Climate Across Curriculum: An Effort to Increase Climate Literacy Beyond STEM Disciplines

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Objectives

- Discuss progress on a K-12 climate literacy project conducted in 2019/20 as part of Smith College’s Year on Climate Change initiative

- Encourage K-12 teachers to incorporate ideas about climate beyond STEM subjects by creating and disseminating an open-access guide
Inspiration for the Project

- Smith College course GEO 106 Extraordinary Events in the History of Earth, Life and Climate

“Climate in Earth History” from Prothero and Dott, 2010, *Evolution of the Earth*
Interviewing Teachers

- Have you ever heard that climate change played a role in the rise and fall of the western Roman Empire?

- Would you be interested in incorporating these ideas about climate change into your teaching and curriculum about the western Roman Empire?

- How important do you see this information and its inclusion in school curricula for fostering and developing climate change literacy?
“Information about climate change is commonly taught only in natural and environmental science classes in K-12 curricula. This project explores relationships between climate and human history and culture so that this information could also be included in history, social studies, literature, art, music, language and other classes.

Student researchers are needed to browse through schools’ curricular plans and standards in search of topics that may have relationships to climate information. Each student will choose one or more topics of their own interest and relate it to published information on climate. For each topic, a student researcher will prepare a short, bulleted list explaining how their topic is related to climate, together with links to credible resources for any additional, more detailed information. Student researchers will then work with teachers in local schools to create questions and activities to use in the classroom.”
Table of Contents:  [we will be adding numerous examples here based on climate literature and teaching standards]

History/Social Science

- Climate in Human History (in general and as an example)
- Evolution, diversification, and migration of hominids out of East Africa
- Migration of humans into North America
- The first great civilizations of Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley
- History of the Anasazi People in American Southwest
- The rise of highly complex, centralized governments (e.g., the Egyptian pharaohs and Babylonian kings)

Ancient Egypt:
- Megadrought and Collapse in Old Kingdom Egypt and Akkadian Empire
- Rise and fall of the Maya Empire
- Collapse of the Mycenaean culture in Greece and the Hittite empire in Turkey
- The rise and collapse of civilizations in Northern Africa
- End of the Bronze Age in Europe
- Hannibal’s crossing the Alps

- Rise and Fall of the Western Roman Empire
- Establishment and abandonment of Viking settlements in Greenland and Labrador

- Development of modern agriculture
- Black Death in Europe
- Abandonment of the Mughul city Fatehpur Sikri in India

- Potato Blight in Ireland
- Droughts in Africa, India, and Russia in the early 1970s
- Political conflicts in Northern Ireland
- Topic n
Migration of humans into North America

*How is this topic related to climate:*

- The presence of a land bridge between Siberia and Alaska allowed migration of humans from Asia into North America at the end of the last Ice Age (about 12,000 to 10,000 years ago) when sea level was lower than today because of a large amount of water frozen into thick ice sheets or glaciers. When glaciers melted and sea level rose to its present-day position, the land bridge was flooded and became the Bering Strait.

*Ideas for incorporation in teaching:*

Examine Geography of the Americas figure from p. 187 in the World History textbook by Ellis and Esler 2014 (below; better copy and permission to use needed).

How and why was geography of the northern hemisphere about 18,000 years ago different from today? How may have this allowed people to migrate from Asia into North America?
Megadrought and Collapse in Old Kingdom Egypt and Akkadian Empire

How is this topic related to climate:

- C. 2200-1900 BCE: global abrupt climate change caused synchronous megadrought (a drought lasting over 10 years) across the Mediterranean, West Asia, the Indus, and northeast Africa
  - Caused by the direction and intensity of the cyclonic North Atlantic westerlies controlled by North Atlantic Oscillation, which also caused disruption and weakening of the Indian Monsoon and diminished northeast African precipitation
- Precipitation decreased 30-50%, temperatures dropped slightly
- The megadrought completely dessicated the dry-farming agricultural regions of the Mediterranean (especially the extensive dry-farming regions on the northern Akkadian Empire). It also reduced the flow of the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates rivers, causing irrigation agriculture yields to decrease sharply. Food shortages were extreme, and migration from the north to the southern irrigation-farming areas of the Akkadian Empire occurred.
- The beginning of the megadrought coincided with the collapse of Old Kingdom Egypt and the beginning of the First Intermediate Period; though not entirely responsible for the collapse, decreased agricultural yield certainly played a large role in the instability of this period.
- The megadrought is also thought to have been the primary cause of the relatively sudden collapse of the Akkadian Empire. Famine lead to massive instability within the empire as northern populations moved south (the northern dry-farming regions remained uninhabited for 250 years, at the end of the megadrought), and is likely to have caused the Gutian invasion.
  - Three major building projects during this time were abandoned mid-construction, including Naram-Sin’s fortress at Tell Brak
- Evidence for the presence of megadrought came from radiocarbon-dated lake-bed sediments (primarily), as well as tree-ring and speleothem data

Ideas for incorporation in teaching:

List of Resources:
Rise and Fall of the Western Roman Empire

How is this topic related to climate:

- During the foundation of the Roman Empire, the weather was warm, wet, and stable, which was conducive to the growth of an agrarian society.
- Then, between ~200-600 C.E., this period of climate stability ended, leading to a period of climate variability that caused crisis and instability within the Roman Empire (spread of disease, dry weather caused agrarian issues, etc.), which coincided with and exacerbated political turmoil, cultural change, and socioeconomic instability, as well as the invasion of Persian and Germanic peoples during the Migration Period.
- These migrations were also triggered in part by climate change: in Northern Europe, Alpine passes melted during the end of the warm period in the early C.E., and the later climate variability created even less ideal temperatures and conditions in Northern Europe, so Germanic peoples migrated to the relative warmth of Mediterranean Europe. They were able to so because of the newly created Alpine passes.
- Disease and climate were also connected: all three major pandemics faced by the Roman Empire occurred during times of climate instability and were facilitated by Roman connectivity and trade. Furthermore, Roman manipulation of the land around them (moving rivers, slashing and burning forests, draining basins, etc.) exposed unfamiliar parasites and triggered ecological change.

Ideas for incorporation in teaching:

List of Resources:
Literature Examples

“Frankenstein” by Mary Shelley

“The Vampire” by John William Polidori
Art Examples

Winter Landscape, 1601, by Peter Brueghel the Younger

George Washington Crossing the Delaware, 1851, by Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze

Additional examples needed for music, languages, etc.
Going Forward

- Keep compiling the document draft

The placid Lake Ilopango is the caldera of the Ilopango volcanic complex, which in 539 or 540 A.D. produced one of the largest volcanic eruptions in the last 7,000 years. The lake was also present then; as lava boiled the water into steam, the eruption became even more explosive.

Colossal volcano behind 'mystery' global cooling finally found

The eruption devastated local Maya settlements and caused crop failures around the world.

www.nationalgeographic.com/science Aug. 2019; Dull et al., 2019, Quaternary Science Reviews
Going Forward

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- Consult with experts

YaleNews
Joseph Manning wins major NSF grant to study climate change, human history link

By Bess Connolly | SEPTEMBER 24, 2018

A Yale-led project examining the link between explosive volcanic eruptions and the annual Nile river summer flooding in antiquity has received an award from the National Science Foundation (NSF).
Going Forward

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- Work with Campus School of Smith College and other area schools to test topics and integrate teaching strategies
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- Keep compiling the document draft
- Consult with experts
- Work with Campus School of Smith College and other area schools to test topics and integrate teaching strategies
- Disseminate the open access document

Campus School of Smith College

Northampton Public Schools
Ideas for Document Dissemination

● Professional Conferences

AGU Fall Meeting

ED014: Climate Literacy Effort Showcase
https://agu.confex.com/agu/fm19/prelim.cgi/Session/78569

ED015: Climate Literacy: Bringing climate change science curriculum, pedagogy, and research to K-12 educators, preservice teachers, and students.
https://agu.confex.com/agu/fm19/prelim.cgi/Session/82100

ED016: Climate Literacy: Informal education, youth initiatives, community impact work, and reaching broad audiences
https://agu.confex.com/agu/fm19/meetingapp.cgi/Session/78516

ED017: Climate Literacy: Inspiring student and public action through effective science/arts/sustainability engagement
https://agu.confex.com/agu/fm19/prelim.cgi/Session/82593
Conferences and Workshops for Teachers

Humanities Content for Your Classroom

Check out our Summer Institute for Climate Change Education, a 3-day conference to gain the tools and skills to teach climate change!

Climate Change Education has historically been tied to the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) disciplines, but, climate change is an issue that impacts political, social, and economic dimensions and can be used as an integrating context for all subjects. Read our Humanities Statement from our Education Program.

Explore our free resources for incorporating climate change into your humanities classroom!

DOWNLOAD HUMANITIES RESOURCES
● Educational Organizations

www.masscouncil.org

www.emergingamerica.org
- Climate Education Networks

www.cleane.net.org

www.climateecos.org
Conclusions

- Incorporating information about climate change beyond STEM subjects in K-12 curricula could greatly improve overall climate literacy and increase general understanding of the impact of climate on human societies.

- Such approach is vital for providing comprehensive climate education for the next generation.
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