

Green Literacy Thematic Unit Planning Template: Completed “How Extreme Weather Events Connect Our Communities” Unit

Name: **Helen** (twelve years of teaching experience)

Grade level: **Fourth grade**

School context: **Urban**

PHASE 1: ENGAGE

Develop Your Thematic Question

Here are some guiding questions to consider as you develop your thematic question. Reflect on these prompts to clarify your focus.

1. Brainstorm

- What issue that could lead to a big idea about the environment are you most passionate about exploring with your students?

I am most passionate about exploring with my students extreme weather events and how they affect our lives. I want them to understand how storms, rain, and other types of weather can change the places we live and the way we live. I wonder, too, if these extreme weather events might be a way for communities to connect to each other.

- What current events or real-world examples resonate with you and can help bring environmental issues to life for your students?

One current issue that really stands out to me is that some of my students are new to our area because they had to leave their homes after the hurricanes. These big storms can cause so much damage, and families sometimes have to move to find a safer place to live. I think it's important for my students to understand how the environment and extreme weather can affect people's lives and the places they call home.

I also see that some of my students are worried about how the weather changes—lots of snow, wildfires, and floods.

2. Prioritize

You might have more than one environmental issue you'd like to explore with your students. Now, think about which one will create the most meaningful conversations and learning.

My students are curious but still learning about how weather affects their lives and the environment. I might need to take into consideration their emotions and feelings. Our school community is open to lessons that connect to our local area, and I think my administration would support a thematic question that focuses on something familiar, like extreme weather and its impact on our communities.

While climate change is a tough topic and one my administrators would be supportive of me teaching, I want to make sure that I don't "doom and gloom." I'm very willing to engage with this issue because it helps my students connect to the environment in a meaningful way, especially if I can show how weather can connect our communities.

Through this brainstorming and prioritization process, write your thematic question. Some stems that might be useful are:

- How can/do . . . ?
- What might . . . ?

Write your thematic question here.

How do extreme weather events connect our communities?

See page 38 in the book for more information on creating thematic questions.

Foster Your Thinking Through Commentary

First, review the following questions and respond to a few or all of them. Use a list or brainstorm freely to capture your ideas.

- Whose voices or stories do you need to hear to understand this issue, and why are they important to you?

I'm interested in stories of people who have experienced extreme weather events.

I'd like to find information on how young people cope with extreme weather events emotionally.

I want to explore how extreme weather is connected to climate change.

- What unfair systems or problems do you want your students to think about when learning about this issue, and how can you help them ask questions and find ways to make things better?

I want my students to think about unfair systems that make it harder for some people to recover from extreme weather events. For example, not everyone has the same access to resources like food, clean water, or safe shelter when a storm or flood happens. I can help my students ask questions like, "Why do some neighborhoods take longer to rebuild?" or "How can we make sure everyone gets the help they need?"

- Whose experiences or ideas are sometimes left out when this issue is talked about, and how can you share those voices in your classroom to help everyone learn more?

I would like to explore how people are affected by extreme weather and how animals are impacted, too.

From your responses, begin to find springboards that will help you develop commentary that deepens your thematic exploration.

Springboards to Support Commentary

- Springboard 1: *Lai & La Greca, 2020*
 - Title or source: *Impact of extreme weather*
 - Key insights: *Facts about extreme weather and its impacts on people, animals, and land*
- Springboard 2
 - Title or source: *Climate anxiety search*
 - Key insights: *Young people worry about the Earth's future and climate change—their emotional health matters.*
- Springboard 3: *Resilience and collaborative courage*
 - Title or source: *Seven Cs of resilience (Ginsburg, 2011)*
 - Key insights: *How to understand resilience in young people*

See page 40 in the book for more information on developing springboards for commentary.

PHASE 2: EMPOWER

Cultivate a List of Green Reads and Views

Consider the three cycles of comprehension as you choose your strategies: simple comprehension (retell and summarize), criteria comprehension (support thinking), and perspective comprehension (investigate explicit and implicit perspectives and move to systems thinking).

Select texts and digital media that flow from your thematic question and your commentary research. If you need help finding texts or digital media, consult go.SolutionTree.com/literacy, our companion website (www.greenliteracy.org), or your school or local librarian.

What types of texts or stories (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or multimedia) can you use to help your students connect emotionally and critically to this environmental issue? What is the author's message?

After looking at the lists and talking with my teacher friend, I think these five books are perfect

for my class.

Green Reads
<p>Title: <u>Our House Is on Fire: Greta Thunberg's Call to Save the Planet</u> by Jeanette Winter (2020)</p> <p>Author's message: Students' activism on extreme weather</p>
<p>Title: <u>Mario and the Hole in the Sky: How a Chemist Saved Our Planet</u> by Elizabeth Rusch (2019b)</p> <p>Author's message: When we work together across nations, we make positive change.</p>
<p>Title: <u>The Day War Came</u> by Nicola Davies (2018)</p> <p>Author's message: How war impacts a young girl, who becomes a refugee</p>
<p>Title: <u>Lauren's Story: An American Dog in Paris</u> by Kay Pfaltz (2002)</p> <p>Author's message: More about being a newcomer</p>
<p>Title: <u>A Mama for Owen</u> by Marion Dane Bauer (2007)</p> <p>Author's message: Finding connection after extreme weather events</p>

Select Green Literacy Strategies

<p>What reading, writing, and drama strategies will encourage your students to express their thoughts, analyze the issue, and explore solutions?</p> <p>Reading, Writing, and Drama Strategies:</p> <p>Free-write</p> <p>Intra-Act</p> <p>Role play</p> <p>Compare and Contrast Authors' Message</p>	<p>How can you support all your students—no matter their reading level or background—to engage deeply with the issue and build their understanding?</p> <p>Immersive Strategies:</p> <p>Web of Life</p>
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See page 45 in the book for more information on selecting Green Literacy strategies.

See page 16 in the book for more information on the three cycles of comprehension.

PHASE 3: SHIFT

Develop Green Literacy Ideals

As you work with your students to create their Green Literacy ideals, remember this is something that happens naturally during your teaching. You can plan all the other steps ahead of time, but for this last part, you'll need to pause and observe how your students respond.

Reflection 1

As you plan how to guide your students in creating their Green Literacy ideals, take a moment to think about the lessons you've already taught. How did your students respond during these activities? What really stood out to you? Write down some notes or free-write about what you noticed happening in your classroom.

When we explored how communities rebuild after extreme weather, students were curious about the role of helpers like firefighters, volunteers, and organizations. They asked thoughtful questions about how people can prepare for and recover from these events.

While discussing extreme weather in other parts of the world, students showed empathy for those affected, with one commenting, "I didn't know it could be that bad." They began to see how global issues connect to local ones.

Reflection 2

In your free-writing, think about what stood out to you during class discussions about the books. What were some interesting things your students said about using the reading and writing strategies?

A few students recognized how heavy rains in our area sometimes lead to flooded streets or homes. They reflected on how neighbors help one another by sharing resources or offering shelter during these times when we talked about Nicola Davies's (2018) picture book *The Day War Came*. Students created images of floods, tornadoes, and community support in a drawing activity about extreme weather. They explained their artwork, emphasizing teamwork and helping others.

See page 47 in the book for more information on how to facilitate the Green Literacy ideals discussion.

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