

**Thinkers' Lodge Climate Crisis Retreat**  
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**Thinker's Essays**

**Climate Grief and an Open Letter**  
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**On Climate Grief**

Ecological grief, climate grief, and solastagia all refer to mental health responses to ecological loss as a result of climate change. Some studies show that groups or people that live closer to the land like Indigenous populations, particularly the Inuit in Northern Canada, or farmers feel ecological grief to a greater extent than others (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). Grief is a normal response to loss, but it has only recently begun to be associated with the loss of ecosystems and ways of life on the land (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). Ecological grief is also associated with human migration and leaving their place as it becomes uninhabitable (Dandy et al., 2019). As climate change worsens, more people will have to leave their homes and leave their land, leading to greater grief (Dandy et al., 2019). Many mental health impacts related to climate change are due to natural disasters that lead to forced migration because their land becomes inhabitable (Berry et al., 2018). Studies have also shown that climate change and the impacts experienced by climate change can accelerate the onset of youth clinical depression (Majeed & Lee, 2017). Climate change is more likely to impact the mental health of women, ethnic minorities, 2SLGBTQ+ community members, people living with disadvantage, youth, and marginalized populations (Berry et al., 2018). Climate change and solastagia (environmentally induced distress) threatens people's sense of place on the planet, and their sense that they can plan for the future (Albrecht et al., 2007) leading to mental health challenges and feelings of immense grief. Different forms of art and science communication can provide help coping with climate grief. For instance, ecomusicology can be used to convey environmental and ecological problems through musical representation in a way that brings people together (Titon, 2018). On the other hand, keeping field journals with detailed drawings can help scientists process ecological impacts by providing a kind of mental therapy through the work (Baldwin, 2019). Clearly, there needs to be interdisciplinary and high-risk/high-reward efforts in research and in community building to create spaces and processes to help cope with climate grief.

My objective in this research is to pair different forms of art (including visual art, performance art, music, and writing) with scientific knowledge and communication will build rituals and vocabularies that help communities cope with the loss of place and land associated with climate change. To determine this, I will engage with diverse communities in Nova Scotia whose lived experiences are heavily impacted by climate change; work with artists, scientists, writers, and other experts; and employ participatory methods that use both forms of art and science. To accomplish the proposed objectives I will be employing participatory social science methods, including Photovoice, that empower the participants as co-researchers by illustrating what is important to them (Woodgate, Zurba, & Tennant, 2017). In particular, participatory methods can

help researchers understand place significance and the responses of communities to natural disasters that can cause climate grief (Engle, 2018). Furthermore, participatory methods can aid in understanding what people value, and what impacts cause their greatest feelings of loss as a result of climate change (Barnett et al., 2016). Therefore, participatory methods are the methods that will be the most helpful in understanding how to create rituals and vocabularies to deal with climate grief, as it is a personal and individually unique feeling.

This research is crucial. Every day the impacts of climate change are causing devastation to ecosystems and communities. As climate change worsens, the number of people who will be forced to leave their homes, who will lose their ways of life, or lose family members will increase. These impacts will lead to increased levels of grief and loss associated with climate change. Additionally, climate change massively threatens the physical and mental health and safety of future generations. Climate change can seem apocalyptic (Fiskio, 2012), and this leaves young people to feel as if they have no chance at a future, which leads to massive amounts of climate grief, feelings of hopelessness, and fear (Fischer, 2014). This research can help current and future generations to cope with living in a world with an uncertain future, and it is crucial for maintaining morale and improving the quality of life of people around the globe.

## **My open letter to the world as a youth climate activist**

Dear World,

I know that you think that as a 19 year old, caucasian, privileged female that I spend my days high on the joys of life on this planet. Focused on my hair, my makeup, my dress, my dates, and maybe sometimes my schoolwork. I know that you think that I am in the height of my life, living it up because as a first year university student, what do I have to worry about except booze, boys, and that next paper I have to write on some dead old white guy?

Actually, World, I have to worry about the future of life on this planet. I have to worry about the fact that half of the species on this planet have become extinct, and thousands more will become extinct within my lifetime. I have to worry about the fact that with our increasingly inconsistent and changing climate that we are facing worldwide hunger that will only become a greater issue. I have to worry that if I ever do decide to have children (which is largely expected of me as a woman), would it be right for me to subject them to the horrors that they are likely to experience as the frequency and severity of extreme weather events becomes increasingly greater? Would it be right for me to subject them to low air quality, increasingly strong and deadly diseases, a world based on the idea that money will buy anything. But, the reality is that that world is not so far off. We are living in it already. Although as a woman living in a high-income Canadian household I might not experience some of the effects of climate to change to the same extent as a woman of my age living in India where they have had drastic heatwaves reaching temperatures of over 50 degrees celsius, I too am experiencing the effects of climate change.

The world should be one where it feels amazing to bring a child into it. The generations before me should have created a world for mine where we could be safe, one where we do not need to fight for basic human rights of fresh drinking water or clean air.

Unfortunately, they didn't.

So, World, it is now my generation's job to fix it. To break down these barricades preventing us from saving our home, saving our species.

It is not "cute" that I am a climate activist. It is not "adorable" that I am young and care so much about the planet. I am not a sight to be wondered at. I am a climate activist out of necessity, out of my basic instinct to survive. Whenever I hear that my work is cute or adorable, it tells me that you think it is unimportant. That whatever I am doing is not going to make a difference. It tells me that you don't realize the enormity of this issue, that you think it should be left to the politicians and the adults of this world. It tells me that you think my voice doesn't matter.

**And why would my voice matter? I'm only the future of this planet and species.**

And please, don't ask me why I want to spend all my time in meetings. Because, as much disapproval of my social life, my deviance from social norms, my lack to conform to societal expectations may seem important to you, they aren't to me. What's important to me is that our species has a future. I know that the work that I'm doing will only make things minorly better in my lifetime, because we are going to be repairing the damage done by our excessive dependence on nonrenewable fossil fuels for a long time yet. But, I am not doing this for me. I am doing this for the next seven generations of humans on this planet, the diverse species that are integral to our ecosystems and just incredible living beings, and the plants that keep us alive.

**Let me ask you a question World, do you think that it is my idea of fun to lay awake on many sleepless nights thinking about the destruction we are causing our planet? I hope that you don't because it is definitely not mine**

Do you know how frustrating it is World when you are just trying to save the entirety of humankind and you can't because people discredit you as a "child" or as a "tree hugger"? Do you know how frustrating it is when those we have elected to run our cities, our provinces, our Nation's say that they will be taking on this challenge and then elect to utilize targets that in no way will ever keep global average temperature warning within a threshold that we as humans can survive?

World, do not worry about me getting the prettiest clothes, do not worry about me getting a nice car, do not worry about me getting top marks at school, do not worry about me having friends, do not worry about me watching my favourite tv show. World, worry about me using up every inch of my energy to fight for climate action that will provide us with a future, worry about me burning out because governments won't listen, worry about me never being able to rest and

enjoy the luxuries of life because I am tied to this climate roller coaster that keeps flipping the world upside down.

And World, don't even worry about me. Worry about the children in third world countries who do not have access to food, healthcare, or water, worry about the children who have become homeless because that last hurricane destroyed their home and they have no money to rebuild it, worry about our indigenous peoples who are denied the right to clean water and live in comparable poverty to many in countries that are not as rich as Canada, worry about the bees that are endangered because they pollinate the majority of our crops and food sources, worry about the acidification of our oceans which is bleaching coral reefs that are home to 25% of all aquatic species.

And World, worry about your children, your grandchildren, your great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandchildren. World, worry that there will not be a habitable planet for them.

World, I wish that there would be someone to save us from this mess. But, World, there isn't. We got ourselves into this mess, and World we are going to have to save ourselves.

Sincerely,

Just a girl trying to find her place in this world.