

Lesson Plan: Climate Change and the Environmental Humanities

Analysis of Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'The Climate of History: Four Theses'

Lesson plan contributed by Dr Maya Dodd, FLAME University, Pune, India.

As an **Undergraduate Humanities (Cultural Studies, Literature, History)** teacher, you can use this lesson plan to teach critical analysis of a comprehensive text in **climate literature**.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, a Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor of History, South Asian Languages, Civilizations and Law, at the University of Chicago, authored a seminal essay, '**The Climate of History: Four Theses**' in 2009. This lesson plan will enable your students to critically analyze this text and acquaint themselves with the field of environmental history.

Thus, the use of this lesson plan allows you to integrate the teaching of a climate science topic with a core topic in **Humanities (Cultural Studies, Literature, History)**.

Use this lesson plan to help your students find answers to:

- How does the crisis of climate change spell the collapse of the distinction between Natural History and Human History?
- What is the idea of the Anthropocene and how does it qualify humanist theories of freedom?
- How do you reconcile the global histories of capital and the species history of humans in the Anthropocene?
- How does climate change challenge our understanding of the human universal or collectivity?

[About the Lesson Plan](#)

Grade Level: Undergraduate

Discipline: Humanities (Cultural Studies, Literature, History)

Topic(s) in Discipline: Human History, Environmental History, Natural History, Anthropocene, History of Capital, Species History

Climate Topic: Climate and the Anthroposphere; Policies, Politics and Environmental Governance; Introduction to Climate Change

Location: Global, India

Access: Online, Offline

Language(s): English

Approximate Time Required: 60 min

1 Contents

1. Reading (40 min)

An essay that discusses the idea that the discipline of history to date has not adequately addressed the environmental history of the planet.

This can be accessed at:

<http://www.law.uvic.ca/demcon/2013%20readings/Chakrabarty%20-%20Climate%20of%20History.pdf>

2. Video micro-lecture (~5 min)

A video micro-lecture that summarizes the key points of the four theses discussed in the above-mentioned essay.

This can be accessed at:

https://tropicsu.org/m-dodd_video-micro-lecture_dcfourtheses-mp4/

3. Suggested questions/assignments for learning evaluation

- How does the crisis of climate change spell the collapse of the distinction between Natural History and Human History?
- What is the idea of the Anthropocene and how does it qualify humanist theories of freedom?
- How do you reconcile the global histories of capital and the species history of humans in the Anthropocene?
- How does climate change challenge our understanding of the human universal or collectivity?

2 Step-by-step User Guide

Here is a step-by-step guide to using this lesson plan in the classroom/laboratory. We have suggested these steps as a possible plan of action. You may customize the lesson plan according to your preferences and requirements.

1. Topic introduction and discussion

Begin your classroom session by introducing Dipesh Chakrabarty, the author of the essay '[The Climate of History: Four Theses](#)', the text to be critically analyzed. Then ask your students to read the introduction to the essay.

Discuss the questions raised by the author about the environmental history of the planet reported to date using the following points:

- Why the discipline of history itself is unable to capture what is significantly different about what is called the Anthropocene
- Definition of Anthropocene and how humans have become geological agents
- The same faculty that allows us to picture the past also allows us to imagine the future

Now direct your students to read the essay closely.

At the end of every section, discuss the over-arching arguments presented by the author.

This essay can be accessed at:

<http://www.law.uvic.ca/demcon/2013%20readings/Chakrabarty%20-%20Climate%20of%20History.pdf>

2. Extend understanding and summarize the key points of the essay

Play the embedded video micro-lecture, "[A Commentary on 'The Climate of History: Four theses'](#)" by Dr Maya Dodd, FLAME University, India to focus your students' attention on the key points/arguments presented by the author of the essay.

This can be accessed at:

https://tropicsu.org/m-dodd_video-micro-lecture_dcfourtheses-mp4/

Pause the video micro-lecture at will to allow your students to re-visit the text and to extend their understanding of the essay through a classroom discussion using the following points:

Thesis 1 The distinction between natural and human history is a distinction that has to be dropped in this new era

- The assumption was that all history was the history of human affairs but we (humans) are now a part of the environment and this collapse that separated the natural from the man-made worlds requires a unity now in order to fully understand what the Anthropocene era entails.

Thesis 2 talks about the emergence of humans as a geological force and how this "severely qualifies humanist histories of modernity/globalization"

- Has human freedom been placed under a cloud in the era of the Anthropocene?

Thesis 3 The Anthropocene requires us to put global histories of capital in conversation with the species history of humans

- The argument that we must mix these two histories comes from the fact that capitalism has also always changed but this is also to be seen as a species history. In modernity and early modernity and history needs to be viewed not in this short time frame and to think in species terms changes the way in which the discipline itself functions.

In the fourth thesis we can probe the limits of historical understanding by the cross hatching of species history and capital history.

3. Questions/Assignments

Use the tools and the concepts learned so far to discuss and determine answers to the following questions:

- How does the crisis of climate change spell the collapse of the distinction between Natural History and Human History?
- What is the idea of the Anthropocene and how does it qualify humanist theories of freedom?
- How do you reconcile the global histories of capital and the species history of humans in the Anthropocene?
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3 Learning Outcomes

The tools in this lesson plan will enable students to:

- create sensitivity to ecocriticism and the history of writings in the area of environmental history
- engage with writing on the interaction between humans and nature
- understand the impact of climate change on historical thinking

4 Additional Resources

If you or your students would like to explore the topic further, these additional resources will be useful.

1. Audio podcast

A December 2018 *Critical Inquiry* podcast of a discussion by Consulting Editor, Dipesh Chakrabarty about his 2009 Essay, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses'.

This can be accessed here:

<https://critinq.wordpress.com/2018/12/04/dipesh-chakrabarty-looking-back-to-the-climate-of-history-four-theses/#comments>

2. Reading and Video lectures

A set of reading and viewing materials about the Tanner Lectures on Human Values, delivered by Dipesh Chakrabarty in Yale University (2015).

The manuscript that details the theme- 'The Human Condition in the Anthropocene'-of the Tanner lectures can be accessed at:

<https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/Chakrabarty%20manuscript.pdf>

The Tanner lectures can be accessed at:

- 1) 'Climate Change as Epochal Consciousness': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEPTyrQGgdI>
- 2) 'Decentering the Human? Gaia': https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_8w2LDgPWM
- 3) 'Roundtable Discussion with Dipesh Chakrabarty, Daniel Lord Smail, Wai Chee Dimock, and Michael Warner': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CcPq8qb-38>

5 Credits/Copyrights

All the teaching tools in our collated list are owned by the corresponding creators/authors/organizations as listed on their websites. Please view the individual copyright and ownership details for each tool by following the individual links provided. We have selected and analyzed the tools

that align with the overall objective of our project and have provided the corresponding links. We do not claim ownership of or responsibility/liability for any of the listed tools.

1. Reading; “The Climate of History: Four Theses”

Essay by [Dipesh Chakrabarty](#). Provided by [Faculty of Law](#), University of Victoria, Canada.

2. Video micro-lecture; “Commentary on The Climate of History: Four Theses By Dipesh Chakrabarty”

By [Dr Maya Dodd](#), FLAME University, Pune, India. Produced for TROP ICSU by [Science Media Centre](#), IISER Pune.

3. Additional Resources

Podcast by Consulting Editor, Dipesh Chakrabarty, hosted by [Critical Inquiry](#), University of Chicago.

[The Tanner Lectures on Human Values](#) hosted by the University of Utah.