

ONWARD

16 Climate Fiction Short Stories to Inspire Hope

DISCUSSION GUIDE



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ABOUT THE BOOK

This young adult anthology strings together the past, present, and future across a wide range of genres, from fantasy and science fiction to thriller and verse. Readers will laugh and cry along as they meet a host of compelling characters navigating a changing world and fighting for their future.

Onward includes voices that will reach kids wherever they're at: Erin Entrada Kelly, Rin Chupeco, Padma Venkatraman, Gloria Muñoz, Aya de León, M. García Peña, Jeff Zentner, Karina Iceberg, Aleese Lin, Kim Johnson, Anuradha D. Rajurkar, Xelena González, Sarah Aronson, Heather Dean Brewer, Nora Shalaway Carpenter, and Rachel Hylton.

Because the best cure for despair is action, each story is paired with key resources to help kids learn more and stand up for their planet. There's also a section focused on tools to support mental health and cultivate resilience—what we need to make life on Earth sustainable for us all.



ABOUT THE EDITOR

Nora Shalaway Carpenter's fiction has been named to NPR's and *Kirkus Reviews*'s Best of the Year lists, praised in the *New York Times* and *People*, and won the Green Earth Book Award, the Whippoorwill Award for exemplary rural fiction, and the Nautilus Book Award. She holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts and teaches at the Highlights Foundation's Whole Novel Workshop.

Find climate action resources tailored to each story in this anthology at www.charlesbridgeteen.com/Onward.





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ABOUT THE ANTHOLOGY

- The stories in *Onward* represent many genres. Which genre is your favorite? Did any of the stories surprise you with regard to their genre?
- Have you read anything else by any of the authors represented in this book? How does their other work compare to the story they contributed to *Onward*?
- In the back of the book is a QR code leading to a page of climate action resources. Choose a story and explore the resources associated with it. Why do you think the author chose the resources to pair with this story? Is there an organization you would like to get involved with?
- “Tellico Lake” (page 31) and “One Piece at a Time” (page 111) are told in verse. For each of these stories, consider: Do you have a favorite poem in the story? Why is it your favorite? What role does your favorite poem play in the arc of the story?
- *Onward* has two epigraphs, one from youth climate activist Xiye Bastida and one from environmental activist Jane Goodall. What do these epigraphs have in common? What do you think of these epigraphs? What are some “small ethical actions” that you can do or are already doing to help the planet?
- What does the foreword have to say about “Gen Dread”? Are there times when you have felt worried or depressed about the climate crisis? What are some of the solutions Nora Shalaway Carpenter suggests?

ABOUT THE INDIVIDUAL STORIES

- In “The Care and Feeding of Mother” (page 1), Shayta’s parents and her uncle disagree about the solutions to climate crisis. What are their positions? Where do they find common ground? Have you ever replayed the same argument multiple times with a person, the way Shayta’s parents and uncle replay this argument?
- In “The Care and Feeding of Mother” (page 1), Coco asks, “What’s the point of all this?” What are some of the platitudes that Shayta remembers? Do you agree or disagree with Shayta’s opinion of these or other platitudes? When times are hard, where do you find meaning?
- In “The Manatee Is Not a Meme” (page 15), what happens to the school’s mascot? Do you agree or disagree with the decision to choose a new school mascot? Why? What does your school’s mascot mean to you and your community?
- In “The Manatee Is Not a Meme” (page 15), Esperanza says of Matilda, “We loved her as if we knew her, but the thing is, we didn’t” (page 23). Why do the characters feel this attachment to Matilda? Are there animals or people to whom you or others have a parasocial relationship? Do you think it’s possible to develop a genuine knowledge of a person or animal through their social media presence?

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- In “Tellico Lake” (page 31), the narrator makes many Christian religious references. What references do you recognize? How do these references influence your understanding of the narrator’s character and emotions?
- What role does the Eastern Band of Cherokee play in the events of “Tellico Lake” (page 31)? Compare Amoneeta Sequoyah’s lawsuit to other examples of Native environmental activism. How are Native Nations taking action to protect the environment in the present day?
- “Armadillo by Morning” (page 63) brings characters into conflict over the culling of an animal. What is at stake in this conflict? Why does Lance’s Pap want to hunt the armadillo? What are some other ways that the effects of climate change impact food security for communities in the US and around the globe? What are the nonviolent animal control alternatives suggested by Emaline and Zeke?
- In “Armadillo by Morning” (page 63), Emaline compares the climate-fueled migration of animals to the movement of people seeking lower rent outside large towns and cities. Has your neighborhood changed in the recent past? What are politicians and community leaders in your area saying about rent and affordable housing? What relationship do housing costs have to climate change?
- In “Worldfall” (page 89), Chena’s tribe lives in a post-apocalyptic Alaska affected by severe wildfires. Do natural disasters affect your area? What role does disaster preparedness play in your life? How does disaster preparedness in real life look different from disaster preparedness in the world of “Worldfall”?
- What role do superpowers play in “Worldfall” (page 89)? Where do Auntie and Grandma believe these powers come from? What would your post-apocalyptic superpower be?
- In “One Piece at a Time” (page 111), why doesn’t Riddhi participate in the #FridaysForTheFuture protest? How does Callie’s approach to recruiting Riddhi and Latisha make her feel? Would you participate in a school strike? Why or why not? How does Riddhi find other ways to make a difference?
- Why did Riddhi’s family come to the US in “One Piece at a Time” (page 111)? What sacrifices did they make to establish themselves in a new country? If your family has an immigration story, reflect on how it is similar to or different from Riddhi’s story.
- What do Amy and her dad find when they reach Point Nemo in “Graveyard for the Sky” (page 135)? What do you think of her dad’s assertion that “. . . they try to get you all worked up over nothing” (page 142)? How does ocean pollution impact humans?
- In “Graveyard for the Sky” (page 135), why does Amy call the creature from Point Nemo “Kaijuu”? What does that word literally mean? What other creatures have been called kaijuu? What were some of the symbolic meanings tied to those creatures?
- What role does grief play in “Blue Glass” (page 155)? What are the similarities and differences between personal grief and climate grief?

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- In “Blue Glass” (page 155), how does Tejas use a public art project to process his feelings? What do you think of the quotes that appear in the bottles? What quote would you write down to put in a bottle for public art? Is there a piece of public art near you that you find meaningful? How would you go about starting a public art project if inspiration struck you?
- “The World Within” (page 181) is a personal essay. How is this reading experience different from reading fiction?
- Try the writing exercise described in “The World Within”: For fifteen minutes, write all your observations of a natural place without stopping to edit or overthink. Then, for fifteen minutes, write from a place of being observed by nature (page 185). How are those writing experiences and modes of thinking different? Did you take away something similar to or different from González’s experience with the same exercise?
- In “Critobis” (page 193), Yuisa has the ability to experience memories attached to objects, particularly those made of precious metals. What does Yuisa see when she touches the discarded watch? What does this memory tell you about the setting of “Critobis”? Is there an object in your life that you think would carry a memory that someone like Yuisa could see?
- What does the word “critobis” mean? When Yuisa understands the origin of this word, how does it affect your understanding of the word’s definition? Do you think you could still find “at least a little of something good” in a cryptobillionaire like the one in Yuisa’s vision?
- In “Seguimos Aquí” (page 203), the main character and her friend join a protest for beach access rights in Puerto Rico. What are some of the slogans used in this protest? Are the beaches in your area private or public? Why does beach access matter?
- In “Seguimos Aquí” (page 203), the main character has complicated feelings about leaving Puerto Rico for education and work. What is at stake in her decision to leave? Have you or someone in your family had to move to a new area for educational or economic opportunity?
- How does Terra work in “The Divining” (page 225)? What are the spoken and unspoken rules of this community?
- In “The Divining” (page 225), water is an extremely scarce resource that is strictly rationed. How is water scarcity linked to climate change? What are some solutions that communities around the world are using to cope with water scarcity?
- In “A Trashy Love Story” (page 247), what are the steps of t’shuvah that Rona’s parents expect her to follow? What do you think makes an apology meaningful?
- Community service is a part of Rona’s atonement in “A Trashy Love Story” (page 247). How does this connect with the Jewish concept of tikkun olam? What actions besides trash pickup do Adam’s group take to improve their community?

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- In “Water Is Life” (page 265), Gemma’s community is divided by water scarcity and corporate interests. How do these divisions play out in ways big and small?
- What are your associations with the phrase “water is life”? What historical events and movements has it been linked to? Given these connotations, why do you think this slogan is adopted by the Refresh! corporation in “Water Is Life” (page 265)?
- In “The Great Tree” (page 291), the main character’s city is beset by visions of a mysterious tree, which some dismiss as a form of mass hysteria. What are some other famous episodes of mass hysteria from history? Why do you think the city government is invested in discrediting these visions?
- Sven from “The Great Tree” (page 291) worked at a seed bank before a series of devastating earthquakes and climate collapse. What is a seed bank? How do they help support climate resilience in communities around the world? Can you get involved with the work of a local seed bank?
- In “The Stealth Arborist” (page 307), Rosalie perceives each person’s time as a result of her new mathematical understanding of dimensions. How does this power affect her understanding of her own complicated family history? How does her understanding of this power evolve when she encounters the stealth arborist? Have you ever learned something that literally or metaphorically changed the way you see the world?
- In “The Stealth Arborist” (page 307), Rosalie’s mother decides to sell the timber from an ancient cypress forest on the family property in order to pay for home repairs and upgrades. What does Rosalie think of this decision? What kinds of things are at stake when private owners consider selling or developing natural resources for financial gain? Are there circumstances when it’s okay to make that choice? What alternatives might exist?