

Climate Change Tea Party
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Materials Needed:

- Tea party roles, cut up. One for every student in the class.
- Blank nametags. Enough for every student in the class. (Optional, but advised.)
- Copies of “Climate Change Tea Party” questions for every student.

Time Required:

- One class period for the tea party. Time for follow-up discussion.

Suggested Procedure:

1. Explain to students that they are going to do an activity about the impact of climate change around the world. Distribute one tea party role to each student in the class. There are only 17 roles, so in most classes, some students will be assigned the same individual. That’s not a problem. You might point out to students that all of the roles describe actual people. In some cases, the roles include these individuals’ own words.
2. Distribute and have students fill out their nametags, using the name of the individual they are assigned. Tell students that in this activity you would like each of them to attempt to become these people from around the world. Ask students to read their roles several times and to memorize as much of the information as possible. Encourage them to underline key points. I ask students to list the three or four things about their characters that they think are most important.
3. Distribute a copy of “Climate Change Tea Party” to every student. Explain their assignment: Students will circulate through the classroom, meeting other individuals who also have some connection to global warming. They should use the questions on the sheet as a guide to talk with others about climate change and to complete the questions as fully as possible. **They must use a different individual to answer each of the eight questions.** (This is not the “Twilight Zone,” so students who have been assigned the same person may not meet themselves.) Tell them that it’s not a race; the aim is for students to spend time hearing each other’s stories, not just hurriedly scribbling down answers to the different questions. I like to begin this activity by asking for a student volunteer to demonstrate with me an encounter between two of the individuals, so that the rest

of the class can sense the kind of interaction I'm looking for. This allows me to emphasize the use of the "I" voice, as sometimes students will begin by saying something like, "My character lives in Bangladesh." I want them to attempt to *become* their characters — e.g., to say, "I live in Bangladesh." Note that it's best to encourage students to meet one on one, as they circulate throughout the classroom. Sometimes students will cluster in groups, but this tends to allow some students to be passive and simply listen to others' conversations. Encouraging students to discuss the questions in pairs helps to address this potential problem. Finally, the last two questions ask students to begin to think about possible solutions. Tell students that for both of these they don't have to limit themselves to the information included in their role descriptions, but that they should try to propose ideas that are consistent with their characters' circumstances and concerns. For example, in one class, two students playing different individuals both hurt by climate change decided that they would try to make a film about the negative impact of rising temperatures throughout the world. This was not included in either role, but it was a creative response.

4. Ask students to stand up and begin to circulate throughout the class to meet one another and to fill out responses on the Climate Change Tea party questions student handout.
5. There is no set length of time for the tea party. I generally play a character myself so I can get a feel for how it's going and how much time students need. Allow at least a half hour for students to circulate.
6. Afterwards, ask students to write briefly on some of what they learned from meeting individuals from around the world. Questions that I've used:
 - Whom did you meet, or what situations did you hear about, that surprised you? Did you have any "aha's" in talking with people?
 - What themes seemed to come up in your conversations with people?
 - Whom did you meet or which situations did you hear about that gave you hope?
7. Discuss these with students. See my article, "The Big One," in the summer 2009 issue of *Rethinking Schools* for a description of how this played out with one group of students I worked with.