



STORIES FOR CHANGE

**Educational Manual on Storytelling and art
in Climate Education**



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in Climate Education**

For youth workers, educators, teachers,
and youth organisations

Stories for Change is a practical guide for using storytelling, creative writing, and climate fiction in youth work. Experience we want to share is based on real project activities implemented across the Western Balkans.

Key message we want to spread is that Climate change is not only a scientific issue, it is also social, emotional, and cultural one.

Please use this manual as a flexible tool that you can adapt to your group, context, and needs. There is no strict rule, just focus on process, not perfection.

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Project link: <https://zelena-akcija.hr/hr/projekti/story-projekt>

Developed within the project “THE STORY OF THE 1.5°C LIMIT – Solutions and storytelling of youth from Western Balkan”

THE STORY OF THE 1.5° C LIMIT

SOLUTIONS AND STORYTELLING
OF YOUTH FROM WESTERN BALKAN



Co-funded by
the European Union



Centar za
životnu sredinu



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WASTE
MONTENEGRO



Project 101184372- STORY- ERASMUS-YOUTH-2024-CB is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

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INTRODUCTION

The climate crisis is one of the biggest challenges we are facing today. Young people are increasingly aware of environmental issues, but climate education is often based only on facts and data. This can sometimes feel distant, too complex, or hard to connect to everyday life.

Climate change is not only a scientific issue. It is also a social, emotional, and cultural topic that affects how we live, think, and imagine the future. Because of that, we believe it is important to find new ways to talk about it and how to work with young people.

The STORY project was created with the intent of a different approach. The idea was to connect climate topics with creativity, storytelling, and art. The project is led by Zelena akcija, together with partners from the Western Balkans: Zero Waste Montenegro, Omladinski centar CK13, and Centar za životnu sredinu. More information about the project can be found here: <https://zelena-akcija.hr/hr/projekti/story-projekt>

We focused on how to work with young people, including those with fewer opportunities, but also with people and organisations who work with youth. Through different activities, we assisted them to better understand climate justice, think about solutions in their local communities, and find ways to express their creative ideas.

During the project, we organised youth exchanges, creative writing workshops, trainings, study visits, and supported different youth-led ideas. A big part of the project was using art and storytelling, especially climate fiction, as a way for young people to explore climate topics and share their views.

One important thing we learned is that storytelling can make climate issues feel more real and more personal. It gives young people space to imagine the future, to ask questions, and to say what they think and feel. Instead of just learning about climate change, they become part of the conversation.

This manual, “Stories for Change,” is one of the results of the project. It is made for youth workers, educators, teachers, and organisations who want to try similar approaches in their work. It is a practical tool that can support learning and facilitation around storytelling and climate justice.

It is also important to mention that this manual is complementary to the regional literary initiative and publication “Homo Climaticum: Balkan: 2026”, which included a climate fiction writing contest and a collection of youth stories. While Homo Climaticum collection of short stories and poems showcases the creative outputs of young people across the Balkan region, this manual focuses on methods, tools, and guidance for how to run similar activities in practice.

Inside the manual, you will find ideas, methods, and examples based on what we tested in the project.

This is not a strict guide that needs to be followed step by step. You can adapt the activities to your group, your context, and your needs. The goal is simply to support you in creating spaces where young people can learn, express themselves, and feel encouraged to take action.



1. Why storytelling and art in climate education

Working with young people on climate topics is not always easy. Many traditional methods in education focus on facts, data, and problem descriptions. This is important, but it is often not enough on its own.

Climate change is not only something we understand with our mind. It is also something we feel, imagine, and respond to emotionally. Because of that, we found that storytelling and art can be very powerful tools in climate education.

Traditional teaching often focuses on explaining what climate change is and what the problems are. This can sometimes feel distant or overwhelming for young people.

Storytelling works differently. It creates emotional connection. When young people write stories or create characters, they are not just learning about climate change—they are putting themselves at the centre of it. This makes the topic more real and easier to understand.

Storytelling also helps build empathy and opens space for imagination. For example, when young people imagine different lives, places, or futures, they start to understand how climate change affects others, not just themselves. At the same time, instead of only focusing on problems, they can also imagine different futures, solutions, and possibilities. This is especially important in climate education, where the future can often feel uncertain.

One of the most important things we noticed is that creative methods can help young people feel more involved. When they create something themselves—a story, poem, or idea—they are not passive learners anymore.

They become participants in the topic. They start to see that their voice matters and that they can contribute to change in their own way.

Thus, the main benefits of using storytelling and art can be grouped into three simple areas such as understanding, expression and action.

For youth, **understanding** of complex climate topics becomes more relatable when they are turned into stories and when instead of abstract information, they can connect it to real-life situations and characters.

Also, **expression** through storytelling and artistic creative activities give them a safe space to express their thoughts, feelings, fears, and ideas about the future which is especially important when dealing with difficult topics like climate change.

Finally, when they feel emotionally connected and heard, they are more likely to think about solutions and take **action**, making creativity a first step toward engagement and change.



2. What is climate fiction (Cli-Fi)?

Climate fiction, often called Cli-Fi, is a genre of storytelling that deals with climate change and environmental issues. It can be set in the present, the past, or the future. What connects all these stories is that they explore how climate change affects people, societies, ecosystems and everyday life.

Cli-Fi is not only about disasters or negative futures. It can also show solutions, alternatives, and different ways of living. It gives space to imagine what the world could look like, both in difficult and hopeful ways.

For young people, climate fiction is useful because it connects global issues with personal experience. Instead of only talking about data or abstract problems, they explore climate change through characters, emotions, and everyday life situations.

In our experience, this method works well because it opens imagination and personal reflection and helps participants think about questions like:

- What does climate change mean for me personally?
- How will it change the way we live, work, eat, or move?
- What kind of future do we want to build?

Cli-Fi also gives space for uncertainty, fear, hope, and ideas. There is no “correct answer” in storytelling, which makes it easier for many young people to participate, even if they do not see themselves as writers.

A good example from our work is the **Homo Climaticum** initiative, developed by Zelena akcija in cooperation with regional partners. Over the years, this project has included several literary calls and publications focusing on climate fiction.

It collected over 200 short stories and poems from writers and young people, exploring futures shaped by climate change.

Building on this experience, a new regional edition **“Homo Climaticum: Balkan: 2026”** was launched together with partners from the Western Balkans and Klub Booksa from Zagreb. The focus is on young people from the region, one of the most climate-sensitive areas in Europe, where climate change is already visible in everyday life—through longer heatwaves, changing rainfall patterns, floods, fires, and shifts in seasonal weather.

Through this experience, we saw that climate fiction is not only a creative exercise but also a way for young people to reflect on real changes around them, and to ask deeper questions about the future: How will climate change affect our lives, our communities, and our relationships? How will societies respond—through isolation or solidarity, fear or cooperation?

For youth work, climate fiction can be used in very simple ways. It can start with a short writing prompt, a group discussion, or imagining a future scenario. It does not need to be complicated or require advanced writing skills as the focus is on ideas, not perfection.

In the STORY project, Cli-Fi was one of the key methods used to support young people in exploring climate justice and expressing their views. It also became a way to connect personal creativity with wider social and environmental topics.



3. Methodology: How to Use These Approaches

1. Creative Writing Workshop (CK13 experience)

The creative writing workshop continued from an educational and activist field trip to Fruška Gora, as part of our Study visit in Serbia. The experience of being in nature, walking through the forest, and spending time outdoors became an important starting point for writing.

Many participants entered the writing process still carrying impressions from that day—feelings of beauty, calmness, and a kind of return to something forgotten from childhood. These emotions were used as a creative entry point into writing.

The workshop was led by a member of the CK13 collective, Đorđe Majstorović, who supported participants in finding words for their own experiences. The focus was not on “good writing” or literary skill, but on helping everyone express what they felt and experienced in their own way.

With no pressure to write correctly or beautifully, participants were encouraged to search for their own words and to communicate what had touched them during the day, both to themselves and to each other.

At the same time, the workshop also opened space for ecological imagination. Participants were invited to explore climate fiction and to think about environmental change, including the more difficult and uncomfortable realities that are often ignored or avoided.

Methodology

Creative Writing Workshop - opening perception

Based on this experience, the workshop can be understood as a **group method** that supports creativity and expression. The goal is not to produce perfect literary texts, but to strengthen everyone's ability to express thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

This can be achieved in few ways:

Oral sharing of impressions: at the beginning of the workshop start with a group conversation. This is the space for participants to share impressions that come from an experience, place, or topic. This step is important because it reduces pressure to write immediately by allowing participants to relax, speak freely, and connect with each other. It also makes it easier to enter the writing process later.

Writing from another perspective

After the discussion, participants are invited to write a short text based on their impression—but from a different perspective.

For example:

- if the experience is about a forest, participants can write from the perspective of a tree, a path, an animal, or the forest itself
 - if it is about a place, they can imagine the voice of the place
- if it is about a climate issue, they can imagine the voice of someone or something affected by it.

This exercise helps participants step outside their own perspective and develop imagination and empathy. It also opens space for more creative and unexpected stories. It is important that there is enough time given for writing, so that participants can explore their ideas without pressure.

Sharing and expanding imagination

After writing, participants can voluntarily read their texts aloud and share them with the group.

This moment is important because it creates exchange. People hear different perspectives, and the group becomes a space of learning from each other.

This is the opportunity for a facilitator to support this process by encouraging openness, respect, and creative freedom, helping participants reflect on their writing and expand their ideas.

Through sharing and discussion, participants often discover new ways of thinking and new ways of expressing themselves. This helps expand individual imagination and strengthens the sense that everyone has something valuable to say.

What we learned from this workshop

From this experience, we learned that creative writing works best when there is no pressure on performance. When people are free from the idea of “good writing,” they are more open, more honest, and more creative. We also saw that connecting writing with real-life experiences, especially time spent in nature or shared group experiences, makes the process more meaningful.

Finally, moving between personal perspective and imaginative perspectives (like writing from the view of nature or objects) helps participants think differently about the world and their place in it.



2. Climate Fiction Contest – Homo Climaticum

One of the key activities within the STORY project was a regional climate fiction writing contest called “**Homo Climaticum.**” This contest was coordinated by Zelena akcija in cooperation with partners from the region, including Omladinski centar CK13 (Serbia), Center for Environment (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Zero Waste Montenegro, and Klub Booksa (Croatia).

The contest invited people from the region to write short stories and poetry in the genre of climate fiction (Cli-Fi). The aim was to use creative writing as a way to explore climate change, imagined futures, and possible responses to environmental challenges.

The whole process was organised parallelly across the region. Each partner organisation was responsible for collecting participants’ stories in their own country, which allowed the contest to reach different communities and contexts at the same time. This approach helped the process become more accessible and locally grounded, while still connecting everything into one regional activity.

Over the course of the project, we received more than **130 stories and poems from across the region.** These contributions showed a strong interest in climate-related storytelling and demonstrated how young people and other participants see and imagine climate change in their everyday lives.

The main idea of the contest was to move beyond simple awareness and information, and instead open space for imagination, reflection, and personal expression. Participants were invited to think about questions such as:

- What does climate change mean for me personally?
- How will it change our daily lives and communities?

- How will societies respond—through solidarity or inequality
- What kind of future do we want to live in?

The aim of this activity is the creation of a **published collection of selected stories and poems, titled “Homo Climaticum: Balkan 2026”**, which brings together the best climate fiction stories from the region.

The 2026 edition focuses on the Western Balkans as one of Europe’s climate-sensitive regions, where climate change is already visible in everyday life through heatwaves, floods, droughts, fires, and changing seasonal patterns.

The contest was primarily aimed at young people (18–30), but it was also open to all interested writers. It focused on short stories and poetry, with simple guidelines that allow creative freedom while ensuring the works are connected to the topic of climate change.

In our experience, this type of contest works well because it combines creativity, reflection, and participation. It gives young people space to express themselves and to think about climate change in a more personal and imaginative way.

In youth work settings, a similar contest can be organised in a simple format—locally, regionally, or online. The most important elements are openness, accessibility, and encouragement of imagination rather than technical writing skills.

Suggestions for organising a similar contest

A climate fiction contest can be organised in a simple way, but there are also few elements that can make the process richer and more engaging.

It is useful to start with clear and simple guidelines (or call conditions). Here you will define the basic rules of the contest (format, length, theme, deadlines), but keep them simple and flexible to encourage participation.

You will also need to choose the jury that will support you with the selection process. This can be supported by a small and diverse group of people such as writers, educators, or people working in the field of climate and youth work, that can help ensure different perspectives in the selection process.

After the selection process of the best work you want to present, you can organize a public event, such as readings of selected stories. This will add an important social dimension to the process and create space for sharing, discussion, and can even involve the audience in choosing their favourite story.

The final collection of selected stories can also be enriched with illustrations or simple visual designs, which helps make the stories more accessible and engaging. In some cases, stories can be further developed into other formats, like theatre, film, or audio, opening new ways to connect with audiences.

These elements are not necessary for every context, but they can help reach new audiences and extend the impact of similar creative writing or storytelling contests and activities.



CONCLUSION

Working with storytelling and art in climate education has shown us that young people respond strongly when they are given space to imagine, create, and express themselves. Climate change is often presented in abstract or technical ways, but creative methods make it more personal, understandable, and meaningful.

Across the STORY project, we saw that young people do not only want to learn about problems—they also want to imagine solutions, express their feelings, and take part in shaping the future. Storytelling gave them a way to do this in a safe and open space.

What we learned

One of the main lessons is that there is no need for perfection in creative work. When pressure is removed from writing or artistic expression, participants are more open, more honest, and more creative.

We also learned that different formats work well together. Workshops, writing exercises, and open calls like the climate fiction contest all supported different types of participation. Some people feel more comfortable writing individually, while others prefer group discussions or structured activities.

Another important lesson is that context matters. Linking activities to real experiences—nature, local environments, or everyday life—helps participants connect more deeply with the topic.

Finally, we saw that imagination is a powerful tool. When young people are invited to think about the future, they do not only describe problems, but also propose ideas, alternatives, and new ways of thinking.

Final message

The STORY project showed us that storytelling is not just a creative exercise. It is also a way to connect people, build empathy, and open conversations about the future.

When young people are given the tools to tell their own stories, they also start to see themselves as part of the change. This is where the real value of this approach lies—not only in learning about climate change, but in imagining and shaping responses to it.

Recommendations for youth workers and educators

Based on our experience, we suggest the following when using storytelling and art in climate education:

- Keep activities simple and accessible. Participants do not need prior experience in writing or art.
- Focus on process, not product. The goal is expression, not perfect results.
- Create a safe and supportive environment where all ideas are welcome.
- Use real-life experiences or local contexts as a starting point.

Allow space for imagination and different perspectives, including future scenarios.

Encourage sharing, but never force participation—many prefer to express themselves privately.



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