Death has been on my mind. Minding the end times reverberates at many scales—global, personal, physical, spiritual. Solstice pulled me out among the winter whispery grasses and low trees on my land. Science predicts the devastation of the two-needle piñon, the keystone species of my home states and places. Yellow needles, polka dots of beetle holes, and skeletal branches take increasing portions of my awareness. Indeed, this impending die-off is part of why I choose to live where I live, so that I can be present with the dying. I promise them my witness and reverence.

(Elder 2021)

Stories for Change: Solastalgia, Climate Grief, and Re-storying Ourselves

by Rick Fisher and Maggie Bourque

The term "nostalgia" comes from Greek words *nostos* ("return home") and *algos* ("pain"). First coined in the late 1600s, the term was used in medicine to describe people (especially soldiers) suffering from an acute longing for home (Matei 2017). For nearly 200 years nostalgia was treated as a brain disorder with symptoms including melancholy, malnutrition, brain fever, and hallucinations ("Those were the days" nd, para. 5). More recently, the environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht has been credited with coining the term "solastalgia," which he and others have described as "the pain or distress caused by the loss of, or inability to derive, solace connected to the negatively perceived state of one's home environment" (Albrecht et al. 2007, S96). Related to homesickness and nostalgia, Albrecht et al. distinguish solastalgia as focused on those who may not be directly displaced from home but may nonetheless feel dislocated, especially by the global effects of climate change:

People who are still in their home environs can also experience place-based distress in the face of the lived experience of profound environmental change. The people of concern are still "at home," but experience a "homesickness" similar to that caused by nostalgia. What these people lack is solace or comfort derived from their present relationship to "home." (S96)

Galway et al. (2019) further refine the concept, noting that—unlike related terms such as ecological grief and eco-anxiety—"a key theoretical aspect of solastalgia ... is an explicit focus on place:

solastalgia is a place-based lived experience" (2). Put more simply, solastalgia might be understood as a kind of homesickness felt by those who are physically at home but feel nonetheless displaced or distanced from the comfort of that place.

Albrecht et al. (2007) categorize solastalgia as a somaterratic illness, meaning it occurs at the intersection of body (*soma*) and earth (*terra*) where a person's mental health is "threatened by the severing of 'healthy' links between themselves and their home/territory" (S95). In 2020, Albrecht and his coauthors updated his concept and reinforced that while solastalgia remains a place-based and embodied state, it also exists within a socioeconomic and political context; rather than an inevitable and hopeless resignation, solastalgia "is an emotional state that can be countered and overcome" (20). They argue that countering solastalgia—in addition to recognizing and processing it as a human emotional experience—can be done through deliberate personal and community action to change corporate, social, and political realities.

Grappling (or Not) with Climate Change

As part of the evolving notion of solastalgia, Albrecht (2020) has proposed a new way to re-story the future: the Symbiocene, which he describes as

a period in the history of humanity on this Earth, [which] will be characterized by human intelligence and praxis that replicate the symbiotic and mutually reinforcing life-reproducing forms and processes found in living systems. This period of human existence will be a positive affirmation of life, and it offers the possibility of the complete re-integration of the human body, psyche and culture with the rest of life. The path to avoiding yet more solastalgia, and other negative psychoterratic Earth emotions that damage the psyche, must take us into the Symbiocene. (102)

For Albrecht, then, as well as for the many grounded activist networks orienting their work around the frameworks of hope (Solnit in McQuilkin and Chakrabarti 2020) and joy (Intersectional Environmentalist), there is a pathway out of the deep, often anticipatory pain that many of us are feeling as we consider our personal, communal, and inter-species existential futures as well as our impacts on ecosystems around the globe. As Albrecht suggests, that pathway includes intentional efforts to positively re-story human existence among other forms of life.

Yet, for many of us living in the first quarter of the 21st century, the solace of "home" is undercut with anxiety and—for many more—grief. A report co-produced by the American Psychological Association, Climate for Health, and ecoAmerica (Whitmore-Williams, Manning, Krygsman, and Speiser 2017) notes that effects of climate change can "induce stress, depression, and anxiety; strain social and community relationships; and have been linked to increases in aggression, violence, and crime" (4). Yet, Galway et al. (2019) help to establish that, even if "physical health implications of climatic and environmental change are increasingly well documented, ... the emotional, mental, and spiritual health implications remain understudied" (1-2). Further, Richard Louv warns that "if climate change occurs at the rate that some scientists believe it will, and if human beings continue to crowd into de-natured cities, then solastalgia will contribute to a quickening spiral of mental illness" (in Galway et al. 2019, 1).

Despite the psychological effects that climate change has and will continue to have, it appears there is substantial reluctance to talking about this topic. A 2018 Yale/George Mason survey, for example, found that 65 percent of participants say they discuss global warming "never" or "rarely" (Leiserowitz et al. 2018, 16). Psychiatrist Lise van Susteren adds, "It's culturally acceptable to talk about all kinds of anxieties, but not the climate" (in Scher 2018).

At this point we feel it is important to note that, among scholars and public-facing voices, the phenomenon of climate *anxiety* has been critiqued as "overwhelmingly white:"

The prospect of an unlivable future has always shaped the emotional terrain for Black and brown people, whether that terrain is racism or climate change....Exhaustion, anger, hope—the effects of oppression and resistance are not unique to this climate moment. What *is* unique is that people who had been insulated from oppression are now waking up to the prospect of their own unlivable future. (Ray 2021 para. 6)

While acknowledging this important critique, we argue that solastalgia—within the context of the Symbiocene and embracing its relationship with grief and hopeful action—is a concept that remains worth interrogating, and we believe folklore can fill an important gap in present cultural engagement with climate change.

A Place for Folklore

This is a time of change, death, and, perhaps, an opportunity for rebirth. This is a time when we need folklore to help us process change that is in many ways beyond the scale of rationalization. Owens (2022), for example, argues that folklorists can help U.S. communities address climate-related human migration by driving conversations about how to sustain collapsing cultures, how to welcome newcomers in recipient communities, and how to determine priorities for preservation efforts. And, as Alvarez (in Ober 2020) notes, "Folklore is often the harbinger of cultural change; folklorists and cultural reporters can track shifts in beliefs and habits with great efficiency." Her research has illustrated that "many of the first people to notice significant changes in patterns of pollination, the temperature in bodies of water or the variation of patterns of wildflowers in certain zones affected by drought were actually 'the folk' who lived, walked and knew these places intimately." Folklore can serve functions for recording and documenting change, creating or capturing adaptive guidance, and offering narratives for emotional and psychological engagement with solastaglia.

Not only does solastalgia capture deep grief (one both reflective of the current moment as well as anticipatory of increasing change, destabilization, and loss of familiar experiences of our surroundings), but it also has been documented across a range of cultures and communities, including the Erub Island and Torres Strait Indigenous communities (McNamara and Westoby 2011). Recognizing the ways in which their cultural identities are connected to their biophysical surroundings, women in the Erub Island community have "an intrinsic synergistic relationship [that] connects the health of islanders and the wellbeing of their land and sea country" (234). Even as this community faces accelerating, destabilizing changes that affect their traditional and embodied methods for reading the land/seascape, their millennia-long histories of adaptive co-

evolution with nature—many captured through folklore practices—may provide insights and strategies that can inform a global move towards the Symbiocene.

Across cultures, folklore's focuses on storytelling and on documenting place-based expertise and local ways of life offer many pathways through which students (and others) can engage with the social, personal, and economic impacts they are experiencing during this period of worldwide death, displacement, and loss of connection with "home." The activity below offers options for engaging individuals and groups with themes of grief and solastalgia as well as possible adaptation through re-storying and active engagement needed to move forward. Our conception of "restorying" draws on Positioning Theory's concept of storylines as semi-stable constructions through which individuals take up and negotiate social positions. Re-storying, then, is a process by which people intersubjectively create new social possibilities for themselves and others (Davies and Harré, 1990).

In line with the call for submissions for this special issue, we believe the educational activities we describe illuminate how "remembrance of the deceased [can offer] an entry point to learning about identities, histories, and communities through traditions, rituals, and culture" (Helmsing and Varga 2021, para. 2). Especially in educational settings where climate change is often presented as science separate from embodied and local experience, we believe that framing climate change in terms of death, loss, and remembrance can help collapse the felt distance between global climate impacts and the internalized, embodied, local grief implied in the term solastalgia.

Because human and environmental health are deeply interconnected, there is a strong correlation between witnessing effects of climate change and an increase in traumatic stress. The World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Psychiatric Association, among others, have described the threats that climate change poses to mental health; experiencing and anticipating environmental destruction or loss, along with the physical impacts of climate change, likely increase traumatic stress for all people, and most acutely for those most vulnerable and marginalized (San Mateo County Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative 2019).

Because of the close association of climate change and trauma, teachers should realize that exploring these concepts—even using a re-storying framework or symbiotic action approach—carries the potential to trigger or reveal participants' trauma responses or prior experiences. Using a trauma-informed approach, however, can strengthen students' educational experience and create a safe environment for learning, documenting, and re-storying to occur. Some primary trauma-informed educational strategies that apply to these activities include cultural humility and responsiveness, social emotional learning, and empowerment and collaboration (San Mateo County Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative 2019).

The activities described here are additionally informed by the "Lead with Listening" guidebook from the Climate Migration Project (Climigration 2021). This guide invites facilitators to slow down, be extremely mindful of language choices and cultural context, and acknowledge the challenging emotional, psychological, and personal relationships that are bound up in exploring loss and death within our home places.

Classroom Connections — Stories for Change: Exploring Climate Death, Loss, and Remembrance Through Folklore

These activities can be adapted for a range of settings and participants, including elementary, secondary, post-secondary, and community learners. These activities are not designed to align directly with any specific national standards or learning outcomes; rather, they are designed from the perspective that engagement in personal-reflective, empathetic, and trauma-informed activities can holistically enhance and deepen learning in science, social studies, language arts, ethics, and other subject areas and topics of cultural concern. To extend and adapt this activity, facilitators may want to consider projects and ideas in the *Journal of Folklore and Education's* 2018 Common Ground: People and Our Places issue.

Individual Exploration

As an initial activity, participants should be encouraged to seek out culturally relevant texts, artifacts, artworks, documents, and other existing expressions of folklore seeking to make sense of death and loss in the context of climate change* and its related consequences.

Example texts include artist Nina Elder's collective <u>Solastalgic Archive</u> (2019-2020) and her photo essay <u>Inspiration and Adaptation</u>: Art in the Anthropocene (2022); poet Amanda Gorman's <u>"Earthrise" (2018)</u>; architect and designer Maya Lin's crowd-sourced memorial <u>What Is Missing</u> (2022); the social media and podcast work of <u>Intersectional Environmentalist</u>; popular music grappling with climate and ecological crises (Petridis 2021, compilation from <u>The Guardian</u>); the essay <u>When Climate Change Comes for the Fairy Tale Forest (Campbell 2017)</u>; and stories from *The New York Times Magazine's* <u>The Decameron Project (2020)</u>.

* Certainly climate change can be understood in the context of scientific evidence; it is also located within the political and moral complexities of climate change denial. Such complexities include challenges of cultural acceptance and/or rejection of causal attribution in cases of environmental injustice, corporate and governmental responsibility, and anthropogenic factors overall. In facilitating discussion in a classroom context, teachers may want to acknowledge the tension of belief and denial when it comes to climate change, as well as the role of denial in the context of western notions of grief.

Empathy, Discussion, and Collaboration

Part I. Discussion of Individual Exploration. Facilitators should develop questions to deepen participant engagement iteratively with the individual activity text(s) and support students in social-emotional learning experiences. Possible prompts include:

What did you **notice** as you read/viewed the texts? Why? What did you **feel** as you read/viewed the texts? Why? What do you consider the **subject** of each text? Why/how do you know? How would you describe the **tone** of these texts? Why?

What do you think the creators/authors were **trying to say**? What do the texts say about the **creators/authors**?

Part II. Additional Connections to the Central Topic. Transition from discussion of specific initial examples to other examples of focal topics (e.g., climate grief, solastalgia, and/or the loss of recognizable aspects of place and home). Consider the following questions:

What do these texts suggest about people and the places that matter to them?

What do these texts suggest about the more-than human world? What do they suggest about the "natural" worlds?

What kinds of literal and figurative "death" do you see in these texts?

Why do you think the authors/creators chose these media for their expression?

During this stage: With the help of an educator trained in trauma-informed learning, consider introducing a list (like the one provided in the Activity Companion below) that can help further extend participants' recognition of climate change and loss. (The San Mateo County Environmental Literacy Initiative provides an excellent overview of environmental literacy and trauma for educators.) Alternately, engage participants in constructing their own lists of local climate impacts, documenting loss from their existing experiences or observations.

Part III. Connections to Participants' Existing Knowledge/Experience. This step is designed to help participants connect potentially distant texts/examples to their lived experience to bring themes of *solastalgia* and climate grief into local consciousness. Facilitators might ask questions like these:

What kind of climate-related or environmental changes have you seen in your local environment or community?

Whom do you know personally whose life, home, goals, or career have been affected by climate change?

How have you noticed changes in a place that matters to you?

What possible changes to a place you care about would cause you concern?

Part IV. Re-Storying the Future: Engaging in the Symbiocene. This step invites participants into radical reimagining and action planning. Participants can be asked to describe an imagined future—what might be possible in a particular place—through drawing/sketching and free writing. Then participants might list three concrete, tangible actions they can take to begin to build toward that future. Examples include collective organizing, political engagement, fundraising for causes, participation in mutual aid organizations, sharing of creative and generative work, or collective celebration of symbiotic relationships in place.

Contributing to Folklore

Depending on how the facilitator defines folklore (see https://whatisfolklore.org for ideas), ask participants to engage in crafting, documenting, or making some other contribution to the folklore of climate grief. This may include story writing, drawing, mapping, dance, photography, audio recording, and other forms of permanent or transitory expression. Depending on a facilitator's

theories of learning they may choose to be directive or open-ended about final product criteria. Examples of prompts and products are provided below.

Individually or in groups choose a specific type of climate death event to explore and represent through creating an altarpiece. Each participant collects artifacts, images, terms, and found objects to create a three-dimensional collage or offering that represents, memorializes, and/or celebrates the loss.

Choose a specific, local place to observe for 30 minutes each week for the next 10 weeks. Decide how to document that place over time (nature journal, sound mapping, audio recordings, photography, etc.). Create an archive of that place over time and provide your reflections on changes you cheepe and changes you are

Editors' note: Another folklife resource to consider is Louisiana Voices' "Sense of Place" unit. Two handouts from this unit can especially help students consider their sense of place and its relationship to culture and their folklife:

- Cultural Perspectives on Place or Event worksheet
- Spirit of Place Worksheet

reflections on changes you observe and changes you anticipate.

Choose a place that is familiar and meaningful to you. Based on the communal readings/discussions we've had, imagine how that place might change—in big or small ways—within your lifetime. Create artwork or writing that engages with themes of death, grief, or destabilization in relationship to your familiar place.

Append or amend existing narratives. If discussion uncovers existing personal experience narratives and other representations of local change, update or extend those narratives. As one example, Old Crow Medicine Show's "James River Blues" captures a culture shift as river-based transportation gave way to railroad shipping. How might additional verses of this song further capture more recent, climate-based shifts in the area?

Activity Companion: Climate Facts for Discussion

The list below can help participants visualize, imagine, and confront diverse forms of death and loss that comprise climate change on a global scale. Asking participants to connect these examples to art, literature, policy, ritual, and other forms of expression may help them recognize existing folklore that addresses, responds to, or memorializes previous moments of local or more broad-spread climate-related change.

Vidal (2010) reported that the planet has entered a new period of mass extinction, with scientists estimating that 150-200 species of plant, insect, bird, and mammal become extinct every 24 hours. An International Union for Conservation of Nature report (2019) notes the impacts of warmer temperatures on endangered green sea turtles; because warmer temperatures during egg incubation determine the sex of the newly hatched turtles, females have accounted for 99% of hatchlings on some nesting beaches. This imbalance will affect population growth and survival in the future, since it means fewer male mating partners for this species.

Cressey (2016) described a massive 2016 coral bleaching event across the Great Barrier Reef, including a substantially impacted 1,100-km stretch; he projects up to 50% mortality on the most severely bleached reefs, with follow-on effects to fish and other sea animals that depend on these reefs for food and habitat. Such events result in the death of millions of individual corals (Hughes et al. 2018).

Regarding total global impacts of climate change on plant communities, one study (Worland 2015) suggests that overall growing days could decrease by 11% by the end of the century; the areas predicted to be worst impacted are already hot regions, where up to 2 billion people in low-income countries might be displaced. Alternately, reporting by Leahy (2019) suggests that a hotter, more carbon-rich climate will lead to dramatic plant growth in many areas—with the carry-over effect of leaving less water for humans, especially those living in mid-latitude regions including North America, Europe, and central Asia.

If climate change leads to the death of forests, dead trees will become sources of carbon being released back into the air; as the Canadian Invasive Species Centre (2021) notes, warming temperatures have contributed to the spread of mountain pine beetle beyond its normal range, leading to pine tree mortality on unprecedented scale in some areas.

Globally, nearly 15 million excess deaths have been attributed to Covid-19 between January 2020 to December 2021 (World Health Organization 2022). While the coronavirus pandemic is not often described in terms of climate change, Aaron Bernstein (Director of Harvard's Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment) explains that key climate change triggers also contribute to increased risk of pandemics: "Deforestation, which occurs mostly for agricultural purposes, is the largest cause of habitat loss worldwide. Loss of habitat forces animals to migrate and potentially contact other animals or people and share germs. Large livestock farms can also serve as a source for spillover of infections from animals to people" (Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment 2020).

Bernstein (Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment 2020) also explains that, as species move toward the poles to find more temperate climates, increased interaction among species brings a higher likelihood of zoonotic spillovers. Lustgarten (2020) further warns that a changing climate "is even bringing old viruses back from the dead, thawing zombie contagions like the anthrax released from a frozen reindeer in 2016, which can come down from the arctic and haunt us from the past."

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