

# HAVE THE TALK: CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS

## TEACHER LESSON PLAN

### SYNOPSIS

This lesson will prepare students to have an authentic and effective climate conversation by exploring the psychology behind having climate conversations, role-playing, and using inquiry-based models of communication to have a conversation with an adult in their lives.

The foundation of this lesson is based on shifting the tendency to lead with ‘telling’ about the issue to listening and engaging thoughtfully with responses, so that the focus is on mutual understanding, not explicit persuasion. The activities in this lesson are scaffolded and are based on research in motivational interviewing, psychosocial research, and neuroscience.

### TOTAL TIME

45 min (one class period). *Optional: use a second class period for extra practice.*

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will discover the psychology and challenges behind having conversations around climate and other difficult subjects. (Bloom’s Taxonomy: Understand)
- Students will role-play climate conversations with and without using the OARTAC model for effective climate conversations. (Bloom’s Taxonomy: Create)
- Students will plan for and initiate a climate conversation with an adult in their lives. (Bloom’s Taxonomy: Create)

### PLANNING

Optional: [Accompanying Presentation Slides](#)

For Students: Conversation Guide, Conversation Structure: OARTAC Worksheet

### CONTEXT VIDEOS



### STANDARDS



■ NGSS

■ Common Core

### SOURCES & REFERENCES

Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2012). *Motivational interviewing: Helping people change*. Guilford press.

## TEACHING-LEARNING PLAN: THE INQUIRY 5E INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL

Time	Teacher Does	Student Does
Engage 5 min	<p><b>Discuss experiences (2 min):</b> Think back to the holidays every year when family get together to share meals and stories. Who has experienced family members getting into heated debates? What are they usually about?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have one or two students volunteer to share an example of a heated debate they've witnessed.</li> </ul> <p><b>Roleplay 1 - Convince (2 min):</b> In pairs, one student will take the stance that cats are better than dogs and the other student will take the stance that dogs are better than cats. Students will try to convince the other of their respective stances.</p> <p><b>Debrief (1 min):</b> How did that go? How did it feel trying to be convinced of something?</p>	<p><b>Possible responses:</b> Students will likely agree that debates are over sensitive topics such as politics and what's on the news.</p> <p><b>Change the prompt:</b> Students can have the option to come up with their own prompt such as, iPhone vs. Galaxy, cake vs. pie, pizza vs. tacos, Beyonce vs. Taylor Swift.</p>
Explore 10 min	<p><b>Share why climate conversations are important (1 min):</b> Climate change is one of these hot topics of debate, but it can get so heated that people don't want to talk about it anymore. <u>Statistics from 2016:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>67% of Americans are "moderately" or "very interested" in global warming, however...</li> <li>69% of Americans "rarely" or "never" discuss climate change with family and friends.</li> <li>As a result, only 26% of Americans say climate change is "extremely" or "very" important to them on a personal level.</li> </ul> <p><b>Think-Pair-Share - Psychology behind conversations (3 min):</b> Take a minute in your pairs to discuss why you think people get turned off talking about climate change. What emotions might come up for people?</p> <p><b>Explain the defense mechanisms (2 min):</b> These emotions can make it hard for people to open up and talk about climate. The brain lights up in alarm and shoots up defense mechanisms like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Denial</u>: denying the problem even exists</li> <li><u>Avoidance</u>: avoiding the problem or conversation</li> <li><u>Minimizing</u>: making the issue seem like not a big deal</li> <li><u>Blame</u>: blaming others for the problem</li> </ul> <p>Has anyone ever felt these or notice others have felt these when talking about a sensitive topic?</p> <p><b>Watch "The Secret to Talking about Climate Change" (4 min):</b> Neuroscientists and psychologists have found that conversations can profoundly help this situation. Take a look:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Play "<a href="#">The Secret to Talking about Climate Change</a>" Video</li> </ul>	<p><b>Read the statistics:</b> Students read the statistics off of the Presentation Slides (slide 5).</p> <p><b>Possible responses:</b> People might be turned off because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It may feel overwhelming or beyond our control. This makes it hard to see what the actual solutions are.</li> <li>People might feel: despair, worry, overwhelmed, guilt, shame.</li> </ul>

Time	Teacher Does	Student Does
<p>Explain 12 min</p>	<p><b>Explain the task (1 min):</b> You'll practice having a climate conversation, then plan to have one with a parent or other adult in your life.</p> <p><b>Structure the conversation (3 min):</b> To help support your conversation, let's use the acronym OARTAC: Open, Ask, Reflect, Tell, Ask, Close.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Open</u>: How you open and set the tone for the conversation. Ask to minimize distractions.</li> <li>• <u>Ask</u>: Ask open-ended questions to learn and understand your partner's experience. (Not yes/no questions).</li> <li>• <u>Reflect</u>: Reflect back what you heard them say. Reflecting helps the other person know they have been heard.</li> <li>• <u>Tell</u>: Ask if you can tell something you're feeling or are thinking about. Keep it brief.</li> <li>• <u>Ask</u>: Ask what they think about what you've said, other open-ended questions to learn more about them.</li> <li>• <u>Close</u>: Close out the conversation in a respectful way that hopefully leaves them open to having more conversations.</li> </ul> <p><b>Hand out the Conversation Structure: OARTAC worksheet.</b></p> <p><b>Roleplay 2 - OARTAC (6 min):</b> In pairs, each student will have 3 minutes to lead a climate conversation using OARTAC. Switch after 3 minutes.</p> <p><b>Debrief (2 min):</b> How did it go? How did it feel compared to the first roleplay? How was it different?</p>	<p><b>Read the steps:</b> Students can read examples of each step off of the Presentation Slides (slides 10 &amp; 11).</p> <p><b>Use the Conversation Structure: OARTAC Worksheet:</b> Students can refer to the worksheet to guide conversation and use examples. Consider switching up pairs.</p>
<p>Elaborate 5 min</p>	<p><b>Setting up conversations (5 min):</b> Take some time to prepare for your conversation with a parent/adult.</p> <p><b>Hand out the Climate Conversations Guide.</b></p>	<p><b>Fill out the Climate Conversations Guide:</b> Consider letting students work with the person next to them to share ideas.</p>
<p>Evaluate 13 min</p>	<p><b>Roleplay 3 - Climate Conversations (8 min):</b> In pairs, practice having a conversation by role-playing using the responses from your Climate Conversations Guide. Each student will have 4 minutes before switching.</p> <p><b>Conversations theater (5 min):</b> One or two pairs can present their skit in front of the class, moving around and using props as they like.</p>	<p><b>Have fun with it:</b> Encourage students to have fun with their conversations, reminding them that the goal is not to convince their partner, but to connect through authentic conversation.</p>
<p>Homework</p>	<p><b>Have the talk:</b> Have a climate conversation with a parent or other adult in your life using what we learned today.</p>	<p><b>Share the experience:</b> Get a temperature check and follow up to hear how conversations went after the due date.</p>

# HAVE THE TALK: CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS

## CONVERSATION STRUCTURE: OARTAC

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

These are examples of questions and phrases to use when having a conversation about a sensitive topic like climate change. You do not have to use these as a script -- be yourself and communicate in a way that is authentic and comfortable to you!

OARTAC	Examples
<p><b>OPEN</b> How you open and set the tone for the conversation. Minimize distractions.</p>	<p><u>Note:</u> The key to initiating a conversation is that you are asking permission, rather than just springing it on them. Giving consent makes them a more willing participant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Would it be alright if we talked a bit about climate change?”</li> <li>• “Can I talk to you about what I’m working on at school?”</li> <li>• “I am worried about climate change. Can we talk about it?”</li> <li>• “One of my assignments at school is to have a conversation with our parent about climate change. Can you talk for 20 minutes?”</li> </ul> <p><u>Agree on ground rules:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Would it be alright to ignore texts, calls and TV during our conversation?”</li> <li>• “Let’s turn off our phones and TV while we talk.”</li> <li>• “What do you think about powering down electronics during our talk?”</li> </ul>
<p><b>ASK</b> Ask open-ended questions to learn about them and understand their experience. (Not yes/no questions).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What comes to mind when you hear the words climate change?”</li> <li>• “What about climate change interests or concerns you most?”</li> <li>• “What do you think about climate change?”</li> <li>• “What’s something that worries you about climate change?”</li> <li>• “How do you feel about the latest news on climate change?”</li> </ul>
<p><b>REFLECT</b> Reflect back what you basically heard them say. Reflecting helps the other person know they have been heard and listened to.</p>	<p><u>Note:</u> Reflect back what you basically heard them say. It can be practically word for word! It may feel weird, but reflecting helps the other person know they have been heard, which especially helps when you hear something that sounds like criticism or denial.</p> <p><u>Example:</u> “I don’t think I can do anything about climate change. I feel so overwhelmed.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I hear you saying you don’t feel that there is really anything you can do about it, so you feel overwhelmed.”</li> <li>• “So you’re saying you just feel overwhelmed right now, so you don’t think you can’t do anything?”</li> </ul>

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## CONVERSATION STRUCTURE: OARTAC

<p><b>TELL</b> Ask if you can tell something you've learned, are feeling, or are thinking about.</p>	<p><u>Note:</u> Tell why you care about climate change. Keep it brief!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “If it’s ok, I’d like to share my thoughts with you and where I’m coming from.”</li> <li>• “Can I share with you a bit about what I have been learning/thinking about?”</li> </ul>
<p><b>ASK</b> Ask what they think about what you’ve said, as well as other open-ended questions to learn more about them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “How are you feeling about all this?”</li> <li>• “What do you think?”</li> <li>• “What do you agree or disagree with?”</li> <li>• “Can you say a little more about how you see things?”</li> </ul>
<p><b>CLOSE</b> Close out the conversation in a respectful way that hopefully leaves them open to having more conversations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It sounds like you are feeling _____. That makes sense. I appreciate hearing your perspective.”</li> <li>• “I’ve felt _____ too.”</li> <li>• “I’m glad you told me about _____. I didn’t know that about you.”</li> <li>• “I appreciate hearing your perspective, even if we don’t agree.”</li> <li>• “It means a lot to me that we can have these conversations.”</li> </ul> <p><u>If your parent/adult seems interested, you can end by asking:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Would you be open to talking about this more?”</li> <li>• “What do you think we could do about climate change as a family?”</li> </ul>

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## CLIMATE CONVERSATION GUIDE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Getting Ready

1. Who are you going to have the conversation with? This should be a parent, guardian, or other trusted adult in your life.
2. When and where might you have the conversation? List a few ideas of common situations with your chosen adult that would feel most comfortable to you. Examples: after dinner, on a hike or walk, in the car, quiet time after school, relaxing time on the weekend or holidays, right before bed.

### OARTAC Framing

1. **Open:** What is your opening question for permission to start the conversation? How will you ask to limit distractions like TV & phones?
2. **Ask:** What open-ended question will you use to open up the conversation into how they feel/think about climate change?
3. **Reflect:** What are some ways you expect your parent or adult might show pushback like criticism or denial? What are some ways you can reflect back and acknowledge what they are saying?

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## CLIMATE CONVERSATION GUIDE

4. **Tell:** Ask if you can tell why you care about climate change. Share 2-3 points.
5. **Ask:** What are open-ended questions you can ask them as the conversation unfolds? This shows you are listening and want to learn more about them.
6. **Close:** What are some things you can say that will communicate you understand how they feel? What are some respectful ways you can close the conversation with them? Perhaps ask if they are open to continue talking about it another time.