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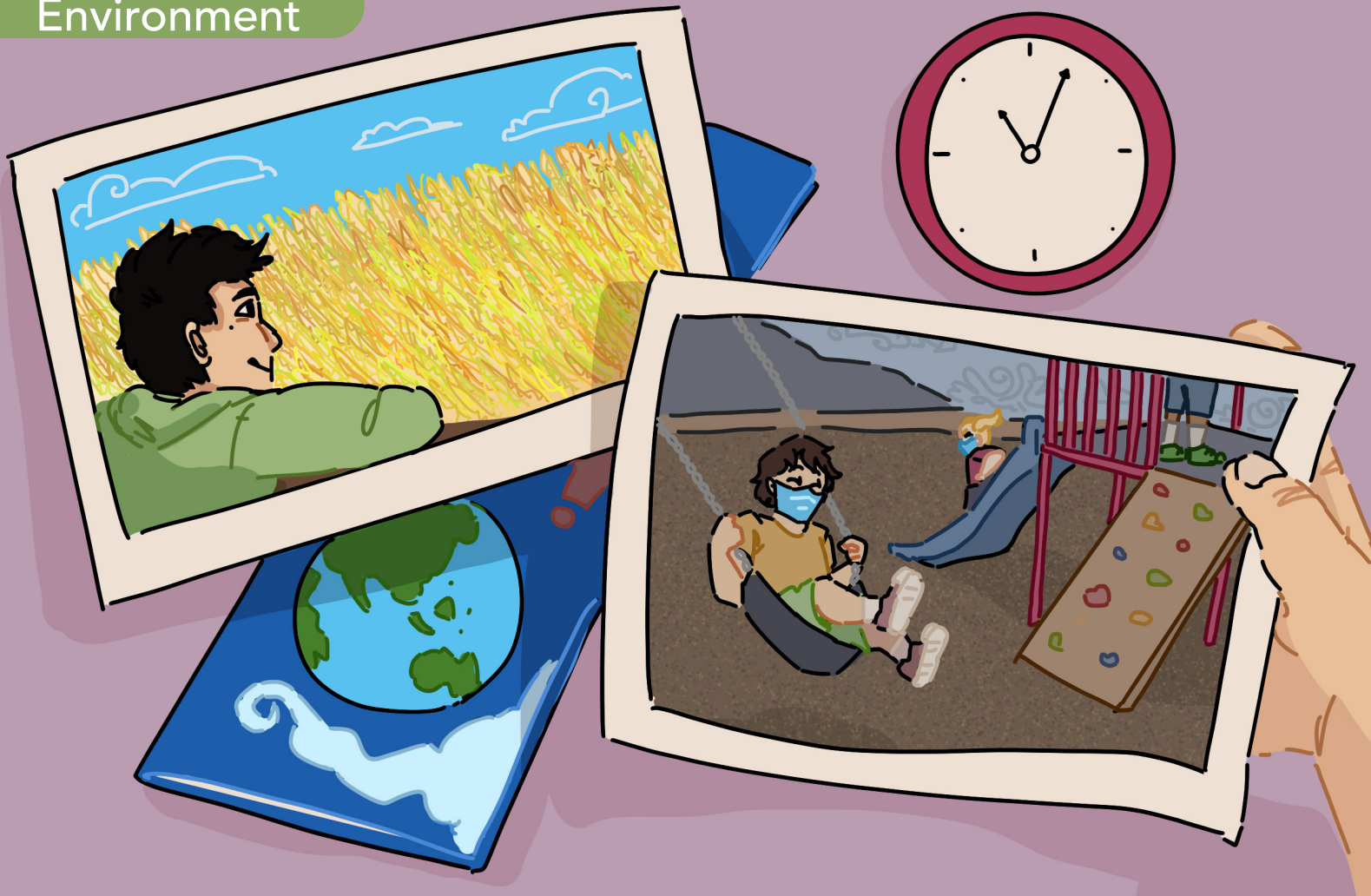
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Climate Change at Your Fingertips

Adjusting our Approach to Climate Change

Written by James Lee

Illustrated by Emma Beveridge

In the winter of 2017, I gazed through the window into a field of nothing as the car thumped along the cracked cement roads. The soil in the field looked as if many small fault lines had fractured it, like how a mirror cracks. This was a weird sight to witness. Just last year, the road to my great-grandparents' grave was filled with rich yellow rice crops, something I called edible gold. But this year, through the same window, on the same road, and on the same day, there was no gold in sight. Years later, I would learn that the broken soil was an effect of climate change—the lack of rain had caused a severe drought.

Every action in modern society has, to a degree, a consequence that either contributes to or mitigates climate change. For example, a cyclist's decision to ride a bike instead of driving a car to work saves about 21 grams of carbon dioxide emissions per kilometer — that is 420 fewer grams of carbon emitted if you traveled from work back and forth for 10 kilometers. Nevertheless, individual actions are not the only contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Large corporations are also culprits in climate change. For example, apple growers emitted about 23.2

million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in 2021. To put that into perspective, that is about the same amount of emissions as if the person mentioned above would travel to work and back 150 times a day every day for a year.

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According to an article published in The Guardian, about 71 percent of all carbon dioxide emissions come from only 100 companies. With that in mind, the solution seems clear: stop using the products from these 100 companies, and the majority of emissions will disappear. Of course, the problem is not that simple. These 100 companies are rooted deeply in our lives because of daily tools like clocks and different facets of transportation, such as

subways and cars. So, how can we, as individuals, work together to pursue a collective solution to climate change?

There are several problems when it comes to collective action. There are only two ways for collective action to happen: one, for someone with authority to force a mitigating action onto a group of people, and two, for like-minded individuals to form a collective voice and pursue a goal. Both methods come with caveats.

The first method may be easier and more plausible — elect an eco-friendly president. But it is in human nature to want to do things that require less effort and are simple. Because we as individuals in the 21st century are accustomed to this type of simple lifestyle — authoritative changes may create fear and pushback. Thus, fearing the public goes against an authoritative figure in a democratic society, creating a conflict of interest. Hence, we see very slow and often minuscule changes to our environmental laws.

The main reason environmental laws fail is that the law often sets unreasonable expectations. An article published by the William and Mary Law and Policy Review titled *Why Environmental Laws Fail* mentions that “laws use an unrealistic model for humans.” For starters, laws can be anthropocentric, lacking perspective. In addition, these laws often expect humans to go out of their comfort zone, which goes against human nature.

It can be challenging to place climate change on our list of personal priorities alongside family, friends, or careers; this is why it's important to make climate change a personal problem.

Laws that encourage and incentivize sustainable habits could be greatly effective. For example, subsidizing the purchase of electric vehicles, as an alternative to gas-powered cars, has created an upshoot of electric vehicle purchases globally. In addition, creating long-lasting and effective public transportation infrastructure and incentivizing walking, biking, and the use of transit may discourage widespread car dependency.

The second approach is hard, but arguably the most sustainable and concrete solution. Every individual has different priorities. It can be challenging to place climate change on our list of personal priorities alongside family, friends, or careers; this is why it's important to make climate change a personal problem. A phenomenon called the tragedy of the commons — where a shared resource can be depleted when individuals are incentivized to act selfishly — could illustrate the importance of personalizing climate change.

In developed countries, the effects of climate change sometimes are not as severely felt. If the summer is too hot, some people can power on their air conditioning systems or drive to someplace cooler; if the winter becomes too cold, they can travel to a warmer region or put on another piece of clothing. But, for people in developing nations like Bangladesh and Haiti, the resources to deal with climate change are often scarcer. Citizens in these developing countries can feel the effects of climate change, like unprecedented extreme weather and sea level rise, first and most severely. Even though these countries contribute significantly less to climate change, they are the ones that end up the most devastated.

The complexity of climate change allows individuals to personalize the way they approach it. For example, my personalization had to do with valuing family. One day, as I was picking up my brother from preschool so that he could play in the playground, I noticed that both he and another 7-year-old were wearing masks because the air quality was so bad. At that point, I reminisced that when I was seven, I did not need to wear a mask. I realized at this rate, my future sons and daughters would not be able to play in the playground without masking.

Making climate change a personal problem is so important because, as illustrated, individuals like you are the pillars of collective action. These small changes like riding a bike to work instead of using a car, choosing to eat less meat, and recycling may just give us the necessary push to mitigate climate change. Not only do habits like these promote individual responsibility as a citizen of the country, but they also may lay the foundation for an impactful movement capable of stopping the climate crisis. You also never know: your actions could create a ripple effect of pro-environmental behavior by influencing someone else, influencing the next person. We will never know if we don't start now. ● ● ●

