

How to engage in conversations on climate crisis?

Have you ever tried initiating a conversation about environmental issues with your friends, relatives, or colleagues, only to be downplayed? Perhaps they weren't interested, or they seemed unconcerned about such matters. But is there a way to truly get them to listen? The answer may lie in an ancient tradition that has captivated audiences for generations. For centuries, particularly within tribal communities, storytelling has been a powerful way to communicate. More than just entertainment, it conveys morals, sparks conversations about critical issues, and bridges the gap between different perspectives. When discussing urgent topics like environmental issues and climate crisis, storytelling offers a way to engage people who might otherwise be indifferent.

The Storytellers based in Pune – Chetan Shetty, Sunita Shetty, Peter Viegas, and Audre – shared this timeless art with us at a workshop. They led us through three days of immersive activities designed to sharpen our storytelling skills and show how stories can captivate audiences. Through exercises such as staring into a neighbor's eyes, playing mirroring games, forming stories from random words and sentences, and finding six commonalities with another participant, we honed our storytelling skills.

One of the most engaging activities was the Problem X game. In this exercise, five of us took turns: one person presented a scenario, the next defined a problem, the third amplified the problem tenfold, the fourth proposed a solution, and the final person provided a takeaway.

The exercise was both entertaining and enlightening, demonstrating how a story unfolds: introduction, problem, amplification, solution, and moral.

This approach illustrates how storytelling can be used to frame even complex issues like the climate crisis in a way that captures attention and fosters understanding. So, the next time you try to engage your friends or colleagues on environmental matters, consider structuring your discussion like a story—start with a relatable scenario, build up the stakes, offer solutions, and convey the importance of the issue.

Another effective way to communicate a message is through narrating published stories. This approach allows for creative engagement with the plot and characters, delivering a tale effectively within a set timeframe. During the workshop, Peter, Chetan, and Sunita shared some captivating stories with us before dinner. One memorable tale was “The Mountain That Loved the Bird”, a touching story about a bird named Joy and the next 100 generations of Joy that brought life to a barren mountain.

Peter's vivid descriptions and attention to detail deeply captivated us and stirred our emotions. After the story concluded, we spent half an hour discussing our reactions and interpretations. Some of us reflected on how seemingly small, invisible changes can lead to significant transformations.





Others noted that such selfless acts could profoundly impact others' lives. Remarkably, this story also touched on the theory of evolution, illustrating how the Earth's journey mirrors the slow, gradual process of natural development over millions and billions of years. This discussion highlighted the power of storytelling to not only convey complex ideas but also to foster deep, meaningful connections and insights among listeners. The ORID framework is an effective tool to recollect and help interpret the story with the audience.

O stands for Objective - characters and places, data mentioned in the story; R stands for reflective - what does the story remind an individual; I stands for Interpretive - key takeaways; D stands for Decisive - action points one would like to implement (Use this to start discussions after narrating the story) However, narrating a written story can be challenging, especially when deciding which details to omit. The process is more manageable when broken down into steps. Start by reading the entire story to understand its essence. Then, divide the narrative into three main plots and break each plot down into three key points.

List the characters, describe them, and identify which ones play major roles. This creates a structural skeleton for your narration, allowing you to focus on the most impactful elements.

In the workshop, we applied this technique to the story "Saving the Dalai Lama's Cranes". We were divided into groups and tasked with creating our versions of the story using the skeleton approach. It was fascinating to see how each of the groups presented the same story in unique ways. One group omitted a character, another combined two characters, played with the plot, and emphasized different aspects of the message. Notably, one team used three characters to narrate the story directly, which proved to be an effective and engaging method. This exercise demonstrated how flexible storytelling can be, even when working with published material.

By focusing on the core elements and practicing, one can effectively convey a story while adapting it to suit different audiences and contexts.

In the end, the workshop provided more than just a platform for practice; it underscored that storytelling is a skill that can be learned and continually refined. Whether applied to science, art, or everyday conversations, storytelling remains a timeless and powerful means of connection. So, have you discovered a method to engage and initiate conversations on conservation and climate crisis? Have you found ways to simplify complex facts into well-crafted stories? Happy storytelling!

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