

Conversations With Kate

Lesson Guide Based On Podcast Episode [083] A Conversation With Cara Leopold

“Conversing About Climate Change & Solutions”



Web link

<https://soundcloud.com/user-404896233/083-conversing-about-climate-change-solutions-my-conversation-with-cara-leopold-part-1>

16:52 minutes

Vocabulary and expressions

- **to strike** - to protest by refusing to work or go to school
- **heatwave** - an extended period of abnormally hot weather
- **Polar Vortex** - low pressure area at the north pole
- **scenario** - situation or event
- **anomaly** - something that is not normal
- **effect** - result or consequence of something else
- **to affect** - to influence, to have an impact on
- **knock-on effect** - something that causes others things to happen
- **drought** - an extended period without rain
- **scarcity** - a shortage; not enough supply
- **trend** - a general direction of change
- **ton of** - a very large amount of something
- **it's a shame** - it's sad; it's a pity
- **Holocene Period** - the end of the Paleolithic Ice Age until now; the age of man
- **to modify** - to change
- **generational** - relating to different age groups
- **compost** - plant fertilizer made through a natural process of recycling decayed organic matter
- **communal** - shared by members of a community
- **prominent** - important; famous
- **to galvanize** - to stir or awaken someone to take action
- **crucial** - all-important, urgent, essential
- **blatantly clear** - completely obvious; easy to see
- **to dwell on** - to think about all the time
- **backlash** - a strong backward movement or action

Conversation questions:

Have you noticed abnormal weather where you live? What is your explanation?

What is your opinion about climate change? Do you think it is a problem created by people, large corporations, or both?

Have you ever been part of a protest or strike? Is there something that would move you to such an action?

Transcript:

This is episode number 83. My guest today is Cara Leopold from Leo-Listening.com. You may remember Cara from episodes 40, 41 & 42 in which she talked about her upbringing in Scotland and moving to France where she now lives. Cara works with advanced English Language Learners who love TV and cinema fall back in love with their favorite films and series by getting subtitle free.

Today, Cara is back to talk about the Climate Crisis and the upcoming Climate **Strikes** on September 20th and 27th.

Welcome back, Cara!

Hi, Kate. Thank you so much for having me back.

It is a pleasure. Tell me, what has your summer been like in France?

Well, I've actually. . . I came back the week before. I've been in the UK, actually, for a good chunk of the summer. So, yeah, I'm just getting used to being back in France and now we're going into the Autumn so it's changing.

It is. It's changing, although it's still hot here and in a lot of places where it normally is cooling off. And I guess that's kind of my question. I know there were some reports about it being very, very hot in France. What about in the UK?

Well, yeah, I seem to like. . . I just end up in every single **heatwave**. We went on holiday at the end of July to the UK with the idea of avoiding heatwaves but we walked right into the heatwave that happened right around that time so we were in London when it was above 35 degrees (Celsius).

When we came back there was sort of, a kind of mini-heatwave there at the end of August. And that's not even the worst. You know, in India, we heard there were temperatures up to about 50 degrees (Celsius) and things like this. So it's bad, but nothing compared to like, you know what's happening in other parts of the world. So, yeah. It's complicated now in the summer.

Yeah, and there have been record-breaking heatwaves but also I think people have switched talking about "global warming" to just "climate change" because it's not always the heat. It's just really irregular. Of course, the ice in the Arctic is melting and that's creating a lot of changes and intensifying storms. I think most people are beginning to get the idea that, yes, we're moving into periods of extreme weather. Do you think?

Yeah, yeah. Actually I was listening to a podcast about that this morning saying that like in the U.S. you had

a really bad winter. And you have that **Polar Vortex scenario** and that is caused by temperatures in the Arctic warming. So, it looks like you're having a really bad winter but if you go further north, there are **anomalies** happening at the poles and that affects the weather, you know, further south.

So, we're starting to realize now . . . how much the poles regulate temperature, having that ice cap reflecting the sunlight, and the fact that it's melting. It **affects**, yeah, it has a **knock-on effect** for everyone else in the world. Like you said, "extreme weather" is a good way to put it 'cause it's not just heat. It's storms. It's **drought**. It's rain.

They're predicting that this could lead to a **scarcity** of food and water because we're dependent on the seasons for agriculture and. . .

Yes, this seems to be the **trend** that's happening. You go from drought to extreme rainfall. And it actually doesn't help to balance out the situation because, you know, having a **ton of** water dropped on very dry ground, it just makes everything, you know, more complicated. I think we have already. . . the water cycle has started to change and that's one of the feedback loops of climate. So when it rains, it really, really pours. Like it's not this normal, predictable pattern anymore.

And **it's a shame** because up to now, we've been living in a sort of stable period for climate, the **Holocene Period**. And now it's like we're kind of engineering our way out of it. We're **modifying** something that has given us stability and, you know. . . Yeah, we're going to see it have lots of **effects** all the way down the line like, as you say, with food production and things like this. So, yeah. It's something that you take for granted and when it starts to behave bizarrely, you realize, oh, okay, we are really dependent on a stable climate for everything we need.

So, it's starting **to affect** more and more people on a personal level, I think. And that's good, I think, because then they can decide what they want to do about it personally or on a local level or on a more national or global level, I think.

And so this Climate **Strike** that's coming up is now a Global Strike. When were you first aware of this coming strike? Or when were you first aware of the crisis and start to think about it? And wonder why no one is talking about it, like you said in your newsletter.

Yeah, well I've been thinking about it for a long time. I'm still relatively young. I was born in 1985. I checked the other day. So there's this graph showing the parts per million of CO₂, so that's the concentration of it in the atmosphere. And 350 parts per million would be like a safe level. So now we're above 400 so we're really going off the charts.

And obviously it correlates with the CO₂ that we've put out into the atmosphere. It's definitely us. And yeah, so the last time we were at 350 was in 1988 so actually I only had 3 years of my life where I was in that safe level.

And you know, the only people who really remember sort of normal climate now are the oldest people in society, so like my grandmother was born in 1925 so she's 60 years older than me. So she would remember what is actually normal. And my parents a bit as well. But yeah, it's actually funny in sight. It's the youngest people who are being the most vocal about the changes and they're so young that they have only ever known

weird weather, you know.

And they have the most to lose. There are these young people who want to have their whole life ahead of them and they're worried that they're either going to have no life or they're going to have a very, very difficult life.

Yeah, exactly. So there's definitely the **generational** justice issue. Watching young people, I can totally understand the school strike idea because what is the point in going to school? What are you actually working towards? What kind of world are you going in to?

Not that education is not important. Obviously, it is. I work in education. But, yeah, I can understand that sort of feeling like, what's all this for if there's going to be a very different world in the future. How does this prepare me for that world? I don't know if schools are very good about talking about these issues with their students. I think now they're getting pressure from the students to start addressing it more.

Yeah, I've been in education for 30 years and I can say that I and some of my colleagues have been talking about it all 30 years, that is, taking care of the planet's health because it's all connected with our own.

I mean as I came into adulthood, I was very aware of the importance of reducing waste and recycling and started gardening and **composting** and all of these things. I was fortunate, I guess, that I was exposed to it because many people aren't even exposed to the idea.

They come to my house and I say, yeah, I compost everything and I even have worms that eat my garbage and they're just like, "What?! What is that?"

Wow, okay, you're really ahead. Because where I live, actually the local council is very good on waste and they've brought in a system where basically you have to pay for your waste. So the non-recyclable waste. . . they weight it and you have to pay for it. So that's a way to encourage people to recycle more. And they have a composting system.

Because I looked into the worms for awhile. I thought, I could set up the worm system but I don't have a garden and I was a bit freaked out by having the worms in that kind of compost and now we have a system where we have a bin and you take the bin to this little, kind of. . . they call it a "Compost Chalet." So basically, you go to this little wooden hut and you put your compost in there and it's like a **communal** thing. So everyone goes and puts their compost in there and then the council uses it to like, I don't know, put on public parks and things like this as actual compost.

Yeah, so it's quite possible. (Yeah, it's a really good system.)

So, you referred to the school strike. It was Greta Thunberg, the young Swedish activist, who started the school strike. I had to look back. It seems like I've known about her for so long but really, she just started in August of last year.

Yeah, something has happened because like in France at the same time, I think it was the end of August last year, the Environment Minister, Nicolas Hulot, who is quite **prominent** in the environmental movement anyway. . . . And he stepped down because he said basically, this transition isn't working. We don't have the means or the will in place to do it. So he actually left his post and that really accelerated the movement in

France. Then Greta started her school strikes. Extinction Rebellion started.

There was this sudden like burst, you know, in different places of activity and then obviously the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report came out in October, I think, and that **galvanized** a lot of people because we saw like, Ah, okay, there is a big difference between allowing 1.5 degrees of warming versus 2 degrees of warming and basically we have to stop. Every tenth of a degree matters at this point because even now at one degree of warming, it's starting to really mess up the systems that we've relied on.

We're now really at that stage where you're writing that term paper the night before except like instead of just writing a paper you've got to overhaul the entire like economic and social system in one night. We've really left it really, really late so, you know, every day that passes where nothing is done. . . you know, it's becoming more and more **crucial**.

So, I don't even think. . . yeah, I think it's better to think of it in terms of the very, very short term that stuff has to get moving so I think it's really good that. . . .

You know, it really annoys me that we have to go on marches and strikes and participate in civil disobedience to ensure our survival. It's like, hang on a second, why do I have to even do this? Why isn't my government looking after me? Why aren't they looking after my best interests? And it shows you what their priorities are and where their priorities lie.

Which is profit.

Exactly. Yeah, it's just insane with the Republican party in the U.S. They may as well come out and say, you know, look, we're here to serve the coal, oil and gas industry. That's it.

It's **blatantly clear** to many of us and why it's not blatantly clear to everyone, I don't understand, but I've decided. . . I mean there was a point when all of this really brought me down. It was probably in 2006. I actually went through a depression like Greta did. And then after I recovered from my depression, I began to see that I just really have to be part of the solution, you know, and not **dwelling** on the problem and not dwell on being annoyed at the failures of other people but to just do what I can.

And so I've been following people who are also of that same mindset. And I sent you an article about a conversation between Wendell Berry, who I think is now in his 80's and he's been preaching about caring for the land for his whole adult life and is very well known as a writer, poet and he's still a Kentucky farmer and is close to the land. So he's really speaking from integrity. You know, because this is how he's lived his life.

And then he was talking to Helen Norberg-Hodge, who I think she's 73. . . but as a young person she went to Ladakh and saw this beautiful community of people who were isolated from the industrial world and Coca-Cola and all of these big corporations.

And then she witnessed, while she was there, them moving in and how it changed the people. And changed. . . they started to feel inadequate if they weren't consuming these products, you know, and basically destroyed their society. And she's been working with others to try to show that, no, what you had was the ideal for everyone. You had the "economics of happiness." You know, we have the "economics of unhappiness." And have you seen the film?

Ah, no. What's that?

The Economics of Happiness. I highly recommend it. And since you're whole thing is, you know, trying to help people become sub-title free, I think it would be great at the end, if we make a list of films, videos, TV shows. . . .to recommend for people who want to learn more.

Oh, yeah. That would be so cool, yeah. Exactly. Okay. Awesome. Yeah, I think that's funny. The economics of happiness like, 'cause there's worry that there might be a **backlash** from people if you try to start kind of **to restrict** consumption or restrict car usage or things like this. But I think that it sort of assumes like what makes us happy is freedom to consume and pollute but that's just the only option that we have in the moment.

It actually makes people deeply unhappy because when you look at societies and their happiness levels as they get to higher and higher levels of income, the correlation is not like the more money the happier you get. You can actually get more miserable as you go deeper into that consumer cycle once you get over that basic level of having food and shelter and enough, you don't get any happier with more consumption.

You've been listening to part one of my conversation about Climate Change with Cara Leopold from Leo-Listening.com. Part two will be released in one week.

In the meanwhile, I invite you to visit my website, conversationswithkate.net/blog where I'll be uploading the transcripts from both episodes and link to additional resources for you to use and share as you have these conversations with people at home, at work, or wherever people want to talk about solutions.

Normally my transcripts and lesson guides are available to my email subscribers and Patreon supporters. This is such an important issue that I'm making them available to anyone who visits my blog. Again that's conversationswithkate.net/blog

I'd like to express thanks to all of my guests and also to my Patreon supporters who make this podcast possible: Agnieszka, Alexandra, Becky, Cara, Claudia, Elena, Jan, Asia, Jocelyn, Kirstin, Laila, Madeline, Natalia, Paweł, Maria, Spence and Tetiana.

If you'd like to join our Patreon community there is a red button on the podcast page of my website.

Thanks to Aaron Burdett for our music.

This is Kate. Remember that every day is a gift. I'm honored that you spent some of your precious time with me. Thank you for listening. Until next time.