Communicating the Climate Crisis: Stories in the Classroom

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As the climate crisis escalates, educators find themselves frequently having to engage with this issue in a classroom context. A significant contribution that educators, especially language teachers, can make is connected to communicating about environmental questions and helping learners develop the critical skills and competences to engage with such questions fully. In this contribution, we present a series of tasks drawing upon the medium of stories – both fiction and non-fiction, for younger and older learners – which are designed to develop a number of key competences: enhance vocabulary in English relating to climate issues; develop awareness of the key themes regarding these issues; increase learners' critical thinking (regarding the use of language specifically) concerning information available on climate change and related issues.

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KOMUNICIRANJE PODNEBNE KRIZE: ZGODBE V UČILNICI

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Ključne besede:
komuniciranje podnebne krize,
zgodbe v učilnici,
na podnebje vezano leposlovje,
didaktika,
poučevanje jezika

S stopnjevanjem podnebne krize morajo pedagogi/pedagoginje oz. učitelji/učiteljice to problematiko vedno pogosteje aktivno vključevati v svoje poučevanje. Pedagogi/pedagoginje, predvsem pa učitelji/učiteljice jezika, lahko bistveno pripomorejo k razumevanju podnebne krize s komuniciranjem o podnebnih vprašanjih in pomagajo učencem/učenkam pri razvoju nujnih spretnosti ter kompetenc za celostno spopadanje z izzivi. V tem prispevku predstavljamo nekaj nalog, ki se navezujejo na zgodbe (vključujejo leposlovje in neleposlovje tako za mlajše kot za starejše učence/učenke) in so oblikovane tako, da spodbudijo razvoj nekaterih ključnih kompetenc: bogatenje besedišča angleškega jezika vezanega na podnebno problematiko; razvoj zavedanja in razumevanja ključnih tematik povezanih s to problematiko; razvoj kritičnega mišljenja učencev/učenk (predvsem glede uporabe jezika), navezujoč se na razpoložljive informacije o podnebnih spremembah in sorodnih problematikah.

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1 Introduction

The decision of the respected British publication *The Guardian* in 2019 to update its style guide to prioritise the terms *climate emergency* over *climate change* and *global heating* over *global warming* reflected the seriousness of the climate situation and the growing concerns over the fate of the planet. As the editor-in-chief, Katherine Viner, said: "The phrase 'climate change', for example, sounds rather passive and gentle when what scientists are talking about is a catastrophe for humanity" (Carrington, 2019). This catastrophe for humanity, as she refers to it, seems only to have gathered pace in the intervening years, with climate scientists issuing bleak predictions as to the future of humankind. NASA (n. d.) scientists have pointed to the likelihood of increasingly frequent episodes of extreme weather in the U.S. as the planet's temperature increases, which would be echoed across the globe unless carbon emissions are significantly reduced (Masson-Delmotte et al., 2021).

For educators, the climate crisis brings clear challenges. The role of language teachers is no longer simply to instruct their learners in grammar and lexis but to prepare them to function in an increasingly globalised and multilingual society (Hiver, 2018). While the frameworks to develop the skills and competences required to do so may vary – for example, *life skills* (United Nations Children's Fund, n. d.) or *global competency* (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018) – there is a degree of conceptual resonance among them and a shared understanding that preparing to navigate our modern world entails engaging with issues such as the natural world and sustainability. Viewing this as a call to engage with the climate issue in the classroom, the question remains as to how best approach it, especially given that some young people are said to have developed "eco-anxiety", burdened by the worry of having to deal with the damage being inflicted upon the planet (Chaaraoui, 2023).

This article is a response to the challenge posed by educating on the climate crisis in the language classroom. It presents examples of activities for primary school learners (in both English and Slovene for younger learners and English for older learners of English as a foreign language), high school learners and tertiary level, devised as part of the ZELEN.KOM[1] project at the Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor. These activities draw upon the medium of

[1] https://zelen.kom.ff.um.si/

stories, both fiction (picture books and novels) and non-fiction (newspaper articles), with the understanding that climate change is also part of our learners' lives, or their own stories. The aim of these activities is to foster communication relating to the climate crisis, which we break down into sub-aims: to develop the necessary vocabulary to discuss the climate issue while at the same time raising awareness of some of the key issues pertaining to it as well as to enhance learners' capacity for critical thinking through the analysis of texts. The activities here may be of use to teachers and scholars who are engaging with climate issues in their own classrooms.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Global Skills/Competency

In education in general, there has been a shift in recent decades regarding the knowledge that pupils are expected to acquire through schooling. The acquisition of traditional subject-content knowledge is no longer regarded as sufficient and an expectation has grown within educational circles that learners must be equipped with appropriate skills and competences to navigate our modern world (White & Murray, 2015). In the Slovenian context, the *Zakon o osnovni šoli (ZOsn),* or Basic School Act, specifies these skills (among others) as aiming to "educate about respecting human rights, understanding diversity and teach tolerance" as well as to "educate for sustainable development, for taking responsibility for one's actions, one's health, other people and the environment" (Eurydice, 2022, p. 25).

The language classroom has come to be seen as the natural site for such "life skills" learning (Platzer & Mercer, 2022). Life skills have been addressed through models of intercultural learning, for example, with Byram et al.'s (2002) widely-used framework, which fosters the skills and competences to manage the challenges of our ever-more intercultural world. It could perhaps be said that Byram's model has been superseded by the so-called "global" frameworks, for example, UNESCO's *global education* (UNESCO, n. d.), OECD's *global competency* (OECD, 2018) and Mercer et al.'s (2019) *global skills*. While the diction and emphasis of these frameworks may vary, their similarities are clear, encompassing the intercultural aspect of education, (including critical thinking skills) and building emotional regulation, wellbeing strategies and digital competences. The aim of these models is a sustainable, peaceful and democratic world, arrived at through collaboration and cooperation. It is within these models that we situate the activities we have developed, intended to address

the climate crisis in the classroom, promoting a sustainable existence and cultivating critical awareness to assess information on the climate issue, especially from the wealth of digital sources on offer today. Being able to collaborate and cooperate to achieve solutions entails developing a sufficient vocabulary and rhetorical skills to discuss and debate issues related to the climate crisis and to do so in a climate of empathetic tolerance and respect.

2.2 Stories in the Classroom

Stories have long been exploited in the classroom for a variety of purposes. As Maureen et al. (2021) say: "Storytelling is probably one of the oldest forms of teaching" (p. 680). As these authors further claim, storytelling can be a useful tool in developing literacy skills through providing a model of speech, a context in which learning can take place and a space in which the imagination can grow. In terms of language acquisition in particular, second language learning is often facilitated through stories, which may be particularly motivating for learners (Moon & Maeng, 2012). For Ioannou-Georgiou and Ramirez Verdugo (2011), stories provide a medium through which the four key skills – of listening, reading, writing and speaking – can be combined, while Abasi and Soori (2014) point to the role of stories in vocabulary acquisition, which resonates with our aim of equipping our students with the appropriate language skills to engage with the climate crisis meaningfully.

In keeping with our goal of developing skills and competences for collaboration and cooperation, Hibbin (2016) points to the use of storytelling as an empathy-building tool, while exploring characterisation in stories can be beneficial in building intercultural awareness (Ribeiro, 2016).

Stories are central in understanding the other, as it is through stories we communicate most commonly (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Yet stories are also how we understand the self, as it is through this medium that we impose order and coherence on our experiences, making meaning of our lives (Riessman, 2002; Sandelowski, 1991), while even prompting reevaluation. Ribeiro (2016) claims that ". . . narrative practices are able to evoke, in all participants, unexpected emotions, ideas and unexpected selves. Consequently, they shift perspectives on experience, constructing and deconstructing knowledge" (p. 72). The pedagogical potential here is clear for both younger and older learners, as exploring the climate crisis through

the medium of stories offers an opportunity for learners to examine – and potentially reconsider – their thoughts and feelings in regard to this issue.

What we also recognise about stories in our activities is their potential to communicate ideas. Stories have often been used as a means with which to pass on information from generation to generation, a process described as "socialization and enculturation" (Cruz & Snider, 2009, p. 380). What we also note is the persuasive power of stories, in the sphere of public policy, for example (Jones, 2014), or in the media. Newspaper articles are seen to play a vital role in shaping our beliefs. According to Martínez Lirola, "the power of the media together with the symbolic power of language privileges certain construals of reality and identity for media audiences" (2006, p. 379).

This quote points to the vital role played by language in shaping our reality. If we are to produce globally-skilled learners, as outlined in the frameworks above, guiding them towards critical awareness of the messages conveyed on important topics such as the climate crisis is vital. Drawing upon the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA), our learners need to become "critical" readers, with critical in this regard meaning understanding texts as social acts (Hood et al., 1996). Texts and talk, according to the CDA framework, reproduce or resist power relations within a social or political context (Byram et al., 2002). Engaging in discourse analytical activities with older learners guides them to explore the language mechanisms writers use to make meanings and ultimately achieve the purpose in a text. By engaging with texts critically, our learners engage in "**language activities** involving **language processes** to produce and/or receive **texts** in relation to **themes** in specific **domains**" (CEFR – Svet Europe, 2001, Section 2.1, p. 32). Interacting with text-based activities stresses the social use of language and relies on collaborative processes. As the CEFR website claims, "when learners/social agents engage in mediation activities, they create the space and conditions for communicating and/or learning, (co)construct new meaning, collaborate to make sense of a text, or convey ideas and information to others" (CEFR, n. d.).

Within the overall framework of critical discourse analysis informing our activities, we focus on the concept of framing in particular. Framing has enjoyed a long history in various disciplines as a useful lens through which to study social reality (Shaw, n. d.). In linguistics, framing has been especially impactful in the field of cognitive linguistics (Plemenitaš & Krajnc, 2019), in particular in the exploration "of concepts

that profile the same thing against a different frame" (p. 18). The power of *same thing but different frame* is illustrated by the following example in Chong and Druckman (2007), citing the work of Rasinski (1989, p. 319): when the term *welfare* is used, around twenty percent of Americans feel too little in the way of resources is devoted to this problem; however, when the term *assistance to the poor* is employed, the percentage grows to around sixty-five percent.

The impact of the framing of issues and the choice of language within that framing is particularly pertinent in *persuasive communication*, for example, the media and political discourse. As D'Angelo (2017) points out, "communicators use media frames in an attempt to influence individuals and/or groups to think about, evaluate, and act on a topic in line with the contextual information encoded in the frame of reference" (p. 2). The media in this way are seen to both set the frames of what we think in terms of the content that they include and also how we think about that content in terms of framing (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

2.3 Narratives and Climate Fiction

Narratives and fiction are two literary terms crucially connected to stories and storytelling. A narrative is defined as a story "involving events, characters, and what the characters say and do" (Abrams, 1993, p. 123), while fiction is "any literary *narrative*, whether in prose or verse, which is invented" (p. 64). Fiction can be difficult to define because, as Hawthorn says, it does not even "have to take the form of a story or a narrative" (1997, p. 4). In this article, however, we use the term fiction in its "narrower" sense as "narratives that are written in prose" (Abrams, 1993, p. 64) and are not "true reports" (Hawthorn, 1997, p. 3), while we also include stories that belong to the opposite – non-fiction.

Fiction is connected to storytelling, an important cultural aspect of our lives (Hawthorn, 1997, p. 3). We often encounter stories in our childhood, with Hawthorn (1997) offering an interesting comparison to the concept of children's play: "Reading novels also resembles the child's make-believe games" (p. 5). He suggests that comparing novels (or short stories) and games functions well because both "allow us to act out *alternative* moves, modes of behaviour, or whatever, in a way impossible in the real world where we often have to act quickly and irrevocably" (p. 6). With this in mind, it makes sense that we often interpret novels – an important representative of fiction, which is "sometimes . . . used simply as a synonym for the

novel" (Abrams, 1993, p. 64) – as literary works that "elicit empathy for characters by promoting character identification and allowing readers to share a character's point of view" (Bitenc, 2017, p. 84). Both reading and playing thus resemble acting, an attempt to portray and understand someone else's point of view or experience.

"[The] novel has become the dominant genre of our age" (Monaco, 2025, p. 17), which is also reflected in the popularity of this genre in climate fiction. Almost a decade ago, Johns-Putra (2016) recognized that "[the] increasing number of ecocritical analyses of climate change literature, particularly novels, is helping to shape a canon of climate change fiction" (p. 266). The latter is often referred to as *cli-fi*, a term that was "[coined] by American activist and freelance writer Dan Bloom in 2007 . . . [and] is an umbrella term that describes the growing interest by fiction writers in climate change and global warming" (Monaco, 2025, p. 16). Nowadays we define cli-fi as a specific genre; however, as Johns-Putra (2016) points out, we should acknowledge that genre is not a rigid concept, and cli-fi can coexist with "science fiction, dystopia (themselves two genres given too much cross-fertilisation), fantasy, thriller, even romance . . ." (p. 267). In any way, "cli-fi provides speculative insights into the future that humanity may face" (Monaco, 2025, p. 17) and it can importantly "include a variety of ethical concerns" (p. 17).

This genre, of course, has also entered the realm of children's literature, where Bitenc's concept of promoting character identification and sharing someone else's point of view can be just as important. As Lindgren Leavenworth and Manni (2020), whose article emphasizes the importance of connecting the fields of "sustainability education among children and Young Adults (YA), and . . . English literature, particularly centred on speculative fiction" (p. 728), state: "Our examination of the novels[2] starts from the conviction that speculative cli-fi can be seen as a safe space in which to imaginatively engage with contemporary risk" (p. 728). Their research recognizes the importance of using climate fiction (as well as the thoughts and ideas of the learners) in education.

[2] In their study, Lindgren Leavenworth and Manni use Julie Bertagna's *Exodus* trilogy, "[targeting] readers between eleven and thirteen and depicting a future world completely altered by climate change." (2020, p. 728).

3 Tasks: Rationale

As stated, the role of the activities in general is to explore issues related to the climate crisis, build vocabulary and, for older learners in particular, to increase critical awareness of the language mechanisms used to convey a (persuasive) message. In the following section, examples of the tasks we have devised to this end are presented. For the sake of brevity, where questions are included in the tasks, only some of the possible answers to those questions are included.

3.1 First Example: Fiction for Older Learners (Aged 18+)

The following task example for older learners focuses on a fictional work, the novel *New York 2140* (2017) by Kim Stanley Robinson. The story is set in the flooded New York of the future and as the author claims in the video promoting and describing his work, part of his inspiration was the potential sea level rise mentioned in a scientific article by the scientist James Hansen and his colleagues (Orbit Books, 2018). Robinson creates a world in which the flooded Lower Manhattan resembles "SuperVenice" (Robinson, 2017, p. 158), a beautiful yet problematic new reality to live in. Since the learners are older, the potential climate-change related catastrophe can be discussed; however, it needs to be contextualized by the teacher.

Through this task, learners are prompted to: expand their knowledge and understanding of the climate crisis in connection to other relevant issues (e.g., understanding the role of carbon emissions and our current consumerist way of living in relation to the climate crisis); develop the competence of critical thinking and of conveying and evaluating their ideas in connection to the climate crisis; become aware of how cli-fi can be used as a didactic tool to raise awareness of the climate crisis issue; develop responsibility for others and future generations.

In the first part of the task, the learners become aware of how cli-fi can raise awareness of the climate crisis. The teacher first briefly discusses the concept of the climate crisis with the learners and explains the cli-fi genre, discussing the fictional elements of the futuristic novel they are working with (and which the learners have already read beforehand). They discuss whether a work of climate fiction can portray a realistic situation, with the learners asked to present their views on if and how a fictional narrative can contribute to raising awareness of climate-related issues

(possible answers: *the reader can identify with the characters, develop empathy and responsibility for future generations).*

The second part of the task focuses on *New York 2140*. The teacher highlights the problem of rising sea levels, connecting the topic to more familiar areas nearby, such as Venice and the local Piran, so that the learners can better identify with the topic. The learners discuss the problems the characters in the novel encounter and what innovative ways of transport and living the novel portrays. The teacher provides a few excerpts on the topic to guide the learners, for example:

> . . . the so-called SuperVenice, fashionably hip, artistic, sexy, a new urban legend. Some people were happy to live on the water if it was conceptualized as Venetian, enduring the mold and hassle to live in a work of art. (Robinson, 2017, p. 342)

> Out onto the crowded canal. The other boats in the financial district were mostly water taxis and private boats like mine, but there were also big old vaporetti grumbling from dock to dock, jammed with workers let out for the last hour of day. (p. 29)

The learners present their opinion on the two-fold portrayal of the city: the mold and crowded canals on the one hand and the romanticized concept of the floating city on the other. The teacher invites them to think about how romanticizing a catastrophe (flooding related to the climate crisis) makes them feel, and whether they understand it as a coping mechanism or as a critique of those not taking the catastrophe seriously.

The second part of the task invites the learners to look at the climate catastrophe presented in the novel from the perspective of consumerism and capitalism. The novel emphasizes the lack of change in lifestyle after the catastrophe, strongly criticizing individualism, capitalism and consumerism – three issues relevant nowadays. The learners then critically discuss these issues in the novel, identifying some excerpts where these topics are most obvious. One of the several possible topics to discuss is how the poor experience the catastrophe in a considerably more negative way than the rich: the poor are called "water rats" (Robinson, 2017, p. 41) living in their boats, while the investors are getting "*too rich*" (p. 149). The teacher invites the learners to discuss the negative connotation of the expression *water rats* and how it stigmatizes those who struggle in the flooded environment.

The last part of the task focuses on the chapters titled "the citizen", narrated by a citizen of New York, who experiences the consequences of sea level rise firsthand and offers a personal insight into the causes that led to this catastrophic situation. The key goal of this task is to investigate the ironic undertone of the narration, focusing on the character's mocking attitude towards his predecessors (fictionally, us today), who did not take the scientific evidence of the climate crisis seriously enough. The following excerpt is one example that can help the teacher:

> People sometimes say no one saw it [i.e., the flooding] coming, but no, wrong: they did. Paleoclimatologists looked at the modern situation and saw CO2 levels screaming up from 280 to 450 parts per million in less than three hundred years . . . and they said, Whoa. They said, Holy shit. People! they said. Sea level rise! . . . They put it in bumper sticker terms: massive sea level rise sure to follow our unprecedented release of CO2! They published their papers, and shouted and waved their arms, and a few canny and deeply thoughtful sci-fi writers wrote up lurid accounts of such an eventuality, and the rest of civilization went on torching the planet like a Burning Man pyromasterpiece. Really. That's how much those knuckleheads cared about their grandchildren, and that's how much they believed their scientists . . . But okay, you can't really imagine a catastrophe will hit you until it does . . . History is humankind trying to get a grip. Obviously not easy. But it could go better if you would pay a little more attention to certain details, like for instance your planet. (Robinson, 2017, pp. 175–182)

Based on excerpts from the chapters, the teacher then asks the learners how the lower register of the speaker affects their perception of the excerpt and whether it makes it easier for them to identify with the character. Together they analyse the narration in terms of its use of swearwords, exclamations, hyperbole and, in particular, irony. The teacher invites the students to think about the character's pronounced critique of the previous generations, asking them whether they feel implicitly addressed when a fictional story places them in the position of those who have been ignoring the climate crisis for too long as well as probing whether they find it easier to identify with the character when the author uses a first-person narration and a more conversational style of writing. The learners thus evaluate their understanding of whether reading cli-fi can help them understand the urgency of the situation and how this can be achieved through the style of narration.

3.2 Second Example: Fiction for Younger Learners

The following task for younger learners offers an example of how we can introduce the topic of environmental awareness and climate crisis with the use of a fictional work, in our instance, a picturebook. Picturebooks are a valuable medium to convey any kind of message to younger children because of their "particular use of sequential imagery, usually in tandem with a small number of words" (Salisbury and

Styles, 2012, p. 7). As Salisbury and Styles (2012) state, in most picturebooks, "the meaning emerges through the interplay of word and image, neither of which would make sense when experienced independently of the other" (p. 7). Thus, this task focuses on both the text and illustrations in the chosen picturebook: *Greta and the Giants,* by Zoë Tucker (2019).

If the task is to be used with learners in the first years of primary school, it can be carried out with a Slovene translation, while for older primary-school EFL learners, the task can be carried out with the teacher's assistance. The following tasks are based on the latter option. The main goals are to build learner awareness of the following: the importance of the coexistence of animals, plants and humans and of a responsible and respectful behaviour towards nature; the issue of habitat destruction, connecting it to their local, Slovene area; the importance of both the individual and community; to raise awareness of the climate crisis issue and develop a sense of empowerment in regard to their individual and family involvement.

The first part of the task prepares the learners for the group reading activity. The teacher asks the learners if they have heard of Greta Thunberg, whose "stand to save the world" (Tucker, 2019, p. 1), inspired the story. The teacher then invites the readers to think about what they imagine as "saving the world" and how they could be a part of it. Together, they discuss their ideas.

The second step focuses on the first part of the story and a careful explanation of the topic by the teacher. Since the task is meant for younger learners, the focus is not on the crisis and catastrophes but on learning manageable concepts, such as deforestation, or the importance of caring co-existence, all of which are expanded and contextualized in connection to the climate crisis. The learners read the first eleven pages with the help of their teacher, looking at the illustrations to understand the relationship between Greta and the forest animals, while connecting the fictional forest environment to those around them, presenting this as a local issue.

With questions and excerpts from the picturebook, the learners start working on the issues the story portrays. To identify the main issues of the story, they are asked to underline the parts of the text that (1) describe the animals and (2) describe the Giants. In answering these questions, the students may observe that, for example, the animals are described as "tired" and "sad" (Tucker, 2019, p. 10), or that the

wolf's "tail [is] low to the ground" (p. 5). They may see that the "greedy Giants" (p. 9) are termed as "huge, lumbering oafs" who were "worse than ever" (p. 6).

By examining the animal descriptions, the learners can develop an awareness of the animals' behaviour, especially by recognizing their potential feelings and connecting them to the Giants' behaviour (i.e., the animals are afraid and sad because the Giants are greedy and reckless). They also compare the written descriptions to the illustrations, for example, those depicting the animals hiding in the dark part of the forest while the Giants ignore them, or those portraying a grey city full of smoke. Next, the teacher encourages the learners' independent thinking by asking them what the potential continuation of the story could be. How can Greta help the animals? The learners then present their ideas to each other.

The reading activity follows, focusing on the second part of the story, from page 12 to page 23. The teacher reads it with the learners and they compare Greta's ideas with their previously discussed ideas. The teacher invites the students to identify and describe the issue at heart of the story, which is connected to the Giants' behaviour (possible answers: *destruction of the animal and human habitat, cutting down the forests, etc.*). The teacher connects these issues to current (preferably local) issues related to the climate crisis and how the Giants' behaviour reflects human behaviour in our everyday lives. After explaining the main problems and terms (e.g., *deforestation*), the teacher moves on to the possible solutions. They first emphasize the importance of individual contributions to solving this problem and then invite their learners to think about the following values: persistence, ingenuity and resourcefulness. The teacher explains the meaning of these words and the learners connect them to Greta and her actions, further consolidating their knowledge and developing a sense of empowerment.

The third part of the task focuses on the importance of group work and community, showing the learners that individual action can be more impactful with the help of others. The teacher introduces this idea by asking the learners to identify when in the story the Giants notice Greta (possible answer: *they notice her only after a group of animals and other people join her*). The teacher points out the importance of community on the one hand and the interconnectedness of humans, animals and plants on the other, best illustrated by Greta's confrontation with the Giants and her angry assertation that "your [i.e., the Giants'] greedy behaviour is spoiling our home" (Tucker, 2019, p. 21).

The learners discuss how Greta uses the pronoun *our* to refer to the homes and forests of humans and animals, emphasizing the power of community and the importance of plants and animals in our lives. The final part of the task focuses on the last part of the story. The following questions can help lead the discussion: How do the Giants react and feel after Greta and others point out their behaviour? (*They are embarrassed and sad. They feel terrible.)*; How do the Giants improve their behaviour? (*They apologize and promise to try harder, they become less greedy, they slow down, etc.).* What are the consequences of the Giants' changed behaviour? What is the forest like now? (*The forest becomes more beautiful and colourful. The illustrations show humans, the Giants, animals and plants coexisting, playing, enjoying each other's company. The grey city full of smoke is replaced by a colourful city full of trees and grass, etc.)*

To make the story even more personal, the teacher finally asks the learners how they respond when they make a mistake and whether they also believe that working together and taking care of each other can "save the world". To conclude the task, the teacher uses the final pages of the picturebook, which include information about Greta Thunberg's real story and her words: "No one is too small to make a difference" (Tucker, 2019, p. 31), to amplify the importance of individual work. Additionally, the teacher reads the steps on page 32, explaining how anyone can help Greta and contribute to a better world and how they can transfer this knowledge to their families.

3.3 Third Example: Non-Fiction for Older Learners (aged 13 to 17)

In the example tasks for older learners presented here, we employ two newspaper articles, one from *The Guardian* newspaper and the other from the *Daily Mail,* both U.K. publications. The articles were carefully selected to present the same news story from different political and social perspectives. *The Guardian* is viewed as a left-leaning publication, while the *Daily Mail* is centre to right on the political spectrum. In line with the theme of the eco-crisis, the texts report on the sentencing of climate change activists from the group Just Stop Oil who were charged and subsequently sentenced for criminal damage after throwing tomato soup at Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*. In selecting these articles, the assumption on our part was that the attitudes toward the eco protestors would reflect wider views on the climate crisis (which, after careful reading of the texts, we felt able to confirm).

In the first step of the task, the learners first "warm up" by discussing various sets of terms, which are closely related in terms of meaning (for example, *refugee/migrant/asylum seeker*) but may be used in different contexts to reflect the ideological position of the author. In this way, learners are guided to consider the "same-different" framing of the information they receive. The second step of the activity asks the learners to think about the headlines of the two stories: *Just Stop Oil activists throw soup at Van Gogh's Sunflowers after fellow protesters jailed* (Gayle, 2024) is from *The Guardian*, while *Just Stop Oil eco-zealots risked causing 'serious damage' to £72.5million Van Gogh Sunflowers masterpiece with Heinz tomato soup attack, court hears* (Lodge, 2024) is from the *Daily Mail*.

They are asked to try to determine what kind of stance, if any, the newspapers have adopted in regard to the members of Just Stop Oil (which they may deduce by the use of the more neutral "activists" as opposed to the negative "eco-zealots"). By doing so, they are reminded that media stories may convey a "persuasive" message.

In order to analyse more fully what this message may be and how it is conveyed, the third step in our activities moves towards reading. The first reading of the texts asks the learners to match the headline with the story. The second reading of the text moves toward a more detailed examination of the content. In line with the frameworks of CDA and framing analysis, we provide the learners with the following guidelines, as specified by Byram et al. (2002) in intercultural work. Our learners are asked to consider the following discourse structures in the text and any others that they may find significant: sources, perspectives, arguments; vocabulary, connotations, names; implications and presuppositions; extrapolation of statistics; active and passive constructions; rhetorical expressions (metaphors and similes); us versus them (2002, p. 27).

What they are also asked to consider in relation to the text is how the information contained in it is "framed" and how this may differ between the two texts. In order to do this, we follow the work of Entman (1993), who describes framing as "salience" and "selection". We guide learners to consider which information is included in a text (selected) and how that information has been presented to us (salience) in order to convey a particular definition and interpretation of an issue, a possible solution to it and a moral stance we may take in regard to it. According to Entman, frames, then, define problems–determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values;

diagnose causes–identify the forces creating the problem; make moral judgments –evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies –offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects (1993, p. 52).

In the *Daily Mail* article (James, 2024), for example, personal details of the activists are prioritised over details of the legal case and the verdict itself, indicating the process of information selection. The activists are described with terms such as "vegan" and "privately-educated", while one of the activists is described as growing up in a "£2.85 million Chelsea townhouse" (para. 10). The article's title asks, "Is this Britain's most annoying activist?" (James, 2024) and elsewhere it is claimed that one of the activists "boasted" about not having to support herself financially, thereby giving her more time to protest. What learners have observed about this article is that the language mechanisms work to create a profile of the protestors as "spoiled" (as described by one student), who are perhaps out of touch with reality due to their affluence – or perhaps with the reality of the readership of this particular publication. The value-loaded terms such as "annoying" and "boasted" demonstrate a clear negative stance towards the activists, indicative of the negative moral framing embedded in the reporting.

The Guardian story (Gayle, 2024), by contrast, is seen to be more neutral in some ways (or perhaps without the immediate value-laden lexis of its *Daily Mail* counterpart). There is none of the personal detail given in the other article present here – only the ages and names of the defendants is provided. Students have observed that priority is given to details of the trial, with a focus on the judge's rationale for the sentencing. Connected to this is the use of legal – neutral lexis – such as "Section 63 of the sentencing code requires me" (para. 18) and "only custodial sentences are appropriate" (para. 18) featuring in the text. Quotations also feature heavily, in a sense allowing the main actors to speak for themselves. Neutral reporting verbs are used to introduce the quotations, such as "say" and "told", in contrast to "boast" from the Daily Mail. What *The Guardian* also includes, which may indicate a more sympathetic tone towards the protesters, is one of the activists' pleas for mitigation, in a sense a defence of their actions. This plea places their protest in a historical context and in the context of what we could perhaps term as a "necessary evil," i.e., that protests like this must be carried out to prevent a "catastrophic future" from becoming a reality. What the students have observed in regard to this article is framing in terms of diagnosing the causes of their actions in two senses. The activists

are responsible for the attack on the painting; however, there is a question as to who is responsible for the wider context – the eco-crisis – in which this protest took place.

The follow-up and last stage of these tasks is to discuss the actions of the protestors and whether or not learners feel that this protest could be justified. This and similar tasks based on discourse analysis and framing in particular are beneficial in guiding our learners to decode the messages that are conveyed to us through the media on significant topics.

3.4 Fourth Example: Non-Fiction for Older Learners (Aged 17+)

Another set of tasks for older learners (senior high school to college students) may be taken from the book *On Time and Water* (2019/2021) by an Icelandic author, Andri Snaer Magnason. Magnason is not only a writer but also a documentary filmmaker, concerned with how we perceive geological changes in terms of time. He claims that geological time is beginning to move at the speed of human time (Magnason, 2019/2021) and this is an issue that can be prioritised in any curriculum in any part of the world, as no matter where we are, we are all experiencing weather extremes that already significantly impact on us and our families. These are no longer simply just 'empty threats' or 'predictions for the distant future,' but rather natural phenomena that are already exhibiting their destructive force, thus causing a great deal of concern. How we experience and communicate these concerns on either the individual or collective level is something that should be acquired in order to be able to express ourselves in a critical yet polite and acceptable manner. Environmental activists choose their own ways of alerting the public, from the Just Stop Oil activists, who seem to have taken art as a 'hostage', as a means of being heard, to Magnason, for example, who addresses the public on this issue by way of writing poetry, children's books, science fiction and non-fiction. The above-mentioned title falls into the non-fiction category and is deeply personal to the author (Magnason, 2019/2021). This approach of "personalizing" the future, bringing it closer to the readers by making them understand that we are the generations that are already starting to feel the grave consequences of the climate crisis in our lifetimes – as opposed to something that concerns neither us nor our children and grand-children – is an approach that may also have a deep impact on the readers, or – in our case – our learners.

The goals (or aims) of working with this particular text are manyfold: learners become aware of the importance of water and maintaining the purity of drinking water for the existence of life on Earth; they provide solutions for maintaining the purity of water, which is important not only for us but especially for future generations; they become aware of the importance of their habits and lifestyle in relation to saving water; they become familiar with the natural rhythm, the water cycle and the existence of ecosystems; they become aware of the importance of water for the existence of humanity, the development of agriculture, trade, the emergence of civilizations and cultures throughout the history of the Earth.

From the goals listed above, there are clear connections/correlations with other school subjects that can be drawn, such as the natural sciences, especially biology, geography and chemistry as well as history, arts and crafts and many others (as will be illustrated later).

As this is a longer text to read, the learners may be asked to read the book at home some time prior to covering the topic in class, which is to encourage targeted reading skills practice. As a warmer, a brainstorming activity may be used. The learners suggest the main topics the author covers in the book: for example, the importance of water to humankind, its importance and use throughout history and its environmental importance. Thus, following Byram et al.'s (2002) framework, elements of communication (linguistic, sociolinguistic) and discourse competences are practiced.

In line with the CEFR (2001), which "in its latest conceptual version (last updated in the CEFR Companion Volume, 2018), replaced the traditional model of the four skills with the model of communicative language activities and strategies" (as cited in Majcenovič Kline & Koletnik, 2024, p. 26), the learners are then encouraged to discuss various water-related issues: their perceptions of the importance of water for all living beings; of accessibility of fresh water in developing countries; of how to keep water as a sustainable source, etc. They are further invited to provide their own personal experience (for example, a tourist/study visit to a foreign country, where there was no drinking tap water available, only bottled water; an event in a hospital, where there was a spread of a nosocomial infection due to the presence of bacteria in the water system; their experience of water shortages during a dry summer period; their experience of the severe floods in Slovenia in August of 2023, etc.). Therefore,

as per P. M. Ribeiro (2016), these very personal narratives evoke emotions and ideas in the learners, which may lead to the construction of new knowledge.

The next activity is detailed reading. The learners are divided into groups and read one chapter only, which encourages more focused reading and attention to detail. They later analyse the topic by means of writing down the key concepts, historical or scientific facts and findings, or impactful stories, mentioned in the chapter.

What follows is a presentation of the groups' findings to the rest of the class and a discussion on their relevance and importance. Since every learner has previously read the entire book, they are all able to take part in the discussion. This kind of activity requires a certain level of critical thinking: the ability to determine what is relevant and not; to provide an opinion on pros and cons; to express one's opinion in an acceptable manner and acknowledge various opinions even when in disagreement.

There are three interactive activities planned for the next task: activity one is where the learners create a visual presentation (mind maps, graphs, infographics) that illustrates the interconnectedness *time* – *water* – *humankind*, as presented in each of their designated chapters; activity two is where the learners are provided with one of the environmental issues mentioned in the book (e.g., water pollution, water shortages, or climate change) and are asked to suggest possible solutions to these problems. These may include, among others, slowing down harmful changes to the environment or even reversing these changes, which may then lead in the right direction towards saving and keeping our water clean.

Each group presents their suggestions, with a discussion on whether the proposed solutions are plausible or not. The activity may be made even more challenging by asking the learners to divide the suggested activities into those that can be realized on an individual level (small-scale interventions with a higher/lower impact) and those that require broader, state, national or international interventions (bigger-scale interventions that may have a higher/lower impact). The students can be further challenged by thinking in terms of whether these changes are immediate or might take a longer time to come into effect, thus having to prioritize what is more important: quick fixes with short-term effects, or more time-consuming solutions with long-term effects; what can be done soon and what can wait, etc.

Activity three is suggested as a homework assignment, in which the learners listen to the recording of the interview with Andri Magnason (Vaughan-Lee, 2019) and answer the following questions: a) Why is the author so consumed with the idea of time in this book? b) Which example is presented as an excellent illustration of environmental changes through time? c) How does the author describe the change in time-passing in the present? Why is geological time now passing as fast as human time? Why do people find it difficult to understand this concept? d) The author states that one of our major problems is that we are no longer concerned with the environmental changes happening around us, which can be seen from discourse, i.e., the language we are using or the manner in which we are describing the mentioned events. How do you understand the author's concern and his arguments? e) Do you agree with the author? If yes/no, explain why. f) Who does the author mention as a common enemy to humankind? g) Which examples does the author use to illustrate his belief that we are our own biggest enemies? h) Do you agree with the author? Explain why.

Upon returning to class, a discussion based on the individual learners' answers follows. One of the last activities may be writing an essay, in which each student reflects upon the book's influence on their perception of the relationship between humans and water through time.

All of the above-mentioned activities are concluded with a final discussion on the practical steps individuals can take to encourage water conservation and other environmental issues covered in the book. Thus, the learners' understanding of the relationship between humanity and water over time is assessed. By means of discussion, text analysis, interactive activities and reflection, the learners should develop a more complex and well-rounded awareness of environmental changes and their individual role in encouraging sustainability for water conservation for us and future generations.

The opportunities and options are endless. This can either be a long-term project executed as a module in its own right or within a larger framework of various school subjects, or perhaps even as a school/home project. Activities can be used to raise awareness of the topic before Earth Day, followed by a clean-up campaign within the community, or learners can also start, for example, a Green Club or something similar to a local environmental movement. Cross-curricular links can also be made

to other subjects, such as carrying out a water cleanliness analysis (biology, chemistry).

3.5 Fifth Example: Non-Fiction for Younger Learners (Aged 6–12)

Here we have found *Časoris*,[3] an international award-winning online newspaper for children (as well as their parents) covering relevant and current topics in a child-friendly manner, to be a particularly helpful resource. The publication features wide-ranging topics from Slovenia and around the world. Several articles (in English)[4] from the newspaper can be used, for example: *Ecological packaging and the plastic flooding our planet* (February 2, 2024); *How can we save the northern white rhinos?* (April 9, 2024); *What is greenwashing and why will it be a crime under the new law?* (April 22, 2024); *Bees are extremely important for our survival* (May 21, 2024). In Slovene,[5] there are also a number of appropriate environmental titles, for example: *Kaj je zaznamovalo Slovenijo v preteklem letu? (What marked Slovenia in the past year?)* (January 2, 2025); *Zakaj nošenje živalskih kož ni moda? (Why is wearing animal fur not fashionable?)* (February 21, 2025).

These are only some suggestions for the classroom and the following activity is based on two articles, both in Slovene. The first one is *Želim si samo, da se takšne poplave ne bi nikoli ponovile* (*I just wish floods like this would never happen again*) (Cetina) from October 3, 2024 and *Ob poplavni tragediji veliko srčnosti in toplih besed* (*Lots of heartfelt deeds and warm words in the wake of the flood tragedy*) (Hanžič) from October 15, 2024.

The first article (Cetina, 2024) addresses the floods that devastated Slovenia in August 2023 and the second (Hanžič, 2024) the floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 2024. These texts were chosen because, first, they address environmental catastrophes that happened in our country and our vicinity, rather than some distant part of the world and, also, they approach the issue from a personal and emotional perspective rather than purely technically and scientifically. The human element is paramount. Those affected are actively involved individuals rather than distant observers and their individual narratives or stories are featured, serving to emphasise the impact of changes on a personal level and act as an inspiration by highlighting the innovative solutions employed during this crisis.

[3] https://casoris.si/
[4] https://casoris.si/english/page/4/
[5] https://casoris.si/novice/

In terms of discourse, it is important that the topics are covered in an appropriate style (both in general and in this particular newspaper), without too much emphasis on technical jargon, abstract notions, or foreign words. The text is further accompanied by visuals (i.e., photos, videos), where familiarity with one's own country and people renders the event more impactful.

During the warm-up stage in the classroom, learners can be asked about their experience of the floods, for example, what they know about what happened and how they felt (still feel) about the recent event. Next, the first article (*Želim si samo, da se takšne poplave ne bi nikoli ponovile* (Cetina, 2024)) is projected on the screen and read out loud, with learners taking turns. They also watch the two *YouTube* videos and describe in their own words what they saw and how they felt about it while watching, and the teacher takes notes of their comments for further use. The teacher here points out that the issue is presented in the form of an interview, where both the interviewer and interviewees are the learners' peers, which makes it easier for the learners to relate. At this point, the class is divided into groups and assigned their tasks, answering questions based on the interview. Group 1 discusses questions related to feelings during the floods; Group 2 discusses decisions related to living in a flood area; Group 3 discusses the impact of losing possessions. The groups then report and discuss their findings. The teacher now writes down the comments provided after watching the two *YouTube* videos and these are compared with the suggestions made during group work.

The second article, *Ob poplavni tragediji veliko srčnosti in toplih besed* (*Lots of heartfelt deeds and warm words in the wake of the flood tragedy*) (Hanžič, 2024), also emphasises the feelings of those most affected in the natural catastrophe, again evoking feelings of empathy in the young readers. One of the first journalists on the site was a Slovene, Boštjan Anžin, who visited the locals and reported mostly on the help that was immediately sent to Bosnia from around the world. One of the activities that may follow the ones mentioned above is a written task, based on the following quote from Eric Sorensen, an American congressman and meteorologist: "It is not about polar bears. It is not about rising sea levels. It is about what is happening at our doorsteps" (as cited in Hanžič, 2024, para. 15).[6] Learners can then write several types of essays, either narrative, descriptive, persuasive or argumentative, depending on

[6] Translation: author's own (Ne gre za polarne medvede. Ne gre za dvig morske gladine. Gre za to, kar se dogaja pred okni ljudi.)

the teacher's decision. All of the above can be followed up by brainstorming the possible causes of such natural catastrophes, creating a mind map or illustrations of suggestions on what can be done to prevent such events from happening again, discussing what can be done on an individual or wider level, or making a video to reflect on their class work.

4 Conclusion

The main goals of working with the selected texts align with those of the ZELEN.KOM project,[7] which is the cornerstone behind all of the classroom activities described here. The module tasks perform a number of valuable core functions: personifying the values of sustainability, embracing complexity in sustainability, imagining sustainable futures and working for/towards sustainability. In conclusion, the ZELEN.KOM project module *Learning for Sustainability Through Book and Film*, which is the main reference for this article, focuses on raising awareness about sustainability and sustainable communication by transferring appropriate knowledge and skills to younger generations. This is how learners build knowledge of practices and trends in sustainable lifestyles, including how we can implement ecologically aware practices on an individual level, in families and households, and on a wider, collective level in schools and communities. What is also targeted through these activities is enhancing knowledge of practices on safeguarding our natural and cultural world and enhancing respect towards them. Learners should thus become familiar with communicating the sustainable values of environmental and nature protection and promoting a green lifestyle through critical reading, speaking, writing and listening strategies. It is hoped that the tasks and activities outlined here, focusing on messages around the climate issue in fiction and non-fiction, for both younger and older learners, will go some way to meeting the aims outlined by the ZELEN.KOM module and provide an outline for other teachers and scholars who wish to address similar issues in their own classrooms.

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[7] https://zelen.kom.ff.um.si/

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