



Climate Storytelling Contest - Educator Resources

The California Coastal Commission invites middle and high school students to answer the prompt below through a podcast, photo essay, or narrative essay.

WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE? HOW COULD THOSE FEELINGS LEAD TO ACTION?

First, have students develop their idea

Brainstorming suggestions:

Storytelling can take on many forms, such as audio, visual, and writing. This contest will accept submissions using the following story mediums: Podcasts, photo essays, and narrative essays. We encourage you to choose the medium that most interests you.

Note: We recognize that the final editing quality of these mediums will vary among the submissions. Therefore, we will be evaluating each submission by its ability to answer the prompt and tell an impactful story with a personal perspective, not by expertise in the chosen medium.

We will be looking for stories that have a clear beginning, middle, and end. For example:

Beginning: What is the first feeling that comes up when you hear the word “climate change”?

What are your feelings about climate change? Why? Did you always feel this way about climate change, or did it shift somehow?

Middle: Are you feeling hopeful about climate change? Why? Is there an activity you do that gives you hope? Is there someone or an organization that inspires you?

Are you feeling frustrated and/or anxious about climate change? Why? Are there opportunities in your community to be more involved in climate or environmental work? Review the [Climate Action Venn Diagram](#) and discover your own climate solution.

Are you feeling indifferent about climate change? Why? Is there a story that interests you? Can you research it further? How does climate change impact different communities? Your community?

End: After exploring different aspects and stories about climate change, how have your feelings shifted? Or, how have they stayed the same?

Then, have students turn their thoughts into a podcast, photo essay, or narrative essay

Podcast:

Record audio that answers the prompt. The podcast must be no longer than 7 minutes. Podcast script/transcription must be included in the entry form. Here are some ideas:

- Have an interview with a person(s)
- Have a casual conversation with a friend or relative
- Talk about research findings you think are interesting
- Talk about your opinion and/or experiences
- Make your recording in a quiet place or incorporate background noise or other sounds that support your storytelling.

Photo Essay:

Take 8-10 original photos to answer the prompt and compile a photo essay. Photos must be the original work of the student(s). Photos must not be manipulated beyond the reality of when it was taken. Images should accurately represent the subjects depicted and those that appear overly processed can be disqualified at the judges' discretion.

- Write an introduction summary (1 paragraph)
- Write a short caption for each photo (1-2 sentences)
- For each photo, include the location of where the photo was taken. Photos taken outside of California are acceptable.

Personal Narrative Essay:

Write a personal narrative essay answering the prompt (up to 650 words). Must be:

- Double-spaced
 - 12 point, Times New Roman or Arial font
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How to Enter, Guidelines, and Resources for Students

Prizes:

Winners will be selected from each medium. \$300 for 1st place winners, \$200 for 2nd place winners, and \$100 for 3rd place winners. You may enter as an individual or a group (for podcasts and photo essays only), but one prize will be offered per winning entry.

How to Enter:

If you choose to do the podcast or photo essay, you can enter on your own, or **as a group of no more than three students**. If working as a group, submit only one entry. All group member names must be listed in the entry form. **If you choose to write a narrative essay**, it must be done on your own.

If entering as a group (podcast or photo essay), decide which student will be the main contact to answer any questions and receive the contest prize on behalf of the others if your podcast or photo essay is chosen as a finalist. Pick a student who's good at responding promptly to email and **be sure to use an email you will check during the summer!** (It's recommended that you *not* use a school email.) We'll also need a mailing address for that person, to mail the prize if your podcast or photo essay is chosen as a finalist. Participants must be middle school or high school level students in California, in school or homeschooled. You may enter as part of a class project or independently. Winners will be announced by the end of the summer, so keep the contact information of your group members after school ends if you are entering as part of a group.

Note to teachers: If you would like to submit the podcasts, photo essays, and/or narrative essays from your class as a group instead of having your students submit them individually, please contact us in advance to discuss how to do that. Participating students and their parent or guardian will still need to complete a waiver form.

For podcasts:

Upload your finished podcast, no more than 7 minutes long, to SoundCloud, and be prepared to submit your podcast sound file directly to us if your entry is selected as a finalist. Make sure to give your podcast a title that's relevant to your creation. (Please don't name it "Climate Storytelling Contest.") *Don't* mark your podcast "Private," because we won't be able to listen to it if you do. (The minimum age for a SoundCloud account is 13. Podcasts can be uploaded to an account owned by the student or by a teacher or other adult. Your SoundCloud account will only be seen by the contest judges and will not be publicly shared. If uploading to SoundCloud presents a problem for you, please contact us for an alternative method to submit your podcast.

When you're ready, fill out this Entry Form with your parent or guardian:

<https://woobox.com/gix8fs>

For photo essays:

Compile 8-10 photos along with an introduction paragraph, caption for each photo, and each photo's location in a power point presentation (examples: Google Slide, Powerpoint, etc.) or other document. If choosing a power point format, download it as a PDF and upload it in the Entry Form. [See here](#) for a format example. Photos must be the original work of the student(s). Photos must not be manipulated beyond the reality of when it was taken. Images should accurately represent the subjects depicted and those that appear overly processed can be disqualified at the judges' discretion. **Be prepared to submit your photo files directly to us if your entry is selected as a finalist. When you're ready, fill out this Entry Form with your parent or guardian: <https://woobox.com/sxad45>**

For narrative essays:

Write a personal narrative essay up to 650 words, double-spaced in Times New Roman or Arial font. **When you're ready, fill out this Entry Form with your parent or guardian: <https://woobox.com/f694aq>**

When you enter the contest, you and your parent or guardian will agree to the Consent, Waiver of Liability, and Release. (If you need paper copies of this form mailed to you, contact us.) By entering the Climate Storytelling Contest, you grant the California Coastal Commission non-exclusive ownership of your podcast, photo essay, and narrative essay, meaning that we can use it on our website, social media, and elsewhere, but you can also continue to use it. **Students may enter only one submission in this year's challenge.**

Guidelines:

- **Entries must be student's original work.** AI generated writing and images violate contest rules and will be disqualified. If using a piece of writing or photograph as inspiration for your entry, your entry must be significantly different to avoid plagiarism. If you include music in your podcast, **only use music that is your own composition or that is copyright free** (Public Domain or Creative Commons). Some sources of available music include the Youtube Audio Library (you must be logged in to access), the Free Music Archive, and Musopen. **Include all required credits at the end of your podcast and podcast script.**
- **Avoid focusing on brand names in your chosen medium.**
- If your chosen medium includes language other than English, please provide English translations. Note: translations do not have to be 100% perfect, but should be accurate enough to understand in English. Google Translate is fine to use.
- Entries must be uploaded by 5:00pm (PST) on May 28, 2026. A parent or guardian must approve and sign the Entry Form. Winners will be contacted directly and announced on this website by the end of summer. Sign up to receive an email announcement.

Podcast resources:

- [Writing for Podcasts - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com)
- [Audio Storytelling in the Classroom: Rachel Hansen \(nationalgeographic.org\)](https://nationalgeographic.org)
- [Storytelling Through Audio: Meghana Kakubal \(nationalgeographic.org\)](https://nationalgeographic.org)
- [Podcastle: All-in-One Podcast Software](#)

Photo Essay resources:

- [Storytelling Through Photography: Hannah Reyes Morales \(nationalgeographic.org\)](https://nationalgeographic.org)
- [Photographic Storytelling in the Classroom: Allison Fuisz \(nationalgeographic.org\)](https://nationalgeographic.org)
- [Advice for an Unforgettable Photo Essay \(format.com\)](https://format.com)

Narrative Essay resources:

- [How to Write a Personal Narrative: Steps and Examples \(prowritingaid.com\)](https://prowritingaid.com)
- [Powerful Personal Narrative Writing Guide for Students and Teachers \(literacyideas.com\)](https://literacyideas.com)

Additional Educator Resources

Climate Change & Storytelling

When we teach and learn about climate change, it's easy to get lost in the data, graphs, and scientific literature. Stories, however, are naturally engaging because they're easier to interpret and remember. Stories can cause an emotional response within us, encouraging us to think and act with a new perspective. If we consider science as the starting point and climate action as the destination, then storytelling is a bridge between the two. Below are resources to help you and your students get started.

Starting Point: Science

- [The National Environmental Education Foundation | NEEF \(neefusa.org\)](https://neefusa.org)
- [Climate Change Science | US EPA](https://www.epa.gov)
- [The Essential Principles of Climate Literacy | NOAA Climate.gov](https://www.noaa.gov)
- [Learning Activities | NOAA Climate.gov](https://www.noaa.gov)
- [Back to school bundles: NOAA resource kits for your classroom | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](https://www.noaa.gov)
- [Home | NASA Climate Kids](https://climatekids.nasa.gov)

- [Climate Change: A Warming Planet - Teachers \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)
- [Science Teaching Resources | Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History \(si.edu\)](#)
- [TILclimate Guides for Educators | MIT Climate Portal](#)
- [Curriculum | Climate Change Education \(stanford.edu\)](#)
- [Lesson Plans & Classroom Activities | Fredonia.edu](#)
- [Resources for Teaching About Climate Change With The New York Times - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)
- [Search Classroom Resources | PBS LearningMedia](#)
- [Climate Change for Kids: OLogy | AMNH](#)

The Bridge: Storytelling

- [History & Hope for Climate Action: An Interpretive Toolkit - Climate Change \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)
- [Storytelling Will Save the Earth | WIRED](#)
- [Lessons in Climate Storytelling - Yale Program on Climate Change Communication](#)
- [Resources for Educators - Yale Program on Climate Change Communication](#)

The Destination: Climate Action

- [Climate Action Venn Diagrams — Ayana Elizabeth Johnson](#)
 - For your students to find their own climate action