

TOPIC

CLIMATE CHANGE



Background notes, explainers, helpful links,
classroom ideas and how to deal with
difficult issues in the media

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INTRODUCTION

What are 'hot topics'?

Climate change, terrorism, refugees, drugs, crime...

There are a range of topics that often appear in the news. The information and links below can be used by teachers and students to easily access a range of articles and videos from *The West Australian* and Channel 7 based on these topics. Some of these topics can be complex, so Media Education will continually develop and add to a pool of resources to assist teachers with covering these with their students.



WHY USE THE NEWS?

It is often said that the purpose of education is to prepare students 'for the real world'.

The news reflects this 'real world'. It informs about the pressing issues within our community, nation and around the globe, examines current events, government and business decisions, and presents a wide range of viewpoints for discussion. Exploring the news can thus bring the topics and themes studied in class to life and illustrate their relevance to students' lives today.

Children are likely to be exposed to news stories at home and on their way to school, or hear it being discussed by their parents, friends and relatives. Therefore, by studying the news we can both tap into children's curiosity about what they hear or see, and encourage sharing of learning beyond the classroom.

The diversity of stories contained in each edition of the news makes it easy to link the news to a range of learning areas, enabling cross-curricular teaching and ample scope for the development of critical thinking skills.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Exploring contemporary stories about this hot topic will bring your classroom to life. The following are some easy ways to access up-to-date resources of Seven West Media (WA).

OPTION 1: Read the newspaper / watch TV

Grab your copy of *The West Australian* or *The Sunday Times*, or watch Channel 7 news or Today Tonight, and look for articles and stories about this 'hot topic'.

OPTION 2: Search online

Visit [google.com](https://www.google.com) and enter `site:thewest.com.au (+ search term)`

- eg `site:thewest.com.au climate change`

OPTION 3: Tagged articles / videos:

- Natural disasters
 - <https://thewest.com.au/news/natural-disasters>
- Environment
 - <https://thewest.com.au/news/environment>
- Weather
 - <https://thewest.com.au/news/weather>

ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

“Chocolate could run out in the next 30 years because the crop will be harder to grow in a warming climate, experts have warned.”

Now there's one way to attract children's attention about the complex issue of climate change.

The statement was the introduction of an [article in The West Australian newspaper in January 2018](#), which continued . . .

“The cacao tree — from which we get cocoa beans — thrives only in humid rainforest-like conditions close to the equator. But the fragile plant is under threat from diseases and a changing climate that will suck moisture from the soil and make it impossible to produce a good crop in many regions around the world by 2050.”

Media reports about climate change are as varied as scientific opinion on the subject.

Some reports are based on high-level global research – others are close to home - and some are quirky and of interest to young readers.

The complexities of climate change and the many opinions based around them are impossible to cover in every media article. The following links and explainers are designed to help students and teachers navigate the complex, “hot topic” of climate change in class.

WHY IS IT IN THE NEWS?

Climate change can be hard to see and intuitively grasp. It's a relatively slow-moving scientific phenomenon that most scientists agree is caused by pollution from all around the globe. But an extreme weather event is a moment when people can see and feel climate change – and if they're unlucky, get seriously hurt by it. When those disasters happen, media outlets cover them as climate change stories. And when a number of them happen in quick succession, the media have an even greater responsibility to report the big-picture story about climate change and help the public understand the immediacy of the threat.

Spikes and troughs

The Media and Climate Change Observatory (MeCCO) collates monthly summaries of coverage of climate change in the media. It charts five Australian newspapers among its global observations (but not including The West Australian). It says 2017 saw media attention to climate change and global warming ebb and flow.

Media coverage about climate change peaked when the former vice president of the US, Al Gore, released the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* in 2007, a campaign to educate people about global warming. Gore was featured prominently in the news media coverage of climate change and his film won an Academy Award (more coverage). A sequel to the film, titled *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power*, was released in July 28, 2017, to less fanfare.

Political intervention also leads to headlines. A carbon tax was introduced in 2011 by the Gillard government in an effort to reduce the impact of climate change and despite some criticism, it successfully reduced Australia's carbon dioxide emissions. The subsequent Australian Government, elected in 2013 under then Prime Minister Tony Abbott, was criticised for being "in complete denial about climate change". The Abbott government repealed the carbon tax in July 2014 in a heavily criticised move. The renewable energy target (RET), launched in 2001, was heavily modified under Abbott's government. However, under the government of Malcolm Turnbull, Australia attended the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference and adopted the Paris Agreement. This agreement includes a review of emission reduction targets every five years from 2020.

In 2017, US president expressed his scepticism about global warming in a series of social media statements. “East, it could be the COLDEST New Year's Eve on record,” he tweeted during record snowfalls in December. “Perhaps we could use a little bit of that good old Global Warming that our Country, but not other countries, was going to pay TRILLIONS OF DOLLARS to protect against. Bundle up!” Prominence of news on climate change or global warming associated with his comments has been referred to as a “Trump Dump”. This is defined as a phenomena where media attention that would have focused on other climate-related events and issues instead was placed on Trump-related actions, leaving many other stories untold.

TALKING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

The topic of climate change can leave some children – and adults! – feeling pessimistic about the future and helpless about the potential scale of the problem. The Australian Psychology Society suggests that exploring a limited number of issues at a time and focusing on positive action is more empowering and less likely to lead to feelings of stress. The Society has released a helpful guide for how to [talk to children about the environment](#) and how to [cope with climate change distress](#).

KIDS EXPLAINER

Climate refers to the general prevailing weather condition of a region. It is determined by many factors that influence flows of energy through the climate system, including greenhouse gases which trap heat in the atmosphere.

The Australian Academy of Science defines climate change as a change in the pattern of weather, and related changes in oceans, land surfaces and ice sheets, occurring over decades or longer. It says climate change may be due to natural processes, such as changes in the Sun's radiation, volcanoes or internal variability in the climate system, or due to human influences such as changes in the composition of the atmosphere or land use.

Scientists say the Earth has warmed by an average of 1°C in the last century, and although that might not sound like much, it means big things for people and wildlife around the globe.

As temperatures rise, some areas will get wetter and lots of animals (and humans!) could find they're not able to adapt to their changing climate. Unless greenhouse gas emissions are severely reduced, climate change could cause a quarter of land animals, birdlife and plants to become extinct, scientists warn.

Useful tips and further reading:

- Climate basis for kids: www.c2es.org/content/climate-basics-for-kids/
- Ice melting in the Arctic: www.nsidc.org/cryosphere/icelights
- Climate change challenges in Western Australia:
www.der.wa.gov.au/your-environment/climate-change/253-climate-change-challenges-in-wa
- What can I do about climate change? www.davidsuzuki.org/what-you-can-do/top-10-ways-can-stop-climate-change/
- NASA's take on climate change: www.climatekids.nasa.gov/climate-change-meaning/

THE ARGUMENTS

The global warming controversy concerns the public debate over:

- whether global warming is occurring;
- how much has occurred in modern times;
- what has caused it;
- what its effects will be;
- whether any action should be taken to curb it, and if so what that action should be.

In the scientific literature, there is a strong consensus that global surface temperatures have increased in recent decades and that the trend is caused by human-induced emissions of greenhouse gases. No scientific body of national or international standing disagrees with this view, though a few organisations hold non-committal positions. Disputes over the key scientific facts of global warming are more prevalent in the media than in the scientific literature, where such issues are treated as resolved.

TEACHING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE IN CLASS

When seeking out items relating to each hot topic, don't forget to look beyond news articles. Often, cartoons, photographs feature articles, opinion pages, reviews and even advertisements can offer scope for rich classroom discussion.

Fact and opinion

A fact is something you can prove to be either true or false. You cannot change a fact (although you can look at it from a different angle). An opinion is how a person feels about something. You can change an opinion.

Example of fact

- NASA satellite to measure ice changes.
<https://thewest.com.au/news/weather/nasa-satellite-to-measure-ice-changes-ng-s-1892038>

Example of opinion

- Economics Editor Shane Wright comments on how climate change will affect mortgages.
<https://thewest.com.au/opinion/shane-wright/climate-change-is-real-and-its-cost-cannot-be-ignored-ng-b88432001z>

Questions for teachers to use in class to discuss articles about climate change

- What facts and opinions are presented in the story?
- What are the sources of the factual information? Are they reliable? If we wanted to 'fact check' this information, where could we look?
- Who is offering opinions about the topic? What is their expertise?
- Why is this article newsworthy?
- How likely / in what way are we to be affected by this issue this year/in our life time?
- What can we do about this?

OTHER HELPFUL LINKS:

- Media and Climate Change Observatory reports:
https://sciencepolicy.colorado.edu/icecaps/research/media_coverage/index.html
- The effects of media coverage about global warming:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_coverage_of_global_warming
- An Inconvenient Truth and media coverage:
www.theconversation.com/an-inconvenient-truth-about-an-inconvenient-truth-81799