

Slaying the Climate Dragon: How to Talk About Climate Change

Facilitator's Resource

Climate change is a problem that we can solve together. Talking about it is one of the first ways to get others engaged in our collective climate fight. It can be intimidating at first, but here are some tips that can make discussing climate change easier.

After reviewing these tips with students, read the story below [*Slaying the Climate Dragon*](#) (by Katie Marvel, appearing in Scientific American Blog, October 11, 2018) and consider the discussion questions.

Tips for talking about Climate Change:

Start with value: Think about something in or about the environment you love. Beginning your story with what you value personalizes climate change, allowing others to relate to what you care about. Numbers don't move hearts and minds, values do.

Share your experience of here and now: Picture what you've experienced recently in your town or state. Contextualizing climate change this way helps convey that its impacts are happening to us, here and now.

Focus on solutions: It's easy to get lost in the impacts of climate change. Spread hope by highlighting how many things we all can do to make a difference, including emphasizing solutions that already exist.

You're not in this alone: Think about climate action as our collective fight. We're all in this together: our friends, family, towns, and states—even the whole world.

Slaying the Climate Dragon, by Katie Marvel (Scientific American Blog, October 11, 2018)

Once upon a time there was an enchanted kingdom, full of magic and fairies and tame dragons that slumbered safely under the mountains. The people of this kingdom lived in great happiness and prosperity, for out of the ground bubbled a magical elixir that could make their every wish come true.

Unfortunately for the people of the kingdom, there also lived in the enchanted land an evil witch. Evil, of course, being a relative term; one cannot help but suspect she was merely very tired of everything that was going on. At any rate, she grew angry and cast an awful curse on them. The magic elixir, the source of all the kingdom's power and wealth, now came with a deadly side effect: it had the power to wake dragons.

And so it was. The reports were hazy at first- disappearing sheep, scorch marks on the ground, huge lizard footprints in the forest. But soon it became clear. The evidence was incontrovertible. A dragon was loose in the kingdom.

The king, panicked, assembled a group of learned women and men to ask what could be done about the dragon menace. They conferred amongst each other and agreed that dragons, all told, were unlikely to positively impact the kingdom. They hinted, rather timidly, at a connection between the elixir and the dragons.

The king and his counselors accepted the report and did nothing. They were confident that the high walls of their castle could withstand any dragon attack, and if a few peasants were eaten or incinerated, what was it to them?

Years passed, and the dragon became harder to ignore. Sometimes its hot breath razed the countryside, and sometimes its flapping wings whipped the angry seas and coastal winds into a frenzy, destroying fishing villages and the beach where the king had hoped to spend his summer. The wise men and women were summoned once again. How, they were asked, could the kingdom be kept safe? Nervously, they suggested that the optimal number of dragons was, in fact, no dragons. But since that was hardly a possibility now, the kingdom should do its best to at least not add another dragon. Two dragons, the heralds proclaimed. The kingdom must not exceed two dragons. The king accepted this, and prepared, once again, to do nothing.

But some were not satisfied with this pronouncement. What if, they said, the kingdom could slay the second dragon? Well, if not slay it, perhaps wound it? Cut it, perhaps, in half? Think of that, they said. Half a dragon. Like a lizard separated from its tail, it would survive, dangerous but diminished. It would take a Herculean effort to even half-slay a dragon, and it would come with no promise of safety. But, suggested the wise men and women, it would be worth it.

The ending of this fairy tale, being purely fiction, is still to be written. Any ending is possible except, of course, the happy one. A possibility is this: the kingdom does nothing. Slaying dragons is expensive work, and what would be the use in trying? The seers prophesy catastrophe for the kingdom. And they are right. Another dragon appears, then another, then another, and the kingdom is reduced to rubble, smug in the knowledge that it foresaw its own doom.

Another goes like this: half the kingdom pretends not to see the dragons. The wise men and women protest, but they are easy to ignore. After all, is there any job description more obnoxious than “wise man”? Others protest, but in vain. The dragons multiply, but it doesn’t matter: the kingdom tears itself apart first.

But here is another ending. It’s not a happy one. No one slays the dragon, not even by half. It rises up, more powerful than even the wisest woman had predicted. Villages burn; the land is alternately parched and flooded. Fairies go extinct in the wild. But the kingdom does not retreat. Heroes challenge the dragon, repeatedly. When they fall, others rise to take their place. They know their quest is a doomed one; they

set out nevertheless. They did not all live happily ever after. But they lived. And, most importantly, they had something to live for.

Discussion Questions:

What are your first thoughts about the story?

What is this story an allegory for? *Students should notice that this is an allegory for human reaction to solving climate change.*

How is this allegory accurate and how is it not? *Students specifically should be made aware that finding solutions strategies for climate change is almost never as easy or uncomplicated as “slaying one dragon”, that is solving one issue.*

What do you think the message of this allegory is? *Students may recognize that people can choose to ignore issues at their peril, but it is only through people acting together and finding good solution strategies to save the things they care about that the “day is saved”.*