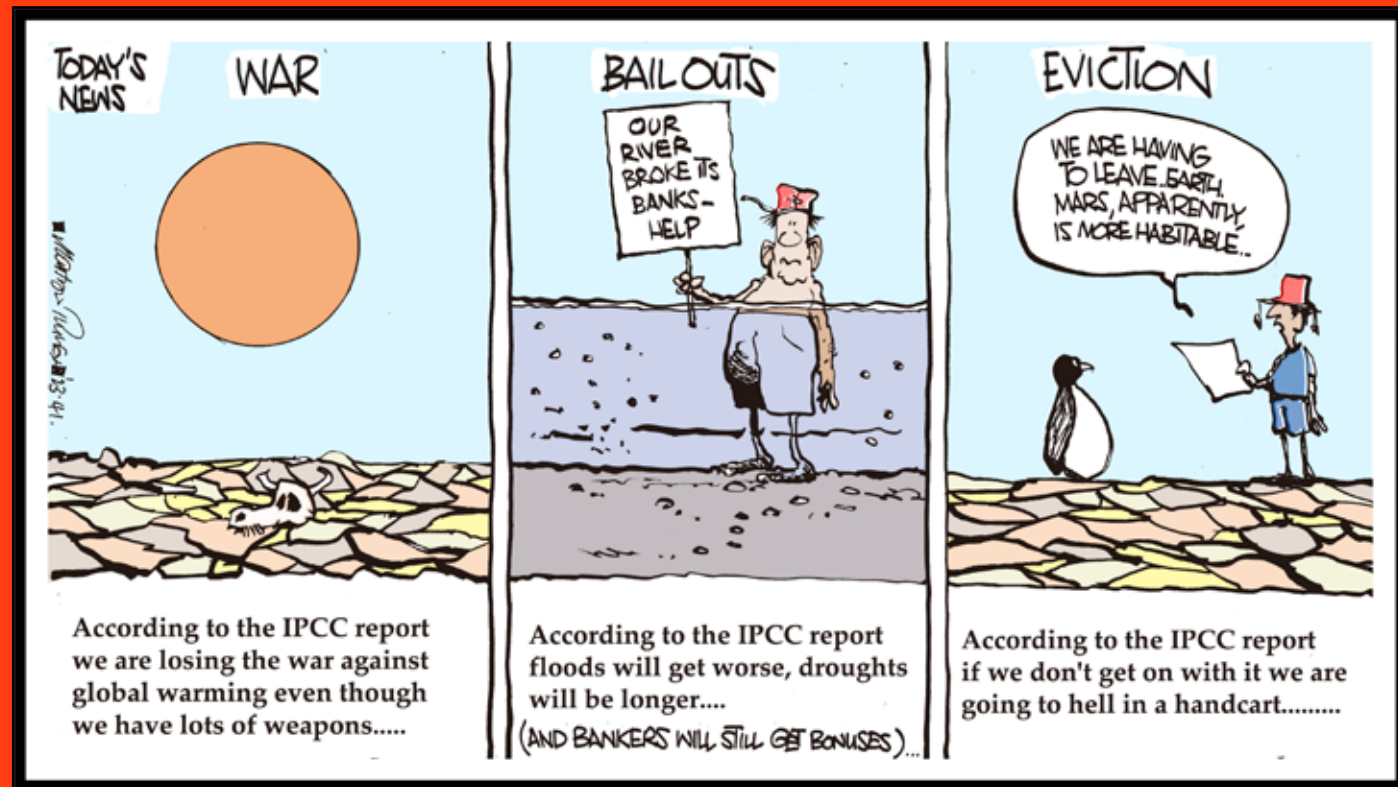
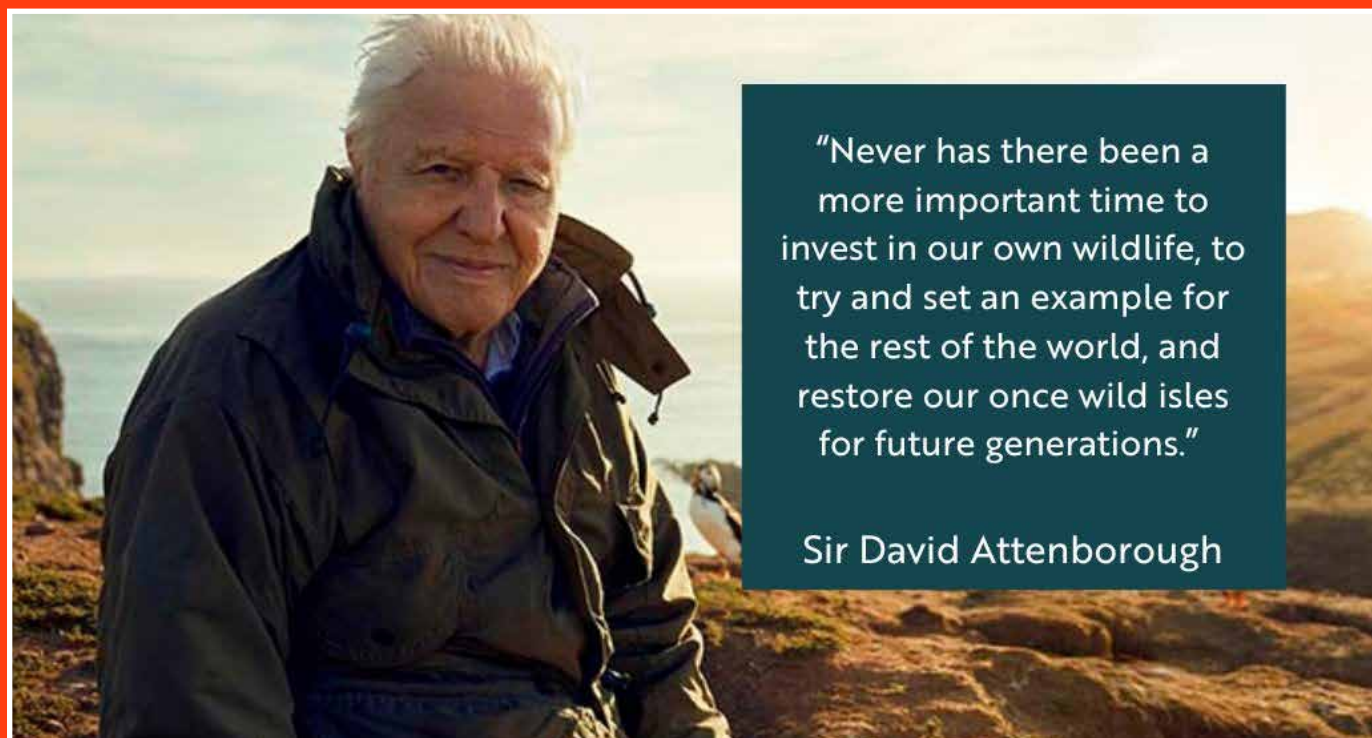


Empowering Our Children ...

Climate Justice and Education



Cartoon by Martyn Turner



"Never has there been a more important time to invest in our own wildlife, to try and set an example for the rest of the world, and restore our once wild isles for future generations."

Sir David Attenborough

Following the Tide~ Conversation Elizabeth Cripps reflects on empowering children

When Maroof Hussain was eleven, his school and house flooded. His eight-year-old friend, Iqbar, drowned. This tragedy was no natural disaster. It was caused by exactly the kind of extreme weather which is made worse by climate change.

Iqbar died in Bangladesh, one of the many poverty-stricken countries that are struck first and hardest by climate change. Even in a rich country like the UK, children can expect worsening heat-waves, floods and wildfires. They will, rightly, fear the future for any kids they have. And the final sting in the tail? They will inherit a kind of complicity: membership of the very institutions causing this devastation. **Children die because of the way we eat, travel, and heat our homes.** They die because of the politicians we vote into office and the corporations we hold shares in.

No wonder, then, that 59 per cent of those aged 16-25, across ten countries, are very or extremely worried about climate change. Or that almost three-quarters of UK kids aged eight to 16 surveyed in 2020 were worried about the state of the planet.

Educators know all this (or should). But what does it mean for what they must do, day on day, in UK schools? I don't have all the answers: **this must be an ongoing conversation between teachers, climate scholars, activists, and the young people and children themselves.** But, after an initial exchange of ideas at the Tide~ Conversation, I have a few thoughts.

Educating global citizens

Climate change is, fundamentally, a moral crisis: a massive violation of human rights. I put this centre stage in my book, *'What Climate Justice Means'*. **Without a moral baseline, we cannot adequately judge the inevitable political compromises, nor assess technological innovation.**

What's more, this vast injustice is inseparable from past discrimination. Those harmed worst – the global south, women, people of colour, Black and Indigenous communities – have done least to cause climate change, have been excluded from global decision-making, and bear the scars of historical atrocities.



What climate justice means ...

1. **This should not be controversial.** It's become politically polarized, but climate justice is about the bare minimum we owe to one another. It's about people being able to lead decent lives, not starving or drowning or dying of malaria, now or in the future. It's about not killing our fellow human beings.
2. **Climate change does not destroy at random.** Climate injustice is racial injustice, gender injustice. Those with most at stake, who are least responsible for climate harms, are losing everything, and they are losing it because of colonialism, slavery, oppression, and systematic disregard for basic human rights.
3. **Climate justice is multi-species justice.** Climate change destroys biodiversity. It drives species to extinction and kills individual animals. This is an injustice, in its own right.
4. **Climate justice means systematic change.** It requires participation: global, inter-sectional, and intergenerational. It requires mitigation, adaptation and compensation. Polluters must pay for this, unless they're too poor. The rich must pay, especially if they're rich on the back of past injustice.
5. **In practice, this isn't happening.** Major polluters refuse to do their bit: governments corporations and individuals. The best option? Persuade or require them to comply. Until then, everyone must choose between lesser evils.
6. **Individuals feel powerless but have collective power.** We should work with motivated others to challenge climate injustice, through inclusive activism, low-carbon movements, renewable and adaptation industries. In a world in crisis, each of us can - and must - be a responsible global citizen.

The lessons for teachers and curriculum-designers? Firstly, a reminder that education is about raising the next generation of citizens, as well as individuals. In our threatened, interconnected world, citizenship is global and intergenerational.

Secondly, this is no 'add-on', to be secured by an extra, standalone climate module. Climate change has implications for almost everything taught in schools, as it has for every part of our children's lives. In recent years, universities have seen a drive to decolonise the curriculum; some push for a parallel '**greening**' of pedagogy, **recognising the inseparability of our own flourishing and culture from the world we are collectively destroying.**

For schools, the challenges are enormous, especially for those in the state system, with limited resources and reliance on often unprogressive politicians. However, the case for embedding climate justice at the centre of the curriculum, is every bit as compelling.

Resilience and reality

This is also about how we teach. 'Dear politicians,' ran a newspaper column by activist Anjali Sharma in 2022, '**young climate activists are not abuse victims, we are children who read news.**' In other words, teachers can't stay quiet so as not to frighten children. They are scared already – and they are right to be.

Interviewing psychologists for my next book, '**Parenting on Earth**', it became clear to me that climate activism can help assuage anxiety, and build resilience. We owe children the truth. We owe them the tools they will need to face the future and to change it. But this truth telling must be nuanced, psychologically informed, and age appropriate. (A great place to start? Harriet Shugarman's *How to Talk to Kids about Climate Change*.)

As educators, we must also recognise that many young people are leading the way on climate justice. As well as cultivating citizenship and autonomy, we must recognise and respect it in our children and teenagers: their unique vulnerability and insight, their political voice. I try to find that balance in a university context. **My students have taught me, even as I seek to guide them.** For school teachers this, too, is a difficult, age-appropriate balancing act – but it's what our young citizens deserve.

and why we should care

