (of multiple shapes, sizes, colours, etc.)

“Children really enjoy the LEGO™ activities – they’re always a big hit!” says Jonathan. “They can use LEGO™ bricks to build models that explore themes such as the power of nature, mental health, and



imagined futures for the Earth.” Post-construction philosophical discussions may be similar to those following drawing and painting activities. “We also use the Lego™ creations to discuss how we respond to the awe of nature, and we discuss the potentially devastating power of nature, such as forest fires, tornadoes and floods, and how we react to such events.” This helps to give a face to climate change anxieties and provides an avenue for children to discuss their feelings.



Photography

You will need:

- Child-friendly digital cameras (light, easy to use, robust, good image quality)
- A means to upload and display photographs (e.g., computer, interactive whiteboard)

“We ask children to take photos on various themes, such as the beauty of nature or the effects of climate change,” says Catherine Herba. “If possible, take your students on a walk in a green space, either within the school grounds or offsite, and encourage them to take photos as they walk.” It is important to tell children not to take photos of other people, as this leads to privacy issues when photos are shared and displayed, but, otherwise, the choice of subject matter is theirs.

Back in the classroom, encourage students to share their photos and talk about why they took them and what they represent. This can initiate philosophical discussions on themes such as the beauty of nature and humanity’s responsibility towards the planet. The team uses the **SHOWED** method to guide questions around the photographs:

- What do you **See** here?
- What is really **Happening** here?
- How does this relate to **Our** lives?
- **Why** does this condition **Exist**?
- What can we **Do** about it?

Further resources

The team will release freely available tools and manuals to help teachers approach children’s eco-anxiety in a constructive way. You can also contact the team for more information and advice: catherine.malboeuf-hurtubise@ubishops.ca

The team recommends the following books for educating yourself and your students about climate change and eco-anxiety:

- **All the feelings under the sun: How to deal with climate change**, by Leslie Davenport and Jessica Smith (an illustrated children’s book about eco-anxiety)
- **A field guide to climate anxiety: How to keep your cool on a warming planet**, by Sarah Jaquette Ray (a guidebook for ‘the climate generation’)
- **Hope matters: Why changing the way we think is critical to solving the environmental crisis**, by Elin Kelsey (an evidence-based argument for hope in the face of climate change)
- **Climate justice: Hope, resilience, and the fight for a sustainable future**, by Mary Robinson (stories of ordinary people creating positive change)
- **Not too late: Changing the climate story from despair to possibility**, edited

by Rebecca Solnit and Thelma Young Lutunatabua (a compilation of climate voices from around the world)

- **The end of this world: Climate justice in so-called Canada**, by Angele Alook, Emily Eaton, David Gray-Donald, Joël Laforest, Crystal Lameman and Bronwen Tucker (advocating for Indigenous sovereignty and climate justice in Canada)
 - **How to talk about climate change in a way that makes a difference**, by Rebecca Huntley (the importance of psychology for effective climate change communication)
 - **Active hope: How to face the mess we’re in without going crazy**, by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone (responding to climate change through an empowerment approach called ‘work that reconnects’)
 - **Psychology and climate change: Human perceptions, impacts, and responses**, edited by Susan Clayton and Christie Manning (a collection of psychological research related to climate change)
- And the following podcast:
- **Climate change and happiness:** www.climatechangeandhappiness.com

