

ORION
AN ORION READER

Thirty-Year Plan

*Thirty Writers on What We Need
to Build a Better Future*

Teacher's Guide

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Introduction

WORKING TOGETHER

CHRIS ROBERTSON

AS GLOBAL WARMING accelerates, Earth's many systems, animals, and people face enormous upheaval. We are witnessing rising sea levels, warming oceans, record drought and flooding, and damaging "unseasonal" storms, while plants and animals vanish in numbers not seen since dinosaurs died off 65 million years ago. Despite this global crisis, world leaders hold up climate accords and international summits as evidence of good faith, meanwhile refusing to take action. Yet, as Kenya's Wangari Maathai demonstrated by founding the Green Belt Movement, government inaction should not stop us from taking responsibility for our future. To this end, as it marks thirty years of publication, *Orion* asked thirty authors—activists, farmers, business people, journalists, novelists, poets, scientists, and teachers—to respond to the following question: what one thing will we need over the next thirty years to create a better, more sustainable future?

The authors collected in *Thirty-Year Plan* call for us to work together to solve environmental problems. Their prescriptions for a better future link local action with self-reliance, living simply with ecological limits, and respect for all life with our own survival. Whether it is Julia Alvarez's observation that communities survive times of crisis when everyone shares what they have, or Charles Bowden's and Ruben Martinez's insistence that living as a community means reaching across political and social borders to help less fortunate neighbors, we are called to create a future based upon sustainable connection to the land, to the greater than human world, and to each other. As Paul Kingsnorth advises in "Improvisation," as we plan for an "uncertain" future, "the most useful skills are likely to be coping with poverty, building a measure of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, and working as a member of a community."

Transforming our corporatist, individualist, consumer-driven society into a cooperative culture—a culture governed by ecological limits and what Andy Kroll terms "people-centered politics"—will not be easy. Many of us are reluctant to join hands with those whose economic and social interests clash with our own. Yet, at stake is our ability to survive in a world with diminishing access even to fresh water and arable land. As we seek practical solutions to secure our immediate needs, many authors here contend that we must also question the Western "story of progress." A sustainable future depends upon letting go of

the myth of unlimited growth, and acknowledging the need for new economic and social models. “Accepting limits while going on living is one of the hardest things humans do,” writes Ginger Strand in “Humility.”

Instrumental to “going on living” will be what Jane Hirshfield calls our “capacity for optimism,” a characteristic that, she says, “allows for effort in any circumstance, even the worst.” Indeed, while these thirty essays differ in approach, style, and theme, they share a belief in the beauty and interconnectedness of all life. In personal stories, recipes, credos, meditations, environmental history lessons, cautionary tales, and in song, these clear-eyed, “sanely optimistic” authors call for us to work together to create a sustainable future from the ground up. And as we pool our resources, they urge us to remember that our most valuable assets will be compassion, humility, respect, and kindness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Thirty-Year Plan* collects thirty responses to the following question: what will we need to build a better, more sustainable future? From practical solutions to creative interpretations, from polemic to meditation, the authors in this volume give us “how-to” stories, credos, personal experiences, and reflections on nature’s indivisibility from the human spirit. Compare and contrast the approaches of several of the essays in this volume, focusing on both form (the structure) and content (the message) of each. Finally, write an essay in which you respond to this very same question.
2. Several authors in this volume argue that in order to create a better future we must question the idea of “progress” that continues to dominate global development. How would you define the dominant view of progress? What is the connection between progress and climate change? Progress and poverty? Progress and species extinction? Keeping in mind the goal of a better future as well as the numerous solutions posed in *Thirty-Year Plan*, can you come up with a new definition of progress?
3. In his landmark work on stewardship, *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold urges us to “Cease being intimidated by the argument that a right action is impossible because it does not yield maximum profits, or that a wrong action is to be condoned because it pays.” In which of the essays in *Thirty-Year Plan* do you find echoes of Leopold’s argument? According to the authors in this volume, what are a few examples of “wrong action” and “right action”?
4. Several authors in *Thirty-Year Plan* contend that what we will need to do in order to create a better future is to share all we have—emotionally, intellectually, materially, and spiritually—with those we know and, also, those we don’t know. As Julia Alvarez observed on a trip to Haiti, sharing “was the basic investment plan in the community: you save what you have by sharing it. Later, when you find yourself in need, those you shared with will share with you.” Do you agree or disagree with this “investment plan”? Why do you believe as

you do? In either case, why do you think it might be challenging for citizens who live in the “developed world” to learn to share? Finally, ask yourself, What do I have to share with my own community?

5. Contemplating humankind’s “place in time,” Craig Childs states that human-caused climate change has “broken” a cycle of alternating “ice ages and warmer interglacial periods like the present one” that “has been going on for at least 2.5 million years.” He and others in this volume argue that “it’s too late to turn back now” and, further, that the choices we make, however passive or active, shortsighted or prescient, will not reverse global warming. Given this stark view of the future, why should we act at all? Do we have an obligation to make choices for the betterment of future generations? Why do you believe as you do?

6. Severine von Tscharner Fleming and others argue that a better future will require us to call for limits to growth, and to “rebuild an economy informed by natural systems.” At the center of this new economy will be food itself, which, as Fleming states, “feeds the cultural systems, economic systems, ecological systems that support life on this planet.” As the food we grow, transport, and eat becomes a commodity too valuable to waste, the way we eat will have to change. In the spirit of choosing food that is “practical, pleasurable, and responsible” Tamar Adler shares “the details” of one day’s meals with us, “simple, delicious things” created from what she has on hand. Discuss what makes these meals both practical and responsible. Next, come up with a two-day menu based on what you yourself have on hand right now. Finally, compare your menus and discuss ways to make such “leftover” menus part of your weekly routine.

7. One of the recurring claims in this volume is that ecological and social degradation can be traced back to what Ralph Nader calls the “concentration of power” in corporate capitalism coupled with weak government leadership; to create a better future “We, the People” need to empower ourselves. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not? What is the relationship between active citizenship and a working civic democracy? Explore this relationship by discussing what we can do to help re-establish what Andy Kroll calls a “people-centered politics.” Where do you see opportunities in your own community to speak up? To act?

8. The authors in this volume offer numerous reasons to be fearful, worried, despairing, and even cynical about our planet’s future. List and describe the arguments that comprise their reasoning. Note, also, if and how they push beyond fear, worry, despair, and cynicism to offer insight, optimism, or a way forward. Which perspectives and solutions seem most convincing to you, and why?

9. Several authors in *Thirty-Year Plan* contend that in order to create a better future we need to cultivate humility, kindness, and compassion. Considering our interactions with other species, Mark Bekoff observes, “We unrelentingly intrude because there are too many of us, because we dispassionately overconsume, increasing our ‘ecological footprint,’ when instead we must begin to think about our ‘compassion footprint.’” Do you agree or disagree with Bekoff? What would a “compassion footprint” need to take into account? How can we begin to cultivate our own compassion footprint right now? In the future?

10. The essays in *Thirty-Year Plan* make strong connections between humanity's future survival and reinvesting in our local communities, restoring local lands and waterways, and establishing priorities based upon local needs. Several authors even suggest that far-flung, central governments will cease to matter much, if they still function at all. Based upon the reasoning offered—from diminishing fossil fuels to widespread drought to vanishing sources of food—does “localism” seem to you a likely future scenario? Do you agree that bioregionalism—living within the boundaries of an ecoregion—is a practical and ethical response to climate change? Why or why not? What are some of the advantages and challenges of your bioregion or watershed?

11. James Howard Kunstler and others argue that, given the impacts of climate change and the lack of any global or national plan, we must all come up with a “personal plan” that includes “reasonable prospects for producing food, and that has access to water.” He advises us to “cultivate a social network of skilled people” and to “imagine ways that you can be useful and helpful to others and be kind to them.” Do you agree with Kunstler, Kingsnorth, Bowden, and others that each of us needs a survival plan? If not, why not? If so, what is your plan? What skills will you be looking for in your network of people? How will you be of use? In what specific ways will you be kind to others?

12. Using the time frame offered by this volume as a starting point, where do you imagine yourself living thirty years from now? What do you imagine yourself doing? Taking into consideration the responses in this volume, what do you think will form the core of your “thirty-year plan”?

OTHER RESOURCES

Diane Ackerman

- Website: <http://www.dianeackerman.com/>

Includes a bibliography of published works as well as links to author events and lectures.

Julia Alvarez

- Website: <http://www.juliaalvarez.com/>

Includes a bibliography of published works as well as a link to Border of Lights:

- www.borderoflights.org.

Shining a light on the 75th anniversary of the 1937 Haitian Massacre, Border of Lights is “a collective coming together to commemorate, collaborate and continue the legacy of hope and justice.”

Mark Bekoff

- Website: <http://www.literati.net/authors/marc-bekoff/>

Includes a bibliography of published works as well as links to several activist and nonprofit organizations devoted to the ethical treatment and conservation of animals, including:

- <http://www.cougarfund.org/>

The Cougar Fund is “a nonprofit organization working to protect the cougar throughout North America.”

- http://www.ad-international.org/adi_home/

Animal Defenders International runs a broad range of campaigns devoted to animal welfare, rescue, and conservation issues.

- <http://www.projectcoyote.org/>

A national organization dedicated to “promoting coexistence between people and wildlife through education, science, and advocacy.”

Charles Bowden

- *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields* (2010)

- Bowden appears as a guest on *Democracy Now!* http://www.democracynow.org/2010/4/14/charles_bowden_murder_city_ciudad_jurez

Joseph Bruchac

- Website: <http://josephbruchac.com/>

Includes links to a bibliography of published works, author performances and events, and poetry available online.

Deborah Cadbury

- Website: <http://www.curtisbrown.co.uk/deborah-cadbury/>

Includes a bibliography of published works.

Craig Childs

- Website: <http://www.houseofrain.com/>

Includes links to a bibliography of published works, upcoming author appearances, and audio performances.

Yvon Chouinard

- <http://www.patagonia.com/us/footprint/>

From the Patagonia.com Website: “The Footprint Chronicles® examines Patagonia’s life and habits as a company. The goal is to use transparency about our supply chain to help us reduce our adverse social and environmental impacts—and on an industrial scale.”

- *The Responsible Company* by Yvon Chouinard and Vincent Stanley (2012)

- Seventh Generation interview with Chouinard: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3TwULu-Wjw>

Anthony Doerr

- Website: <http://www.anthonydoerr.com/>

Includes links to a bibliography of published works and upcoming author appearances.

Riane Eisler

- Website: <http://www.rianeeisler.com/>

Includes links to a bibliography of published works, “Real Wealth of Nations” action initiatives, and upcoming author appearances.

- Center for Partnership Studies: <http://www.partnershipway.org/>

Founded in 1987 by Riane Eisler and David Loye, CPS is “a public service organization dedicated to research and education for cultural transformation from domination to partnership systems.”

Severine von Tscharner Fleming

- *Greenhorns: 50 Dispatches from the New Farmer’s Movement*, by Paula Manalo, Severine von Tscharner Fleming, and Zoe Ida Bradbury (2012)

- The Greenhorns website: <http://www.thegreenhorns.net/>

From the website: “The Greenhorns is a non-traditional grassroots non-profit organization made up of young farmers and a diversity of collaborators. Our mission is to recruit, promote and support the new generation of young farmers. We do this by producing avant-garde programming, video, audio, web content, publications, events, and art projects that increase the odds for success and enhance the profile and social lives of America’s young farmers.”

Nikki Giovanni

- Website: <http://www.nikki-giovanni.com>

Includes links to a bibliography of published works, multimedia, and online interviews and conversations.

Jane Hirshfield

- <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/jane-hirshfield>

Includes a bibliography of published works.

- Jane Hirshfield’s essay “Justice: Four Windows” in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*: <http://www.vqronline.org/articles/2008/winter/hirshfield-justice/>

Paul Kingsnorth

- Website: <http://www.paulkingsnorth.net/books/dark-mountain/>

Includes a bibliography of published works.

- The Dark Mountain Project: <http://dark-mountain.net/>

The Dark Mountain Project is “a network of writers, artists and thinkers who have stopped believing the stories our civilisation tells itself. We see that the world is entering an age of ecological collapse, material contraction and social and political unravelling, and we want our cultural responses to reflect this reality rather than denying it.”

Elizabeth Kolbert

- *The Climate of Man*, a three-part series on climate change that appeared in *The New Yorker*, became the book *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change* (2006)

- An interview with Elizabeth Kolbert can be found at:

<http://www.nrdc.org/globalWarming/ikolbert.asp>

- Union of Concerned Scientists: Citizens and Scientists for Environmental Solutions:

<http://www.ucsusa.org/>

- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

Andy Kroll

- Website: <http://www.andykroll.com/>

Includes a bibliography of published works and links to current environmental, educational, and political issues posted by the author.

James Howard Kunstler

- Website: <http://www.kunstler.com/index.php>

Includes links to a bibliography of published works, podcasts, the author's blog, and upcoming appearances.

Richard Louv

- Website: <http://richardlouv.com/>
- Children & Nature Network: <http://www.childrenandnature.org/>

Rubén Martínez

- Website: <http://www.rubenmartinez.la>

Includes links to a bibliography of published works, music, documentaries, performances, and the author's blog.

Christof Mauch

- Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society:

<http://www.carsoncenter.uni-muenchen.de/index.html>

Christof Mauch is codirector of The Rachel Carson Center, “a joint initiative of LMU Munich and the Deutsches Museum. Generously supported by the German Ministry of Research and Education, its goal is to further research and discussion in the field of international environmental studies and to strengthen the role of the humanities in the current political and scientific debates about the environment.”

Ralph Nader

- Website: <http://nader.org>

Includes links to published works, editorials, and stories “In the Public Interest.”

Helena Norberg-Hodge

- Website: <http://www.theeconomicsofhappiness.org/>

Includes an author bio, information about her codirected film, *The Economics of Happiness*, and links to information on how to “Build the New Economy.”

Andrew Revkin

- Website: <http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/>

Found in the Opinion section of the *New York Times*, Revkin's blog “examines efforts to balance human affairs with the planet's limits. Conceived in part with support from a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, Dot Earth tracks relevant developments from suburbia to

Siberia. The blog is an interactive exploration of trends and ideas with readers and experts.”

- Website: <http://www.youtube.com/revkin>

A link to Dot Earth videos produced by Andrew Revkin

Carl Safina

- Website: <http://carlsafina.org/>

Includes links to descriptions and reviews of published works, the author’s blog, his television series, upcoming appearances, and the Blue Ocean Institute.

- Blue Ocean Institute: <http://blueocean.org/>

The Blue Ocean Institute is a nonprofit organization that provides education and conservation programs “to inspire a deeper connection with nature, in everyone touched by an ocean.”

M. Sanjayan

- Lead Scientist, The Nature Conservancy:

<http://www.nature.org/ourscience/ourscientists/conservation-science-at-the-nature-conservancy-sanjayan.xml>

Includes links to a bibliography of the author’s published works, televised interviews, and recently published news and author appearances.

- M. Sanjayan on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/msanjayan>

Pete Seeger

- Website: <http://www.peteseeger.net/>

Includes links to Seeger’s biography, published music, and videos, as well as books and articles by and about Pete Seeger.

- Website: <http://www.clearwater.org/>

Launched in 1969 by Pete Seeger to clean up the Hudson River, the sloop *Clearwater* is “recognized as America’s Environmental Flagship and is among the first vessels in the US to conduct science-based environmental education aboard a sailing ship, creating the template for environmental education programs around the world.” Today, the organization continues its work both on water and land, with conservation and education initiatives aimed at “Creating the Next Generation of Environmental Leaders.”

Simran Sethi

- Website: <http://www.simransethi.com/>

Includes links to a bibliography of published works, upcoming author appearances, videos, blogs, and audio interviews.

Ginger Strand

- Website: <http://gingerstrand.com>

Includes links to a bibliography of published works and recent and upcoming author appearances.

Terry Tempest Williams

- Website: <http://coyoteclan.com/>

Includes links to a bibliography of published works, interviews, and upcoming author

events.

- Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance: Website: <http://www.suwa.org/>

The Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) is a citizen coalition and nonprofit organization whose mission “is the preservation of the outstanding wilderness at the heart of the Colorado Plateau, and the management of these lands in their natural state for the benefit of all Americans.” Includes links to a blog addressing current issues impacting Utah wilderness and wilderness areas nationwide.