Climate Justice Project - Teacher Guide

A Green-Schools active learning project for post-primary students

What this project is

The Climate Justice Project is an active learning project for post-primary students. It asks a harder question than most climate education, not just what is happening to our planet, but who is most affected, and why.

Climate change does not affect everyone equally. The people who have done least to cause it are often the ones who face the worst consequences. That is the idea at the heart of climate justice, and it is what this project asks students to grapple with, through research, debate, character work, and design thinking.

Working in small teams, students explore the concept of climate justice, choose a character whose life is shaped by climate impacts, define the specific problem that character is facing, and design a solution. They build a prototype or campaign, present it, and reflect on what they learned.

The project is designed to run across several class periods or compressed into a full project day. It suits Junior Cycle classes across a range of subjects, and can be adapted for Transition Year.

What students will do

Over the course of the project, students will:

- Explore the concept of climate change and what makes it a justice issue
- Participate in a Climate Summit debate, arguing the case for different countries/communities
- Examine climate impacts at a global, national, and local level
- Choose a challenge topic and a character whose life is affected by it
- Define the specific problem their character is facing
- Generate and develop ideas for possible solutions
- Build a prototype or campaign and present it to the class
- Reflect on their learning and on their own role in climate action

How long does it take?

The project works across five modules. Each module has a suggested time, but you can adjust to suit your timetable.

Module	Activity	Suggested time
1	Discover climate action and climate justice	60 - 80 minutes
2	Choose and get to know your persona	30 - 40 minutes
3	Define the problem	20 - 25 minutes
4	Generate and choose a solution	45 - 60 minutes
5	Build, present, and reflect	60 - 90 minutes

Climate Justice Project– What you need

What you need

Basic materials

- A4 paper or project workbooks
- Pens, markers, highlighters
- Sticky notes (for ideation activities)
- Blu Tack or tape (for displaying work)

For the Climate Summit (Module 1)

- Country or community cards (one per group, included in the presentation)
- Access to the presentation slides for background climate data
- Optional, printed fact sheets on climate impacts by region

For prototyping (Module 5)

- Recycled materials: cardboard, bottle caps, fabric scraps, paper tubes
- Modelling clay or playdough
- Scissors and glue
- Old magazines or newspapers

Optional

- Tablets or devices for research
- Digital camera or phone for photos of finished prototypes

Printed templates (included in this pack)

- Persona Development Sheet (one sheet with all characters)
- Persona profile worksheet (one per team)
- Problem statement template (one per team)
- Ideation activity sheets: A–Z and Add Five More (one set per team)
- Idea brainwriting sheet (one per team)
- Prototype sketch sheet (one per team)
- Student reflection survey (one per student, completed at the end of Module 5)

Climate Justice Project– Module Guidelines

Module 1 Climate action and climate justice (60–80 minutes)

Students explore the science of climate change and are introduced to the concept of climate justice. The idea that the people who have done least to cause climate change are often the ones who face the worst consequences.

What to do:

- Open with the presentation slides on climate change. Give students time to discuss what they already know and what questions they have.
- Introduce the concept of climate justice. The key question is not just 'what is happening?' but 'who is it happening to, and why?' Prompt students to think about which countries and communities are most exposed to climate impacts, and whether that maps onto who has contributed most to the problem.
- Run the Climate Summit activity. Divide the class into groups and assign each group a country or community (see Roll-Card templates). Each group prepares and presents a short argument, what climate impacts is their country or community experiencing, what do they need, and what should others be doing about it? Give groups ten minutes to prepare and three to four minutes each to present.
- As a class, debrief the Summit. What did students notice? Whose arguments were most persuasive? Where did disagreements emerge?
- Move from global to local. Share the slides on climate impacts in Ireland, then open a discussion, what climate impacts can students identify in their own area? Flooding, drought, biodiversity loss, housing pressure? Ask them to be specific.
- Each team then selects a challenge topic to focus on for the rest of the project. This could be a global climate justice issue, a national policy gap, or something they have seen in their own community.

Teacher notes

The Climate Summit works best when groups feel genuinely invested in their assigned position, even if it is not their own view. Encourage students to argue the case as strongly as they can. It is worth allowing a few minutes for students to step out of role afterwards and share their own perspective.
The move from global to local is important. Students often feel climate change is happening somewhere else. Grounding the issue in named local places, a flooded road, a disappearing beach, a farm dealing with changed rainfall, shifts the conversation significantly.
There is no wrong challenge topic. Let teams choose the angle that feels most real to them. The same topic will produce very different solutions across teams.

Climate Justice Project– Module Guidelines

Module 2 Choose and get to know your Persona (30–40 minutes)

Each team develops one persona whose life is affected by the climate justice challenge they have selected. They then develop that persona fully before moving to solutions.

What to do:

- Give each team the persona development worksheet and let them develop their persona through this activity. Encourage them to give their persona a name, a location, a daily routine, and a clear sense of how the climate challenge is affecting their life. The persona should feel like a real person, not a placeholder.
- Once they have developed their persona give them the 'day in the life' template and let them develop a day in their persona's life.
- Teams can now sketch their persona and, if time allows, present their persona to the class in a short two-minute introduction.

Teacher notes

Persona work can feel unfamiliar at post-primary level, but it is worth keeping. The reason it works is that it moves students from abstract awareness ('climate change is a problem') to specific empathy ('this person's crops are failing because the rains have changed, and here is what that means for their family'). Solutions designed for a real person with a named problem are almost always stronger than solutions designed for a category.

Encourage students to choose a character from a context different from their own. A student in Dublin designing for a Kenyan smallholder farmer, or for a Pacific Island community facing sea level rise, builds a different kind of understanding than one designing for someone in their own neighbourhood. Both are valid, both will produce interesting work.

Do not give too much input at this stage. Let students build the personas themselves.

Module 3 Define the problem (20–30 minutes)

Each team writes a clear problem statement that captures exactly what their character is struggling with, why it is connected to climate justice, and what is making it hard to solve.

What to do:

- Give each team the problem statement template.
- Ask them to complete each section, who their persona is, what the specific problem is, how climate change and climate justice are connected to it, why their persona cannot solve it alone, and how they will feel if there is a solution.
- Encourage teams to be precise. A good problem statement does not say 'climate change is bad for farmers.' It says something like: 'As a smallholder farmer in rural Kenya, my problem is that the rainy season now arrives six weeks later than it used to, which means I cannot plant on time and my family faces food shortages every year. I cannot solve this alone because it requires collective action and policy change that is beyond my reach.'

Teacher notes

The specificity prompt is worth pushing at this level. Post-primary students are capable of sharp, well-argued problem statements, and a vague one will produce a vague solution. If a team's statement is too broad, ask them, what is the one specific thing that, if fixed, would make the biggest difference to your character?

Keep this session short. Twenty minutes is enough. The thinking will sharpen in Module 4.

Module 4 Generate and choose a solution (45–60 minutes)

Teams generate as many ideas as possible, then work together to identify and develop their strongest one.

What to do:

- Start with the A–Z ideation sheet. Give teams five minutes to write one solution idea for each letter of the alphabet. Speed matters here. No filtering, no discussion, just ideas.
- Then move to the 'Add Five More' Ideation sheet. Teams write one idea in each box. Give ten minutes.
- Gather all ideas and display them so the whole team can see everything. Give teams ten minutes to review and vote on their favourite. They are looking for the idea that is most likely to actually help their character, not just the most familiar or the most obvious.
- If it is hard to pick one, teams can combine two or three ideas. They then use the idea brainwriting sheet to develop their chosen idea further, stress-testing it and identifying what would need to be true for it to work.

Warm-up options (optional)

If students need to loosen up before the ideation activity, try one of these:

- Crazy 8s: fold a sheet of paper into 8 rectangles. Each student sketches a different idea in each box, one minute per box, no talking.
- Yes, and: one student shares an idea, the next responds with 'Yes, and...' and adds something. Keep going around the team. No saying 'no' or 'but'.

Teacher notes

Quantity matters at the ideation stage. Students at this level sometimes want to move straight to the 'correct' answer. The A–Z activity in particular is designed to get past that instinct, it forces students to keep generating even when they think they have found a good idea.

The idea brainwriting sheet is where the quality thinking happens. Encourage teams to ask honestly: 'could this idea make things worse for anyone?', 'Does it address the cause of the problem or just the symptom?', 'Who would need to be involved to make it work?'

Climate Justice Project– Module Guidelines

Module 5 Build, present, and reflect (60–80 minutes)

Teams build a prototype or campaign, present it to the class, and complete a short individual reflection.

What to do:

- Give each team the prototype sketch sheet. Ask them to map out their solution first before building anything. What does it look like? How does it work? Who is it for? How does it connect to the climate justice issue they identified?
- Teams then build or develop their solution using whatever materials are available. Physical prototypes work well for product or infrastructure ideas. For policy proposals, awareness campaigns, or advocacy plans, students can create a visual storyboard, a campaign poster, or a short written brief.
- Each team presents their solution to the class. They should cover: who their persona is, what climate justice issue they identified, what their solution is, how it works, and what would need to happen for it to be implemented.
- The class gives feedback using two stars and a wish, two things they found strong and one thing they would push further.
- Students then complete the reflection survey individually. This takes around five minutes.

Teacher notes

The presentation stage is where the climate justice framing needs to come back in clearly. Encourage teams not just to describe their product or campaign, but to explain who benefits and why that matters from a justice perspective. The strongest presentations will connect the local and the global, and will say something about why their solution would not just help their character but could be part of a broader shift.

A note on ambition, some teams will design something very local and practical (a community flood early-warning system, a school-based repair café). Others will go bigger (a policy recommendation, a global campaign). Both are valid. The quality of the thinking matters more than the scale of the solution.

The student reflection survey uses a before-and-after format. Students rate themselves on five skills at the end of the project, thinking about how they felt before it started and how they feel now.

Taking it further

Some classes will want to act on what they have found. Here are a few directions:

- Submit a team's policy proposal to a local councillor, TD, or MEP.
- Share the project with your Green-Schools Committee and connect it to your current flag work.
- Present solutions at a school assembly or to a wider audience through an open event.
- Link the project to Transition Year modules on active citizenship or sustainable development.
- Connect with an organisation working on climate justice in Ireland or internationally, and share what students found.

Climate Justice Project– Curriculum Links

Curriculum links

This project supports active learning across several Junior Cycle subject areas and develops the Junior Cycle Key Skills, particularly working with others, communicating, managing information and thinking, and being creative.

Subject	Curriculum area / strand	What students do in this project
CSPE / Politics and Society	Active citizenship, rights and responsibilities	Explore global justice issues, examine who is responsible for climate change and who bears its consequences, debate policy positions
Geography	Climate, environment, and sustainability	Examine climate change impacts at global, national, and local scale, connect global patterns to local experience
Science	Earth and space, environmental science	Engage with evidence on climate change, explore cause, effect, and systems thinking in the context of a real-world challenge
English	Oral language and communication	Argue a case in the Climate Summit debate, present a solution clearly and persuasively, write a character narrative
Visual Arts / Technology	Design and making	Sketch, build, and present a prototype or campaign using a range of materials and approaches

Junior Cycle Key Skills

The project develops the following Key Skills across its five modules:

Key Skill	How it shows up in this project
Working with others	All project work is team-based, students share roles, argue positions, and make decisions together
Communicating	Students debate at the Climate Summit, present their character's problem, and explain their solution to an audience
Managing information and thinking	Students evaluate evidence on climate impacts, build a problem statement, and move from research to solution
Being creative	Ideation activities push students to generate many ideas before developing the strongest one
Being an active citizen	Students connect global climate justice issues to local experience and design an action-oriented response

Climate Justice Project– Optional Assessment Tools

Assessment tools (optional)
These tools are available if you want to gather more structured evidence of learning. They are not required to run the project.

Observation checklist (teacher use)
Tick what you observe across the five modules.

What to look for	Yes	Partly	Not yet	Notes
Engages critically with climate change evidence				
Demonstrates understanding of climate justice as distinct from climate change				
Argues a position clearly in the Climate Summit				
Shows empathy and specificity in persona work				
Contributes original ideas during ideation				
Works collaboratively and shares decision-making				
Connects their solution to the justice dimension of the issue				
Reflects thoughtfully on their own learning and agency				

Prototype and presentation rubric
Use this if you want to give structured feedback on the final presentation.

Criteria	Strong (4)	Good (3)	Developing (2)	Beginning (1)
Problem clarity	Specific, well-researched, justice-framed	Mostly clear with some justice framing	Partially clear	Vague or missing justice dimension
Creativity of solution	Highly original and well-argued	Creative and workable	Some originality	Limited creativity or feasibility
Team collaboration	All contributed equally	Most contributed	Uneven contribution	Little teamwork evident
Prototype quality	Well developed and clearly explained	Clear effort and logic	Basic, needs development	Incomplete or unclear
Presentation	Confident, clear, and persuasive	Mostly clear	Basic delivery	Unclear or underprepared
Climate justice link	Strong, specific, and explicit	Clear connection made	Partial connection	Weak or missing