

Artistic facilitation guide

**Caring deeply, dancing freely
and raising your voice on
climate justice**

Introduction

This resource, the Letters for Creation Artistic Facilitation Guide, is intended to help you take the children and young people you work with on a reflective and creative journey to explore questions of climate justice beyond academic knowledge.

So much of the conversation we engage with around climate change and climate justice is presented to us in facts, figures and forecasts for the years ahead. We rightly have a strong focus on the science of climate change, as helping young people understand the science of climate change is crucial. At the root of climate change, however, is a spiritual issue of our relationship to the natural world and fellow human beings around the world.

Climate justice is, in part, about restoring our relationship with the natural world and with our brothers and sisters worldwide. Climate justice is imagining, building and living new ways of relating to each other on a societal level that are rooted in justice, love and peace. These ways are not only for us and people like us, but for everyone. Climate justice is building a future that doesn't exploit and oppress others and the natural world. It is a sustainable future for all.

In order to go on a journey towards climate justice, it is vital that we give time, space and weight to exploring our emotions and spiritual relationship to the issue of climate change, our relationship to the natural world and our relationship with communities near and distant.

We believe that Letters for Creation, including this creative resource, will enable us to know about climate justice both in our heads, and also in our hearts, and begin to change our perspectives and build our spiritual connections to one another within a Christian framework or another.

This creative facilitation guide was inspired by an original creative resource conceived and written by Adam Walker, a contemporary artist who works across text, performance, moving image, curation and collaboration in critiquing and disrupting structures of inequality.

One particular quote from Adam characterises the hope for Letters for Creation's prophetic art making well:

'Through playfulness, creativity and 'rule'-breaking, art can disrupt the way things are. This might include doing things which don't make sense according to current ways of thinking, without knowing what will happen.'

Playfulness, enjoyment and unpredictable surprise are relevant to global challenges like climate justice. In bringing us together in co-experience, communication, community and care, they are vital.'

Core concepts for facilitators

This resource will cover key themes to help children and young people recognise that the way that they see the world isn't the only way to see the world.

We commonly see things as separate and self-contained. We likely see ourselves as separate from others, our thoughts as separate from our body, and humans as separate from the natural world.

The reality is that we are all connected through complex relationships, and we can learn a lot when we explore the world with this perspective. Global humanity and creation exist in community. Humans are not separate from the natural world and we do have connections and impacts beyond ourselves.

Through these connections we can make positive change on an individual level, as well as a societal or global level.

Guided reflection

Begin with the following guided reflection about the forest and interconnectedness as a way to prepare for the creative facilitation activities. Invite the children/young people to sit quietly as you read the following aloud.

I invite you each to close your eyes and imagine you are walking through a forest. Take a moment to imagine the smell of the trees and the soil. Listen closely to the noises you can hear. Do you hear the wind blowing gently through the leaves. Do you see the sunlight shining through the branches overhead? What are the different colours you can see?

Note: You may wish to give opportunity to the children and young people to share some of the sights, sounds, and smells that they are imagining to bring it to life for the group.

As you walk through the forest touching each tree that you pass, it is easy to think of each tree as one single tree, separate from all of the other trees. Each tree is tall, majestic and unique. Above the surface this is what the forest looks like. There are lots of tall and beautiful but separate trees.

Now, let's allow our imaginations to journey beneath the surface of the forest to notice if we might begin to see a different story. What will you notice if you look beneath your feet into the darkness of the soil below? Consider the worms, bugs and tiny living things you cannot even see.

Deep beneath the soil all of the tree roots of the forest's many trees reach out to each

other. The roots connect and grow into each other so they can share nutrients and food. They connect so the trees can communicate with each other – knowing when to drop their leaves, when to bloom their flowers and even sharing warning signs for danger.

Can you picture in your mind the trees sharing life through their roots? Can you imagine this web of life joined up together through the roots in the soil beneath your feet?

Now, picture the journey that nutrients must take in order to travel from the roots, up through the tree to the leaves. As you travel to the top of the tree, what do you notice? Who else lives there? What animals make the tree their home? Do you see birds nesting? Squirrels dancing through the branches? Do you see small spiders making their webs? Or bugs living in the tree bark?

From the top of the tree perhaps you can see the whole forest. Notice how the trees are not only connected to each other, but the whole life of the forest is connected. From the worms and fungi in the soil that help to bring nutrients to the roots of the tree, to the animals that need the trees for food and shelter, there is a concert of life working together in harmony.

Following the reflection, invite the young people to open their eyes and share about their experience.

The forest might look like it is made up of lots of individual things, but when we dig a little deeper, we start to see a different story.

Guided reflection (contd.)

Continue the reflection by helping young people think about the things we might be able to learn from the forest and its interconnectedness. How can this help us begin to think about and see the world differently?

Ask the young people to get out of their seats and crouch down as small as possible. Thinking of their feet as roots in the ground, invite them to slowly stand up and stretch out as tall as they can as if their arms were the branches of a tree and their hands the leaves.

Ask them to think about how they are connected to other people through relationships. What roots do they have in the community around them? Who are the people that their lives have an impact on? Who are the people that help shape who they are? While the young people think, read aloud or paraphrase the following (as appropriate for the children's ages):

Nobody lives in isolation. We are who we are because of the people around us. Our communities help shape who we are and who we are becoming. The people that we laugh with, cry with and celebrate with are all part of the forest of 'us'. These networks go deep and far.

Consider when you eat your favourite food, who are all the people you have never met that help to make this possible – the farmer

who grows it, the people who transport it, the workers in the shop where you buy it, the cook who prepares it.

We live in a world that is deeply connected. And we are all a part of it. Who we are and what we do matters. We are part of a bigger world, and when we work together in concert, we can have a deep and far-reaching impact on the world.

Activity suggestions

Use these following four activity suggestions as creative ways to help young people explore these themes in ways that utilise their feelings and 'intuitive' knowledge. While some of these activities may feel unexpected to begin with, we hope that these activities might help young people break the presumed 'rules of art' and unlock new ways of exploring ideas that can take them to unexpected thoughts and realisations.

Activity suggestion 1

The human-centred collage

Artist instruction:

'We often centre the human subject or even further; ourselves. Could we expand or shift this viewpoint? Make a collage using printouts of your own photos or found images. Start with the human (perhaps an image of yourself or perhaps another representation) but then expand. Grow the collage outward so that the human, who was so central, becomes one element within a far larger, more complex composition. Perhaps you could make folds in your collage, closing it in, to again isolate the human. The viewer might then unfold the work, shifting their view. A digital collage could be similarly created. Instead of unfolding, perspective could shift with a zooming out.'

Supplies needed:

Paper, glue, images, scissors, pens

Instructions to children:

Use cut out images to make a collage. Start by putting an image of yourself or something that represents you in the middle. Add images that represent different things to the collage that you feel connected to. These might be things in nature that you feel connected to like the trees in the forest, or they might be communities of people in far-away places that help you see yourselves and the world differently. Once the collage is complete explore by folding and framing the collage to shift the focusing and centre on different perspectives.

Activity suggestion 2

Creating visual scores

Artist instruction:

'Scores are representations or denotations of sound (and perhaps more). They are often created so as to be played again. You might be familiar with conventional musical notation, but different cultures around the world, and artists, have used a broad array of ways to try to represent sound. Some seek to accurately convey aspects such as rhythm, volume and pitch; others seek to convey emotion, expression and experience.

Take paper and a means of marking it. Sit still where you are. Listen. Wait. Spend some time hearing the sounds within yourself, and outside. External sounds might reverberate through you. When you are ready, begin to mark the paper as prompted by sounds and sensations. Create a score which records or denotes your experience of yourself as part of your environment, mind and body and beyond.

Scores might be precise and considered, or fluid and intuitive. Share and discuss these scores with one another. Was the experience similar? Did you feel discomfort? Perhaps even try to 'play' one another's scores. You can find some good examples of visual scores animated on YouTube to help give you an idea.'

Supplies needed:

Paper, pens/pencils of different colours, musical instruments, YouTube for ideas

Instructions to children:

Listen to the sounds around you and listen to how you are feeling. When you are ready draw a visual music score by using colours, size and shapes to represent the sounds and feelings you are hearing. Once you have made some visual scores you can try to play your own score or each others' visual music scores.

Activity suggestion 3

Connected roots

Artist instruction:

'As a group, take a long length of string or ribbon. Unspool it, pass it back and forth, stretch it out in a web. Each person should hold onto a fixed point. With care, take turns to try to move. How are your movements affected by the others holding the mesh? Can your movements shift and affect the mesh as a whole? Are there people who are particularly affected, in a disadvantaged position? De-centering the human, you might want to start to tie other objects into the mesh.'

Continue this exercise while discussing the potential effect we have, and limitations we face, within our complex life-contexts, perhaps sharing examples.'

Supplies needed:

String or ribbon, and small items to tie into the ribbon that represent non-human life

Instructions to children:

Standing in a circle, toss the spool of string or ribbon back, forth and around to create a web. Instruct children to be sure to hold tight to the point where they are touching the string.

Once the web is created take turns trying to move. How do movements affect the whole? When you add objects into the web, how does this affect the web? How does the web affect the objects?

Activity suggestion 4

A shadow play 'Party of human-ness and other-than-human-ness'

Artist instruction:

'Hold a party of human-ness and other-than-human-ness. Create costumes which do not subscribe to a theme, but which follow your mind's expansive wanders. You might want to take time over this, or equally might want to simply use whatever is immediately at hand.

Darken the room and shine a strong light at an empty wall. To the side, set up a camera or phone facing this wall, recording video. In the light but out of shot, take turns to dance in groups in ways you have never done before. In your movements, you could try to 'play' one another's scores. If you feel self-conscious, everyone could keep their eyes closed.

When everyone has danced, without judgement, with collective enjoyment, watch the shadow-dances back.'

Supplies needed:

A strong light, a camera to record, a screen or blank wall for the shadows, props for costumes

Instructions to children:

Invite children, alone or in small groups, to dance freely in front of the light so their movement creates a shadow on the wall. You may choose to find a suitable piece of music to get people into the mood. If you find that the children and young people are struggling to know what to do, try using gentle prompts. For example, ask children to move like the trees in the forest, to dance like particular animals or to express particular emotions through their movement.

Going deeper:

For further insights or for older pupils, review the full text of the "Caring Deeply, Dancing Freely" art guide by Adam Walker available in the Letters for Creation resources.