



CLIMATE STORYTELLING PROMPTS & PITFALLS

The climate crisis affects all of us and impacts many interwoven social issues, which is why practically any story can be a climate story. Consider thinking about your previous work, or movies and TV shows you love, and ask yourself what those stories or characters would be like with a climate focus. Find an aspect or issue within the larger climate crisis and humanize it.

PROMPTS

- Include characters experiencing climate anxiety, guilt, rage, grief, etc.
- Show characters working on climate policy
- Feature a health-issue resulting from climate change
- Focus on a hyper-local climate issue—that thematically reflects something universal
- Exemplify problems with extractive or consumer culture
- Attack problematic systems while honoring the needs and worth of individuals who are still reliant on those systems
- Show a person or people's daily lives disrupted by a climate-related issue
- Portray a character or characters changing their individual behavior in response to a climate-related issue
- Feature an ensemble or de-emphasize individualism
- Reinforce connections between humans, other beings, and/or landscapes on Earth
- A society with a harmonious interconnected relationship to nature
- Offer a realistic solution to a specific climate-related issue
- Include a person or people from a first and most impacted community
- Highlight characters who must adapt to a new situation created by climate change
- Unlikely allies working together to resolve a climate-related issue
- Utilize a setting in the near future where climate issues are being addressed or ignored in a specific way
- Show how climate change is altering people's relationship to familiar places
- Highlight the intersection of technology and justice including who develops it and who benefits from it
- Characters discovering ways to positively make use of aspects of the climate crisis
- Showcase what living beyond fossil fuel dependence would look like
- Depict a culture that is decolonized and guided by a non-extractive economy



WHAT ARE “CLIMATE-RELATED ISSUES”?



- Erosion
- Rising Sea Levels
- Ocean Acidification
- Pollution (Air, Soil, Water, Noise, Light)
- Carbon Offsets
- Emissions
- Deforestation
- Loss of Home or Habitat
- Intensive Farming
- Food Deserts
- Large Scale Meat Production
- Urban Sprawl
- Colonization
- Industrial or Household Food Waste
- Plastic Reliance
- Single-Use Plastics
- Over-Consumption
- Fast Fashion
- Unequal Distribution of Goods and Services
- Supply Chain Disruption
- Loss of Connection with Nature
- Inequity to climate solutions (Transportation, Healthy Food)
- Toxic Individualism
- Vulnerable Communities
- Environmental Racism
- Climate Refugees and Displacement
- Disaster Mitigation
- Extreme Weather
- Climate-Related Natural Disasters
- Endangerment and Extinction of Species
- Socioeconomic Disparities in Healthcare
- Climate Disinformation Campaigns
- Suppression of Climate Facts
- Climate Denialism
- Greenwashing
- Corporate Espionage
- Sabotage, Detainment, and/or Murder of Climate Activists
- Government Corruption (Gerrymandering, Dark Money)
- Health Issues (Asthma, Allergies, Heat Stroke, Etc.)
- Unsustainable Resource Extraction (Mining, Fracking, Drilling)



CLIMATE STORYTELLING PITFALLS



White Saviors:

Stories where predominantly white people confront and solve the issues at hand, often by acting alone or by being the “natural” leader/hero.

Doomism/Defeatism:

Stories that are apocalyptic and/or offer no redemption, hope, or motivation to the audience.

Passing Mentions:

Stories that reference climate issues only briefly, or use them as an unacknowledged background setting.

Obscure Connections:

Stories that rely too heavily on allegory, metaphor, or symbolism, allowing for audiences to misinterpret the message as something non-climate-related.

Distant Futures:

Stories that take place far into the future, thus perpetuating the idea that the climate crisis is not a current set of problems but rather some other generation’s set of problems.

Big Tech Solutions:

Stories that position a singular miraculous technology as the solution to all climate woes, or make use of a Planet B to save humanity.

Lack of Research:

Stories with minimally researched climate issues that muddy the waters and further confuse audiences.

Going Too Big:

Stories that try to tackle too many climate issues at once and overload or alienate their audiences.