

TOOLKIT

ARTITUDE

Climate/ Culture/ Circularity/

LOOPY LOU AND LINNY BIN

ENGAGING YOUNG CHILDREN WITH CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY



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INTRODUCTION:

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Developed by Maeve Leahy—actor, performer, theatre-maker, and zero-waste advocate—the characters Linny Bin and Loopy Lou were designed to introduce young children to the themes of climate change and the circular economy. Loopy Lou’s costume highlights the value of visible mending and repair, while Linny Bin, a hand puppet, was crafted from repurposed materials including old socks, buttons, and bottle caps. These characters have been featured at a range of events, encouraging curiosity and engagement among children on environmental topics. This toolkit explores the vital role that visual art, storytelling and puppetry can play in making complex issues more accessible and meaningful for young audiences.



COMMUNICATING COMPLEX TOPICS TO YOUNG CHILDREN: STRATEGIES AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

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Preschool age children learn best through **active engagement, play and hands-on experiences**. In order to communicate effectively with this age, the subject needs to be tailored to fit into how this age will learn and understand. Climate change and the circular economy are complex subjects, with complicated language and themes. In order for young children to grasp these difficult concepts, effective means of communication must be utilised, including: **Play; Hands on Activities; Storytelling; Active and Reflective listening; Visual aids; simple and easy to understand analogies**.

Both **verbal and non-verbal communication** is important. Using an upbeat pitch and tone of voice, and keeping language simple and easy to understand is key. Along with this, using facial expressions, eye contact and body language to keep children engaged with the subject matter. **Active listening techniques**, allowing questions and providing complex information in small, manageable chunks over a period of time will work best. Use storytelling and visual aids such as pictures to engage their interest. Below is outlined some ways to effectively communicate complex topics with young children.

Connect using Simplified language

- Break down complex subjects into small, manageable chunks, using real objects, pictures or videos to illustrate the point. Use analogies and metaphors young children already understand and age appropriate language, avoiding technical jargons.

Active Listening and Engagement

- Active listening involves using eye contact, affirmative body language such as nods and smiles, asking questions and showing you are interested. Allow questions and be patient, meeting the child at eye level will provide reassurance and comfort.

Provide Information gradually

- Too much information can easily be overwhelming, so small manageable chunks is best, explaining one piece at a time to avoid confusion. Complex subjects can often take multiple conversations to grasp, so patience and understanding is key. Start with simple facts, and only provide as much information as the child needs.



Make it Visual

● Using pictures, drawings, diagrams and videos can assist with a child's understanding. Incorporating the information into a visual story can be more memorable and easier to follow than just a discussion. Having a structured story with a beginning, middle and end, and a subject that the child is already familiar with or interested in can help with understanding

Reinforcement

● Focus on the positive, such as people helping each other out in a crisis, this helps to prevent the child from becoming overwhelmed by negative aspects. Reinforce the lesson with books and supporting materials, and follow up conversations if necessary. Focus on solutions and action each child and their family can take to reinforce a positive outcome.



INTRODUCING THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND CLIMATE CHANGE TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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To discuss the circular economy and climate change with young children, you could follow the below steps.

- Explain the concept of **zero waste** - in nature, there is no such thing as rubbish. Energy is provided by the Sun for plants to grow, these feed the animals, which in turn feed on each other. When things die-plants and animals - their nutrients return to the soil and the **circle of life** continues. Unfortunately, humans do not follow this circle, we do things in a much more **linear** fashion, which means in a straight line. Humans tend to take, use and throw away, which is not circular at all. **A circular economy is a system where things are reused**, many many times. We do this by taking care of the things we own to ensure they can last a long time, by repairing things when they break rather than getting new ones, by repurposing things we no longer need into something we can use again and by ensuring we **only buy what we need** to reduce the need to throw things away.
- This links to **climate change** - Humans are burning **fossil fuels**, which are the remains of plants and animals from a very long time ago, which have been squished under layers of rock and soil over millions of years to create something we now use to **fuel our cars, heat our homes, provide electricity** which powers our lights and TV's etc. We can't make more fossil fuels, as these take a very long time to form, so once they are gone, there are no more. By burning these fossil fuels to create energy, we are releasing **harmful gases** into the atmosphere, which is causing the earth to get hotter and hotter, changing our weather patterns and causing problems around the world such as countries with not enough rain (drought) or too much rain, damaging storms, really hot days and more. This is called climate change.
- How they are linked - Fossil fuels are also burnt to **create new products**. Factories making clothes and toys and other items need fuel to run, and this is contributing to climate change. By **reducing** the amount of new items we buy, and reusing, repairing and repurposing the items we already have, we can make a positive contribution to climate change.

MORE TIPS FOR MAKING CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY ACCESSIBLE TO YOUNG CHILDREN:

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- Relate climate change to **real life** situations they can understand, such as melting ice cream
- Emphasise that **everyone can make a difference**, including them. This could be something simple as sharing toys with siblings rather than getting new ones, wearing an older siblings clothes when they have grown out of them, passing on their toys and clothes to younger family members
- Encourage them to **participate** in age appropriate activities such as planting vegetables and flowers in their garden. This helps children to understand that plants need sunlight and water to grow.
- **Hands on activities** such as creative reuse - using 'waste' to create art or new toys
- Focus on **hope and positivity**, encourage them to be part of the solution and highlight stories of change. Small actions such as turning off lights, not running taps unnecessarily, reusing items can have a big impact.
- **Connect with nature**, encourage children to spend time outdoors and develop a love for plants and animals. You could discuss how plants and animals adapt to the changing seasons and how weather affects them, such as hibernation, trees loose leaves etc.
- Connect to everyday life, talk about reusable lunch boxes and containers and how they help to reduce waste. Discuss composting food and avoiding food waste. Visit charity shops or toy libraries.
- Make it fun - play games, encourage children to be creative with art, create stories, sing songs etc. Help them to express their understanding and feelings in a constructive way.



THE ROLE OF VISUAL ARTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

- Visual Art is effective with young children, as it is a non verbal way of communicating ideas and feelings. Before children have a robust vocabulary, drawing, painting and making provides them with a way of expressing and processing feelings and emotions that their words cannot.
- Visual art turns concepts into something visible and tangible. Learning about topics becomes much easier when a child is able to see a representation of the subject.
- Visual art can engage multiple senses, such as sight, touch, sound, which can improve cognitive function. This hands-on approach can help children to retain what they have learnt.
- Visual Art is inclusive and universal, there are no language barriers and children from all backgrounds and abilities can participate and create.



STORYTELLING AND ITS IMPACT ON YOUNG CHILDREN

Stories are a fundamental part of young children's experience and are crucial for cognitive, emotional and social development. Well structured stories, with a beginning, middle and end, help young children to make sense of the world and expand their understanding of complex topics. Below is outlined a number of ways in which storytelling can be beneficial to a young child's learning:

- Encourages abstract thought - stories introduce new worlds and places, people and concepts and take children out of their immediate surroundings, helping them to develop the skill of abstract thinking
- Builds vocabulary and communication skills - stories introduce new words in a meaningful way, helping to build language skills
- Boosts memory - by using structured stories with interesting characters and plot, children are more likely to focus on the story, remembering the lesson and meaning the story is conveying
- Encourages Empathy - stories help children to put themselves in someone else's shoes, hearing about the feelings and motivations of others gives children the ability to understand that other people have different thoughts and feelings
- Sparks creativity - by not providing all the visual information such as with a film, children can fill in the blanks with their imagination
- Promotes social skills- storytelling helps children to develop listening skills as well as interacting with their peers and social interactions.

USING PUPPETS AS EDUCATIONAL TOOLS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

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- Puppets provide a **fun and less intimidating** way to discuss complex topics with young children, helping to **reduce anxiety and confusion**. They can create a layer of distance between the topic and the child, ensuring the child does not feel overwhelmed or intimidated, helping children to process information.
- Puppets turn learning into **play**. They are able to capture a child's attention in an engaging and non-threatening way, and children will naturally gravitate towards them. Bright colours and fun characters make difficult subjects more digestible and easy to understand.
- Through their characters, puppets model **curiosity, problem-solving, and empathy**. A puppet asking "simple" questions or expressing confusion normalises not knowing, encouraging children to ask their own questions.
- A puppet is able to break down big issues into stories, conversations and actions into **relatable experiences** for their target audience.
- Puppets **invite dialogue** rather than one-way teaching. When children respond to a puppet, they practice critical thinking, decision-making, and expressing their own feelings in a supportive space.
- Puppets and storytelling will capture a child's **imagination**, whilst also maintaining their attention and interest longer than a simple conversation. Their use of voice, movement, and personality makes learning **memorable** and can connect with children across different backgrounds and abilities.



EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS LOOPY LOU AND LINNY BIN

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Stemming from a conversation with staff at the Artitude project, and from a request for facilitation for a workshop with young children, Maeve Leahy created the character of Loopy Lou. Modelled on a friend and fellow zero waste advocate, Loopy Lou was designed to champion the circular economy - with the name **Loopy coming from this idea of a circle**. The costume came from numerous found items, taking inspiration from another children's character Izzy Gizmo (a mender and fixer-upper). The steampunk look of hat, goggles, jacket with visible mending and pink wig (that were all found and donated) help to transform Leahy into the character, one who embodies the themes of reuse and repair and directly showcases the circular economy through the well worn and preloved clothes and accessories she is wearing.



Leahy's first performance was just as Loopy Lou, telling stories and engaging young children with the notion of zero waste and the circular economy, however Leahy felt something was missing. She felt she needed another character to "vibe off" and the character of Linny Bin was developed. Again the name was chosen to symbolise the subject matter, with **Linny representing the linear** style of consumption and consumerism that conflicts with the message of circular economy. Linny Bin became a sock puppet, made from a worn out old stripey sock with reused bottle tops and buttons for eyes with feathers and colourful hair to create a vibrant and engaging character that young children would gravitate towards. Linny Bin became a character that would accompany Loopy Lou to events, one that was designed to be the opposite of the circular theme Loopy Lou was championing.

Linny Bin has a posh accent, is very prim and proper and only wants the finer things in life. She is a character that comes out with "ridiculous statements" which the young audience are encouraged to disagree with, laugh at and confront her obsession with the consumerism lifestyle.

EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS LOOPY LOU AND LINNY BIN

Linny Bin was designed to **encourage dialogue**, not only between the two characters, but between the characters and the audience. Linny Bin will happily discard items once she is done with them, and through this the young audience learn there is an alternative to consumption and throw away culture. **The audience are encouraged to change Linny Bin's mind, to reuse and repair an item rather than throw them away.**

Throughout the performance, Linny Bin goes on a journey, she begins as someone who wouldn't dream of shopping second hand or repairing a broken item, but through talking to Loopy Lou and the audience, she realises the error of her ways and **embraces reuse and repair** along with the ethos of the circular economy. Leahy has a small crochet heart on the Linny Bin sock puppet, at the start of the performance there is a coloured thread running through to show Linny Bin's heart is broken. Once the character completes her journey through the performance, the thread is removed and her heart is healed.

The young people in the audience help to change her mind and are therefore **part of the transformation**. This is another powerful way of demonstrating how embracing a more circular lifestyle can improve our lives and is particularly impactful with young children - the target audience.

The two contrasting voices of the two characters not only play off each other and deliver an important message, but are fun to watch and captivating for young audiences. The stories, fun characters, bright colours and funny voices all help to drive home the notion of a circular economy to those who may be considered too young to grasp such a concept.

Loopy Lou and Linny Bin have been in attendance at many different events and activities since their inception in 2022. This has included events for Northern Ireland Science Festival, Repair Cafes, Artitude Festival, Culture Night events and more. The response to the two characters has been incredibly positive, with young children and parents really engaging and understanding the message. The characters also give young children a voice to articulate their thoughts and feelings whilst laughing and having fun.



CONCLUSION

Loopy Lou and Linny Bin demonstrate that complex subjects like climate change and the circular economy can be made **accessible and engaging** for young children through **creativity, play, and storytelling**. These characters demonstrate that learning about environmental responsibility does not have to be intimidating for young learners; rather, through imaginative play, storytelling, and visual arts, children can explore these concepts in ways that are **relatable, memorable, and enjoyable**. By embodying the principles of reuse, repair, and sustainability, the characters make abstract ideas tangible and accessible, allowing children to see the circular economy and climate change not as distant or overwhelming issues, but as subjects they can understand and influence in their everyday lives.

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This toolkit highlights key strategies for communicating with young learners: simplifying language, breaking down information into manageable pieces, using visuals, encouraging active participation, and reinforcing positive actions. Visual arts play a particularly vital role in early childhood education, as they offer a universal and inclusive method of expression. Storytelling and puppetry, in particular, create a safe and imaginative space where children can ask questions, express opinions, and see themselves as active participants in shaping a sustainable future.

Ultimately, Loopy Lou and Linny Bin are more than just entertaining characters—they are tools for engagement and education. Loopy Lou, with her repaired and repurposed attire, models sustainable behavior and celebrates the circular economy, while Linny Bin, the linear-consumption character, creates opportunities for children to engage critically, challenge assumptions, and participate in problem-solving.



CONCLUSION

Their contrasting personalities and dialogue-driven interactions create a captivating learning environment in which children are **active participants rather than passive observers**, helping to reinforce learning and understanding. Through their playful interactions, children learn that even small actions, like reusing, repairing, and reducing waste, contribute to the circular economy and help address climate change. By engaging young minds in this way, we promote not only understanding but also curiosity, empathy, and **a sense of responsibility** toward the world around them.

The success of these characters in engaging children across various public events—from festivals to workshops—demonstrates the effectiveness of combining visual arts, puppetry, and storytelling in environmental education. Children respond enthusiastically, participate actively, and are inspired to consider practical ways they can make a difference, such as reusing materials, reducing waste, and connecting with nature. **Leahy's work illustrates that environmental education for young learners can be fun, interactive, and deeply meaningful, and can encourage young children to become future stewards for the planet, who see reuse and repair as a sustainable way of life.**

