

The Cronkite Awards for Climate Education

“Ms. Larned, this is Walter Cronkite,” said the distinguished voice on the phone.

Widely recognized as “the most trusted man in America,” Walter Cronkite believed that journalism was a higher calling. He felt a deep sense of personal responsibility to use his platform as the anchor of CBS Nightly News to inform and educate ordinary people so they could make wise decisions about their future.

It was just before the 2000 elections, and he was very concerned about its outcome. He felt strongly that the lack of an educated constituency was threatening America’s democracy. He thought that if people were uneducated about the issues, they wouldn’t be prepared to vote. Instead, they would be easily influenced by fake news, and distracted by fear tactics.

When Mr. Cronkite invited me to his offices on the 57th floor of CBS headquarters in New York City, it began a life-changing journey. I was honored that he wanted to create a TV series based on my first book *Stone Soup for the World: Life-Changing Stories of Everyday Heroes*. He believed these stories could educate people about the issues of our time—and teach them by example how they too could have the courage to take a stand, even against all odds.

We did many great things together. Standing by his side, I always felt taller—and sometimes fearless. For more than a decade Mr. Cronkite served as the Stone Soup Leadership Institute’s honorary chairperson. We are indebted to his leadership. Upon his passing, The Institute hosted the Cronkite Awards. His wisdom and vision of preparing youth as future leaders in their communities gave rise to this Awards Ceremony. The Awardshonored thoseusing the power of the media to create positive change in the world,includingDr. Sylvia Earle andCharlayne Hunter-Gault. Distinguished speakershaveincluded Bob Schiefer, David McCullough, and Ted Kennedy Jr. Mr. Cronkite’s familypresented the Awards.

Mr. Cronkite was an ardent environmentalist. Back in 1970, he strode into the CBS broadcast center and announced his goal of featuring environmental news stories. He worked closely with his investigative team to produce a series of stories about the top environmental issues of the day. The Emmy award-winning segments came to be called *Can the World Be Saved?* By spotlighting these issues on the CBS Evening News, Mr. Cronkite introduced them into the national conversation with the urgency they called for. And with the same passion he had for covering the moon landing, his coverage of the inaugural Earth Day celebration rallied over 20 million Americans to launch the green movement.

It’s been over fifty years since that first Earth Day – and the climate crisis is ravishing our planet every day. As severe weather issues increase in frequency and magnitude, the lack of media coverage is disconcerting. It’s been estimated that merely .01% of the news is reporting on climate change. As a result, people aren’t informed of the most pressing issue of our time: Climate Change.

Now, at a time when the health of our planet is being so severely challenged, we must keep Mr. Cronkite’s spirit alive. He would be very proud of the young people featured in this book, who are on the frontlines of climate change and are courageously working to build a more sustainable world. Young people around the world are hungry to learn how they can adapt to climate change in their communities. Up until now, Climate Education is not being taught in our classrooms. Given the challenges facing our world, I ask myself today: “What would Walter Cronkite do?”

For this Earth Week, The Institute is hosting The Cronkite Awards for Climate Education to honor leaders who are champions of Climate Education. Against great odds, these leaders we are honoring have passed legislation to integrate climate education at the state level. They represent a model for future collaboration; with this event we aim to build bridges between leaders across states and institutions, to push this agenda forward. The next generation

deserves the best educational tools to prepare them for their future – to offset the impacts of the climate crisis. We need universal climate education now to help build a more just, equitable, and sustainable future for all.

At the event we will launch the Stone Soup Climate Education Curriculum including this book. We want to make it easier for educators to take the lead in educating all of us. To help spread the word about the urgency of the climate crisis and the innovative solutions in this book that will inspire their students to pursue sustainable career pathways. We hope that these stories inspire everyone –teachers and students, parents, grandparents, along with our leaders from business, government and education –to join them, follow their lead, so together we can meet this urgent challenge.

In 2002, at The Institute’s Celebration of Heroes in New York City, Walter Cronkite urged everyone to pledge to build a more peaceful and sustainable world. Since then, the dangers to our planet, and to our democracy have grown more urgent. At the Cronkite Awards for Climate Education we will invite everyone to sign this Pledge.

Our Call-to-Action Pledge with Walter Cronkite

We accept Walter Cronkite's challenge for a new kind of engaged activism,
to be a force for positive change in the world.

We will join with the Global Hero Award recipients and carry on the legacy of
Mahatma Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Cesar Chavez and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
to improve the conditions of our neighborhoods, our countries and the world
through individual action and working with others.

Together, we will forge new directions for the global economy,
bridge the gap between the haves and have nots
and strive to build a more peaceful, sustainable world.