Poetry on Climate Change: Central Idea

*Lesson Prep:* Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner’s background may require you to explain or facilitate a brief discussion around what a climate activist is and define unfamiliar terms. These explanations will help students better understand the significance and impact of Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner’s work. See the shaded box below for some tips and definitions.

1. Today we will learn about poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner and focus on two of her poems.
   - Kathy was born in the Marshall Islands and moved to Hawai‘i at the age of 7. At the age of 25, she moved back to the Marshall Islands.
   - She is a climate activist who addressed the United Nations’ Climate Summit in 2014.
   - She writes about nuclear testing conducted in the Marshall Islands, militarism, the rising sea level as a result of climate change, forced migration, racism in America and more.
   - From 1946 to 1958, the U.S. conducted 67 nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands.
     - These tests are equivalent to 1.6 Hiroshima-size explosions per day
     - During WWII, in 1945, the U.S. dropped two nuclear bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

2. Explain the concept of central idea to the students:
The central idea of a passage is the message that the author is trying to get across to the reader. A central idea is stated in a sentence, not just one to two words.

3. Have students popcorn read “2 Degrees”, stopping after each stanza to give students a chance to ask questions about unfamiliar words or phrases. [AdvancingJustice-LA.org/AAPIWomenPoetry, p.6]

4. “2 Degrees” Central Idea Handout: Go over the first row with the class.
   - Pick a student to read the lines on the left in the chart and ask them what they think the lines mean.
   - If necessary, guide them to the key words/phrases of 2 degrees (the title of the poem as well), catastrophe, warm the world, etc. to help them arrive to an interpretation that mentions climate change and 2 degrees being the maximum/tipping point.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines from the Poem</th>
<th>Your Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientists say if humans warm the world more than 2 degrees then catastrophe will hit</td>
<td>Example Meaning: Scientists &amp; experts warn that if the Earth warms more than 2 degrees Celsius, many different natural disasters, such as storms, fires, rising sea levels, will happen and harm the world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Students will likely need definitions for militarism, forced migration, “Hiroshima-sized” explosions (see below). Point out that Kathy’s themes in writing come from her own experiences and priorities—climate activism and her home, the Marshall Islands.

- Militarism: “the belief that it is necessary to have strong armed forces and that they should be used in order to win political or economic advantage” (Cambridge Dictionary)
- Forced Migration: “a general term that refers to the movements of refugees and internally displaced people (those displaced by conflicts within their country of origin) as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects (Columbia Public Health)
- Hiroshima-sized explosions: razed and burned 70% of all buildings; estimated 145,000 deaths by end of 6 months; increased rates of cancer and chronic diseases among survivors; over 90% within quarter mile of where bomb was dropped died, 33% at within one mile, 10% at 1.2 miles (AtomicBombMuseum.org)
Poetry on Climate Change: Central Idea—Classwork

1. Read “2 Degrees”: AdvancingJustice-LA.org/AAPIWomenPoetry [p. 6]

2. Draw a star by the lines that make you think differently about the title of the poem, “2 Degrees”.

3. Fill in the table, explaining the meaning of the lines from the poem in the left column in your own words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines from the Poem</th>
<th>Your Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientists say</td>
<td>Example Meaning: Scientists &amp; experts warn that if the Earth warms more than 2 degrees Celsius, many different natural disasters, such as storms, fires, rising sea levels, will happen and harm the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if humans warm the world more than 2 degrees then catastrophe will hit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thousands, millions displaced left wandering wondering what happened?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like 0.5 degrees are just crumbs like the Marshall Islands must look on a map</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As I watch I think about futility I think about the world making the same mistakes since the industrial revolution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So so tired, wandering wondering if the world will wheel us out to rest in the sun or will they just dust their hands of us, wipe them clean</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That beyond the discussions are faces all the way out here</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking wobbly on the edge of the reef not yet under water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Poetry on Climate Change: Central Idea—Classwork [continued]

4. What is the central idea of the poem?

5. Using the chart on the previous page and looking back on the poem, find which lines support the central idea. Write three of those lines or phrases below:
   1) 
   2) 
   3) 

6. Reread the last stanza of “2 Degrees”. What message is Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner sending in the last stanza?
Poetry on Climate Change: Central Idea—Homework


2. Fill out the table below with what you think the lines from the poem mean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines from the Poem</th>
<th>Your Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And when others ask you where you got this you tell them they’re from the Marshall Islands</td>
<td>Example Meaning: The author wants her friends to tell others that the baskets, earrings, etc. are from the Marshall Islands, so that more people know about the islands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show them where it is on a map tell them we are a proud people toasted dark brown as the carved ribs of a tree stump</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell them our islands were dropped from a basket carried by a giant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell them we are sweet harmonies of grandmothers mothers aunties and sisters songs late into night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell them we are days and nights hotter than anything you can imagine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell them about the water how we have seen it rising flooding across our cemeteries gushing over the sea walls and crashing against our home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell them // we are afraid tell them we don’t know of the politics // or the science but tell we see // what is in our own backyard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But most importantly tell them we don’t want to leave we’ve never wanted to leave and that we are nothing without our islands.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Poetry on Climate Change: Central Idea—Homework [continued]

3. What is the central idea of the poem?

4. Using the chart on the previous page and looking back on the poem, find which lines support the central idea. Write three of those lines or phrases below:

1) 

2) 

3)
Writing Your Own Poem on Climate Change

Instructions: Following the theme of climate change, write a poem following the style of “Tell Them”. Your poem should have an original title and have at least three stanzas. Each stanza should be at least four lines long and must use the phrase “tell them” in it at least once.

Helpful Hint: Think about the consequences of climate change, such as natural disasters, rising sea levels, air pollution, droughts, etc., and the effects that these issues have on people, whether it’s your community or something you read about, as you find inspiration for your poem. Also, think about what you can do about climate change, such as telling your friends and family about it, starting a recycling program at your school, and more.

Example stanza:
When you overhear your friends saying
“Maybe this climate change thing is fake news”
Tell your friends
How California was burning for weeks.
Tell them how families left their homes
Fleeing for safety, afraid
They’d never see home again.

Now, write your poem below, using the back of this page if necessary.
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Credits

Lesson created by: Prabhneek Heer, Curriculum Developer, Asian Americans Advancing Justice - LA.

Works Cited


More Social Justice Teaching Resources from Asian Americans Advancing Justice – LA:

AdvancingJustice-LA.org/UntoldStories