

# Awakening to the Climate Crisis

## A Call to Action

**T**he climate crisis raging around the world challenges each of us to do whatever we can to help our children, our communities, and the planet. As educators, we have an

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opportunity to respond in a thoughtful, empathic, action-oriented way. Many of our students are struggling with climate anxiety. Many of our multicultural students live in environmentally challenged neighborhoods. Many of us are being asked to welcome environmental refugees into our classrooms. How can we help our students come to understand that their everyday actions affect those in other countries? How might we invite them to empathize with migrant children who have suffered disproportionately from this climate crisis? Most importantly, how might we empower our students — as well as their parents and our community leaders — to take action to address the climate crisis?

I had my first climate crisis experience on the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico, in 2003. It challenged me to think differently about everything. I had been searching for a quiet place to finish writing a book. Having written my first book on the island of Martha's Vineyard, I had discovered that island life was ideal for writing. The ocean was my muse — and the simpler way of life allowed me to slow down and stay focused.

A few months after I arrived on Vieques, what had been predicted as an ordinary storm became a



catastrophic event that dropped 24 inches of rain in just 24 hours. Water was coming into my idyllic waterfront home from everywhere — through the windows, roof, floors, and even the walls — and I was evacuated to higher ground. At the time, I did not imagine that 15 years later, this same island would be devastated in the eye of Hurricane Maria. Or that I'd one day be welcoming environmental refugees from Puerto Rico and Central America into our educational youth leadership programs in New England.

In my first book, *Stone Soup for the World*, I'd woven together a wide range of 100 true stories about Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cesar Chavez, as well as “ordinary” people from 28 countries and 65 communities — people who had found imaginative ways to overcome obstacles and improve their

lives and their communities. I'd challenged myself to write from the heart — to connect with readers on a deeper level so they would respond to each story's call to action and build a more humanitarian world. The companion curriculum brings their stories to life and gives educators tools to teach empathy as well as social-emotional learning (SEL); diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); and service learning. The Spanish-language edition had just been published when I arrived in Vieques. It became the framework for the Stone Soup Leadership Institute's four-year bilingual demonstration project to train young people to become leaders in their community.

Empathy is essential for social change. From my consulting years focused on building healthy communities with business, government, and community organizations, I'd discovered that fostering



empathy among diverse peoples could overcome obstacles and build bridges. When people empathize with others, they are more willing to step out of their comfort zones and share their resources. By developing compassion for others, they are more likely to work together to develop public-private partnerships to improve their communities, especially their schools. The simple “Stone Soup” folktale teaches us that when we each share whatever we have, we can create a feast for the whole village.

My climate crisis experience led to 20 years of living and working alongside courageous people on the front lines in island communities

around the world. I dedicated *Stone Soup for a Sustainable World: Life-Changing Stories of Young Heroes*, my new book, to sharing the inspiring stories of environmental justice trailblazers and green entrepreneurs who are developing truly extraordinary and innovative ways to solve our environmental problems.

### **Why Do We Need Climate Education?**

The climate crisis is affecting *everyone*. Most people know someone who has been directly affected by it, and as the news reveals every day, the whole planet is in urgent need of our collective help. Scientists, universities, nonprofits, NGOs,

as well as concerned parents and youth environmental leaders are all working tirelessly to spread an urgent message: the next generation deserves the best educational tools to prepare them for their future.

In the United States, New Jersey and Connecticut are the first states to have passed legislation for climate education mandates. Starting this fall, public schools in these states are now required to teach climate education. While that’s a good start, European and Asian countries are light years ahead of the United States when it comes to climate education. In 2015, 178 member countries pledged to use the UN’s 17 Sustainable



Development Goals (SDGs) as a benchmark to focus their initiatives and measure their progress toward improving health and education, reducing inequality, and spurring economic growth — while also tackling the challenges of climate change and working to preserve and protect our oceans and forests. Yet even in those countries, the challenge is monumental. In a survey<sup>1</sup> of 36 European countries, most respondents reported that the responsibility of climate education lies with schools, and 70% stated that the current school curriculum doesn't address climate education. When teachers were asked why they weren't farther along with implementing their climate education goals, 66% said that training is lacking and 51% cited a lack of climate education resources.

### The Power of Storytelling

One of the most powerful ways to develop empathy in our students

is for them to hear other young people talk about their own experiences with climate change, and the innovative solutions they're coming up with to combat its effects. It's incredibly inspiring to read and listen to such stories, because even in dire situations, young people still have hope, and they have great — and viable — ideas about how to create positive change in our world. The stories in *Stone Soup for a Sustainable World* bring the human element to the issue of sustainability, and the lesson plans in the curriculum bring the stories to life and give teachers resources to expand student learning by offering a wealth of activities they can use in class and for their homework assignments. There is also a rich library of videos featuring young people telling their stories, which give students the opportunity to hear the voices of young people on the front lines of climate change in other parts of the world. These

young people talk about not only how climate change is affecting them and their communities, but also what they are doing to combat it — and how we all can help. It is a valuable resource for educators in a wide variety of settings, and it adheres to the Next Generation Science Standards and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

### How Can a Climate Education Curriculum Help Teachers?

As a brand-new teacher who was tasked with implementing the first learning disabilities mandate in Florida, I empathize with teachers who are struggling to implement climate education mandates. It takes real time to craft lesson plans that engage students to learn complex subjects while fulfilling state standards. Yet I'm painfully aware that we are running out of time to respond to the climate crisis. Teachers are struggling to







find training and materials that will inspire and empower their students to navigate this new reality and move beyond climate anxiety to discover a whole new world of sustainability solutions and sustainable career pathways.

Educators who are using our curricula have shared their experiences with us. Here's what a few of them have to say:

"It can be really challenging to find a meaningful science curriculum; to have learning that applies to a student's life versus just learning because the state says you have to learn things. Teachers of all content areas can benefit from these tools and trainings. You can tie sustainability into all different content

areas — not just science. You can build literacy by reading these real-life stories from 38 countries. You can design a civics project by building on [a story's] call to action. There's a broad range of activities that students can learn from under the context of sustainability." —Diana Hopkins, biology teacher, Bristol County Agricultural High School, Massachusetts

"Autumn Peltier is the same age as my students — and she made a huge impact socially and politically in her Canadian home. My students were impressed that she stood up to her prime minister

at the age of 12. Her Instagram advocacy left my students wondering what could happen if more people used social media for good." —Lisa Melendy, environmental science teacher, Redwood High School, California

"We have the same problems all around the world. When we use the Stone Soup Climate Education Curriculum, we can see what is being done in other places for the same problems that we have. So it's easier to take measures and to take action to deal with our problems." —Marcio Marcos, Escola Secundária Jerónimo Emiliano de Andrade, Azores, Portugal

This summer, I enjoyed mentoring a new crop of future teachers at the Institute's 19th Sustainability Summit and heard some more feedback:

"Working with the Stone Soup Leadership Institute has given me the ability to see a great way to implement sustainability into more schools and reach more students by first reaching out to new and upcoming teachers. If teachers can open more employment options and life choices to students through a curriculum about environmental and renewable sources, then the impact can expand to a large populace. Reading *Stone Soup for a Sustainable World* showed me that it's the people who guide children that create the biggest impact in their efforts, and the push they need to reach out of their comfort zones. Change begins with the educator, and everyone should be given the resources to improve any lesson plan that they create — or at the very least, gain inspiration." —Ella Olmez, an education major at Bridgewater State University

"Quality education is important for everybody all over the world. The more we are educated, the more we know, and the more we can take action. When we take action, we can make some changes. We must educate our generation and future

generations so that we can all take action and help in the sustainability efforts." —Stephanie Carlos, biology teacher at Bristol County Agricultural High School

At 14 years old, Josue Cruz Morales was a founding member of the Institute's four-year bilingual demonstration project in Vieques. Today, he has realized his dream of becoming a lawyer and serving his people and border wall immigrants in Texas. "The essential premise of the Institute's message honors Dr. King's motto — Each One, Teach One — everyone needs to share what they know," Josue says. "If we see it from that perspective, one of the kinds of people that will benefit the most from the Institute's tools that have been developed over the years is school teachers."

### Climate Education Affects Us All

Young people are hungering for solutions to the climate crisis — they are eager to learn how they can help, and they want to know how they can pursue jobs in a green economy. Business leaders of sustainability-oriented companies need a trained sustainable workforce. Educational institutions are eager to train them. The greatest challenge they find is that educators — as well as guidance counselors — need to expand their knowledge of the wide diversity of sustainable career pathways that will lead to good paying jobs, and will help local communities transition to a sustainable economy.

Imagine what millions of new jobs in emerging green energy industries could mean for your students. These jobs represent

the opportunity for them to have meaningful careers while helping to rebuild our planet. As educators, you have the extraordinary opportunity to help your students, your community, and our world by taking the first steps toward that new world. Young people deserve the best educational tools to prepare them for their future. It's up to each one of us to respond and take action NOW.

### Note:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/viewpoints/surveys/survey-on-climate-education.htm>

### About the Author

Marianne Larned is the author of the *Stone Soup for the World* series of books, and the *Stone Soup Climate Education Curriculum*. As the Founding Director of the Stone Soup Leadership Institute, she has been a leader in developing climate education and sustainable workforce development tools, trainings, and initiatives for over 25 years. The Institute's tools have been used by educators from the islands of Martha's Vineyard to Vieques, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and British Virgin Islands to the inner cities of Baltimore, Boston, Cincinnati, Holyoke, Fall River, New Bedford, and Oakland. A progressive educator, thought leader, and spokesperson, her educational background includes studying at the Rudolf Steiner International Training Center in Aberdeen, Scotland, and the University of Massachusetts School of Education. Her business background includes a master's degree in Organizational Development from Boston University and leadership development training from Claire Nuer's Learning as Leadership, and the Wilson Learning Management Systems. A pioneer in CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and Healthy Communities, she has served as a business consultant to Fortune 100 companies and Chambers of Commerce to develop workforce development strategies and innovative public-private partnerships in healthcare and education.

**Stone Soup Leadership Institute:** [www.stonesoupleadership.org](http://www.stonesoupleadership.org)

### Disclosure Statement

The author is an employee of Stone Soup Leadership Institute.