

# Educator Resource Guide

## *Something Happened to our Planet: Kids Tackle the Climate Crisis*

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*Something Happened to our Planet* is a picture book that aims to facilitate adult-child conversations about climate change. It features a child who is worried about the climate crisis but isn't sure what to do about it. She and her friends come up with a proposal that their school switch from disposable to re-usable lunch trays. With support from their parents and the community, the kids eventually convince school leadership to adopt the idea, and conversations about climate change continue. The story provides a positive, empowering narrative for how children can channel climate anxiety into collective action.

Research shows that children are aware of the climate crisis, and anxious about the impact of a warming planet on their futures. Children's exposure to media coverage of the climate crisis may lead them to feel hopeless and anxious about their changing world. However, with the proper guidance, children can feel empowered by stories of collective climate action. This guide is designed to support educators in using the book to foster empowering discussions with students about climate change and climate action.

### PREPARATION TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- Educate yourself about climate change and its impact on humans and other species in your region.
- Acknowledge and cope with your own climate anxiety, with the support of others. You can best help your students if you are aware of (rather than avoiding) your own feelings about the climate crisis.
- Educate yourself about climate justice. Be prepared to discuss which countries and industry sectors have contributed the most greenhouse gas emissions, and which countries or communities are experiencing the first and worst effects of the climate crisis. How will a warming planet impact existing income and race disparities in the U.S.?
- Review the Reader's Note in the book for sample child-adult questions and answers
- Prepare an activity designed to elicit students' suggestions for realistic climate actions
- Find out if your school district, city or state already has a climate action plan or team in place to address transportation, buildings, tree canopy, waste management, or renewable energy use.

### HOW TO ADDRESS THE CLIMATE CRISIS IN THE CLASSROOM

- Ask students what they already know about climate change. Elicit and validate their feelings about extreme weather and other aspects of the climate crisis (see *Handling Children's Emotions*, below).
- Correct students' distortions, and present accurate facts:
  - Climate change is real
  - Humans caused the climate crisis (scientists agree)
  - Climate change is bad for nature and humans
  - There is still hope to avoid the worst effects of the climate crisis
- Provide at least as much discussion of realistic solutions as current or future problems
- Prioritize governmental, institutional, or classroom solutions over individual climate actions
- Promote experience in or with, and enjoyment of the natural world
- Attend to issues of climate justice and human rights

### PRESENTATION FORMAT OPTIONS

- Conduct classroom read-aloud with discussion
- Include climate change oriented books in lists of independent reading or book report choices
- Provide schoolwide parent workshop on how to talk with children about climate change
- Include books in development and discussion of schoolwide climate action plan

## HANDLING CHILDREN'S EMOTIONS

- Some children may have already experienced losses and trauma due to extreme weather events linked to climate change. Others may share anxiety about how a warming planet may bring more storms, fires, and heat waves. Listen to and validate children's concerns, provide accurate information about the risk of extreme weather in your region, and reassure children that adults are working hard to prepare for and respond to these events. Scientists, policy makers, and activists are also working hard to prevent extreme weather events in the future by reducing greenhouse gas emissions now.
- Some children may express guilt that they are not personally doing more to "help the planet," or anger that others aren't doing enough. It is important to communicate compassion for self and others, as nobody can make the best decisions for the planet all the time. Also, climate change won't get better or worse based on one student's (or family's) actions; the most powerful climate actions are those done by larger systems, like governments.

## STORY EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### Vocabulary Development

The Reader's Note provides child-friendly definitions of vocabulary words (e.g., carbon sink, renewable energy). Review these definitions, then pause during the reading to allow students to identify examples of these concepts. Use these concepts to discuss how the children in the story "tackled the climate crisis."

### Connect with Nature (ideal for Earth Day)

Take a field trip to a local park, lake, river, or ocean to help students get hands-on experience with the impact of global warming in your region, such as changes in insect populations or plant/algae growth. Plant a vegetable or native pollinator garden. Discuss how to be better stewards of the earth.

### Develop a School or Classroom Climate Action Plan

Encourage students to choose a climate solution that is a good fit for your school or community. Planting trees and using disposable trays may not be realistic solutions

for all regions. There are many other solutions that could be implemented in a classroom or school (see Reader's Note or resources below).

### Political advocacy

Engage students in climate advocacy by helping them to organize a rally or communicate by phone or letter with legislators at any level of government. Alternatively, students could make presentations or write letters to power holders for institutional change (e.g., school board members, public service commissions). These activities provide opportunities to practice informational and argumentative writing.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Climate Change Live

<https://climatechangelive.org/index.php?pid=148>  
Webinars, educator's toolkit, lesson plans and activities addressing climate change.

### Climate Kids

<https://www.climatekids.org/>  
Science activities, art projects, and storytelling to help children understand climate change and find solutions. Includes resources in Spanish.

### Eco-schools

<https://www.nwf.org/Eco-Schools-USA>  
An assortment of K-12 resources and curricula to develop climate change action plans and build climate resilient communities.

### National Aeronautics & Space Administration

<https://climatekids.nasa.gov/>  
Facts, photographs, games, activities, a kids' guide to climate change, and a "climate time machine."

### National Center for Science Education

<https://ncse.ngo/>  
Information and resources to teachers, parents, scientists, and concerned citizens at state and national levels to ensure that climate change is taught accurately, honestly, and confidently.