

Lesson Plan: The Environmental Humanities: 'The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable' by Amitav Ghosh

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 as part of a course in **Environmental Geography, Environmental History, General Criticism** and **Critical Theory**.

'**The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable**', by Ghosh can be used to acquaint students with **environmental history** of the planet and in India in particular. This work along with the debates generated by Dipesh Chakrabarty's 2009 essay, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses' can be used as texts to better situate the topic of climate change in the humanities classroom. In this lesson plan students will review Ghosh's book based on the theme of **climate change in India**. It includes writings on the **stories, history** and **politics** related to one of the most critical issues of our times.

Thus, the use of this lesson plan allows you to integrate the teaching of a climate science topic with a core topic in **Humanities**.

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

1. Discuss why climate change has not caught the collective imagination of writers?
2. Explain what Amitav Ghosh refers to as 'The Great Derangement' in the book.
3. 'The Anthropocene presents a challenge not only to the arts and humanities, but also to our commonsense understandings and beyond that to contemporary culture in general'- How does Amitav Ghosh justify this statement in the book?
4. What might a sustainable world look like? Respond to this question with reference to Ghosh's 'The Great Derangement'?

[About the Lesson Plan](#)

Grade Level: Undergraduate

Discipline: Humanities (Cultural Studies; Literature; History)

Topic(s) in Discipline: Environmental Geography, Environmental History, General Criticism, Critical Theory, Literary Analysis, Climate Literature, Non-fiction, Fiction- Speculative, Realism, Epic, Documentary, Narrative, Storytelling, Historicization

Climate Topic: Climate and the Anthroposphere

Location: Global, India

Access: Online, Offline

Language(s): English

Approximate Time Required: 1-2 sessions of 45 min

1 Contents

1. Reading (7 min)

An article by author Amitav Ghosh about the absence of climate change in contemporary literary fiction.

This can be accessed at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/28/amitav-ghosh-where-is-the-fiction-about-climate-change->

2. Reading (5 min)

A brief write-up about the novel, 'The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable' from the author's website.

This can be accessed at:

https://www.amitavghosh.com/the_great_derangement.html

Note: The book will have to be procured for the purpose of this literary analysis.

3. Video (~25 min)

A discussion about the aforesaid novel to encapsulate points for discourse in the literary analysis of the book.

This can be accessed here:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1zF2VIWoF5_yJs_zzw5XLc42TskGhImu8

4. Suggested questions/assignments for learning evaluation

- Discuss why climate change has not caught the collective imagination of writers?
- Explain what Amitav Ghosh refers to as 'The Great Derangement' in the book.
- 'The Anthropocene presents a challenge not only to the arts and humanities, but also to our commonsense understandings and beyond that to contemporary culture in general'- How does Amitav Ghosh justify this statement in the book?
- What might a sustainable world look like? Respond to this question with reference to Ghosh's 'The Great Derangement'?

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

Use the article in The Guardian by author Amitav Ghosh, '[Amitav Ghosh: where is the fiction about climate change?](#)' to discuss his views on the evolution of the narrative in novels and why it has been resistant to include the topic of climate change. Use the text to explain how climate fiction (Cli-Fi) differs from science fiction (Sci-Fi) in the treatment of the narrative. Explain how fiction derived from climate change deviates from trends of 'gradualism' in contemporary narratives and yet does not belong to 'surrealism' and 'magic realism' due to its nature of being 'real'. Thus, use the reading to emphasize the difficulty of writing about the nature of climate change and why it does not yet have a large presence in fictional works of the literary world.

This can be accessed at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/28/amitav-ghosh-where-is-the-fiction-about-climate-change->

2. Introduce the novel using the author's note

Use the write-up on author Amitav Ghosh's website as an introduction to his non-fiction book, 'The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable'. Begin by discussing the title of the book- what is the 'great derangement' and why is climate change 'unthinkable' according to Ghosh. Use the brief text to introduce the different sections of this non-fiction book- literature, history and politics.

This can be accessed at:

https://www.amitavghosh.com/the_great_derangement.html

Finally, ask your students to read the non-fiction book, 'The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable' as a home assignment. Note that the book will have to be procured for this assignment. Instruct them to make notes of the key points and arguments presented whilst reading the book.

3. Summarize the key-points and arguments presented in the book

Play the video, "A Conversation on Amitav Ghosh's 'The Great Derangement'" by Dr Maya Dodd (Literary and Cultural Studies) with Paloma Chandrachud (Environmental Studies), FLAME University, India, that highlights the key points presented by the author Amitav Ghosh in the book.

This can be accessed here:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1zF2VIWoF5_yJs_zzw5XLc42TskGhImu8

Use the following points raised in the conversation to facilitate classroom discussions for better understanding of the reviewed material.

- Why, according to Ghosh, is climate change unimaginable or unthinkable?
- Why can we not narrate the story of our times (in the context of climate change)?
- Why is the current cli-fi primarily speculative and not in the mode of realism?
- Explain why Ghosh believes that the missing narrative of climate change requires the unmasking of 'unbelievable choices' we have made in the past. Use the case of a high-risk area Bombay/Mumbai as an example.

- Describe some ‘unbelievable choices’ made by us that have become the new normal.
- Discuss how the rift in narrative between the human and the non-human has come about. Explain how this differs from older narratives especially in the context of Asian/Indian literature.
- Explain how Eastern philosophy of the ‘sacred’ or the ‘divine’ bridges the gap between humans and non-humans.
- Historically, discuss how the association of nature and culture has evolved.
- Explain how Western individualism as opposed to non-Western collective values affects climate action.
- Discuss the role of denialists and activists in influencing climate consciousness.
- Explain why a more philosophical approach with the contextualization of history is needed to deal with global climate change where a technical fix like adhering to the Paris Agreement is not enough.
- Debate the argument that Asia’s ‘delayed start’ abrogates its responsibility of reducing carbon emissions or sharing the burden of climate mitigation.
- Discuss how ‘The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable’ by Amitav Ghosh can be considered as the fourth book to the Ibis trilogy by the same author.

4. Questions/Assignments

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

- Discuss why climate change has not caught the collective imagination of writers?
- Explain what Amitav Ghosh refers to as ‘The Great Derangement’ in the book.
- ‘The Anthropocene presents a challenge not only to the arts and humanities, but also to our commonsense understandings and beyond that to contemporary culture in general’- How does Amitav Ghosh justify this statement in the book?
- What might a sustainable world look like? Respond to this question with reference to Ghosh’s ‘The Great Derangement’?

3 Learning Outcomes

The tools in this lesson plan will enable students to:

1. gain familiarity with environmental concerns specific to India due to climate change
2. engage with writing produced on the interaction between humans and nature in India
3. create sensitivity to ecocriticism and the impact of climate change on literary thinking

4 Additional Resources

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

1. Videos; 'The Great Derangement: Fiction, History, and Politics in the Age of Global Warming'

A set of four lectures delivered by Amitav Ghosh for the Randy L. & Melvin R. Berlin Family Lectures in Fall 2015 at University of Chicago.

This can be accessed at:

<https://berlinfamilylectures.uchicago.edu/past-lecturers/amitav-ghosh/>

2. Reading; 'The Climate of History: Four Theses'

An essay by historian Dipesh Chakrabarty that discusses why the discipline of history does not adequately address 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>

Note: A separate lesson plan by Dr Maya Dodd, FLAME University, India, that discusses this essay comprehensively can be accessed at:

<https://tropicsu.org/lesson-plan-climate-change-and-the-environmental-humanities/>

3. Video; 'Al Gore on 'An Inconvenient Sequel'. Climate change 'ends with a victory to humanity''

A video interview by CBC/Radio-Canada with Al Gore about the documentary 'An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power'. This documentary is derived from Al Gore's book by the same name and chronicles the last decade on what has happened around the world as nations decide on whose burden it is to reduce carbon emissions and how these contributions can be apportioned.

This can be accessed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tx2l2du7Tdg>

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; 'Amitav Ghosh: where is the fiction about climate change?'

An article in [The Guardian](#) by author Amitav Ghosh.

2. Reading; 'The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable'

An introduction to his non-fiction book by author [Amitav Ghosh](#).

3. Video; 'A Conversation on Amitav Ghosh's 'The Great Derangement''

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

4. Additional Resources

Lectures by Amitav Ghosh for the [Randy L. & Melvin R. Berlin Family Lectures](#), University of Chicago.

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

[Dr Maya Dodd](#), FLAME University for [TROP ICSU](#) Project.

An interview with [Al Gore](#) by [CBC/Radio-Canada](#).