

Commissioner's Book Club:

This Changes Everything

Discussion guide

Introduction

The prompts and questions that follow are meant to encourage discussion and support reflection. Human rights-related books highlight challenging issues and topics—take care of yourself in the ways that you need while you dig in.

For more suggestions, including different ways to reflect and share, check out [the Book Club How-to resource](#).

Author Bio

Naomi Klein is an award-winning journalist and New York Times bestselling author. She is a columnist with The Guardian. In 2018 she was named the inaugural Gloria Steinem Endowed Chair at Rutgers University and is now Honorary Professor of Media and Climate at Rutgers. In September 2021 she joined the University of British Columbia as an Associate Professor of Climate Justice and co-director of the Centre for Climate Justice.¹

Summary

In *This Changes Everything*, Naomi Klein presents a compelling case that tackling climate change requires more than technological fixes—it demands a fundamental shift in our values and systems. Klein's analysis reveals that climate change

¹ Naomi Klein. 2025 "About Naomi." <https://naomiklein.org/about-naomi/>

disproportionately affects marginalized communities, exacerbating existing inequalities and infringing upon basic human rights such as access to clean air, water and a safe environment. She emphasizes that addressing climate change is not only an environmental imperative but also a moral one, requiring us to confront systemic injustices and capitalism itself while advocating for the rights of all people to live in a healthy and equitable world. She highlights grassroots movements and Indigenous communities leading the fight against environmental destruction, showing that real change comes from the ground up.

This Changes Everything is a powerful reminder of the interconnectedness of the climate crisis and the socio-economic inequalities in our country and around the Globe.

I chose this book because of its exploration of the fundamental shifts that are needed to address our most fundamental problems. As Naomi Klein noted in a recent interview, now is the time to innovate, not imitate. While this book recognizes that our current business model is fundamentally at odds with life on earth, it also points to the real possibility for change and real power of social movements; the end times are not inevitable.

—Commissioner Govender

Linking the book to human rights in B.C.

The United Nations Human Rights Council has described climate change as “an ethical and moral challenge of a global scale that demands a human rights solution”² and has affirmed that climate change threatens rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water, housing and self-determination.³ The 2015 Paris Agreement, while a climate treaty, directly

² United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2015. “Understanding Human Rights and Climate Change.”
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/COP21.pdf>.

³ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2021. “Frequently Asked Questions on Human Rights and Climate Change.”
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FSheet38_FAQ_HR_CC_EN.pdf.



acknowledges that “climate change is a common concern of humankind, [where all Parties should] respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity”.⁴

Climate action is not just about emissions reductions; it’s about global equity, justice and the right of every person to live in dignity and safety, regardless of geography. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees life, security of the person and equality—rights that are also echoed in international law.

However, as climate change increasingly threatens public health, access to clean air and water and housing stability, our physical safety is increasingly threatened. While these threats create risk for us, they are disproportionately borne by those already most marginalized around the globe.

In Canada, and in British Columbia, climate change is visible in wildfire smoke and heat threatening communities, floods displacing entire regions and rising food insecurity. These impacts are not distributed evenly—people without stable housing, with disabilities, young people, seniors, Indigenous people and those in remote or rural communities often face the brunt of climate consequences. In addition, during times of societal crises, racialized people, women, people from religious minorities and others face a rise in violence and hate, for example, in increases in gender-based domestic violence.⁵

⁴ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. 2016. “Paris Agreement.” https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english.pdf.

⁵ Government of Canada. 2022. “Full report: Mobilizing Public Health Action on Climate Change in Canada.” Last modified February 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/state-public-health-canada-2022/report.html>.



Discussion guide questions and prompts

Here are some questions to ignite discussion or thought on the connections between the book and human rights. The provided prompts are not the only or complete answers, but some ideas you might want to incorporate into your conversation:

1. What does Naomi Klein mean when she says climate change "changes everything"?
 - She says: "Climate change is such a big crisis that it changes everything. It forces us to reconsider what's possible, what we can hope for, and how we can act. We need to start doing things we've been told are impossible and stop doing things we've been told are inevitable."
2. Klein shares her experiences about "not wanting to look" at climate change. Have you ever avoided thinking about climate change because it felt too overwhelming? What do you do in those circumstances?
 - Answers will vary
3. How does the current economic system contribute to environmental problems?
 - Klein argues that our focus on constant economic growth and profit often leads to environmental harm, as it encourages overuse of natural resources without considering long-term consequences. She argues that unchecked capitalism is at the root of the climate crisis.
4. How is climate change connected to human rights?
 - Climate change threatens basic human rights, such as the right to clean air, safe housing, and access to food and water. Climate change is creating a world that threatens the very existence of life on earth, thus challenging our right to life.
 - Klein points out that climate change disproportionately affects marginalized communities, making it not just an environmental issue but also a matter of equity and human rights.
5. How might climate change affect human rights in your own neighborhood or city? Who in your community is most affected by climate change now?
 - Consider whether certain groups—like older adults, children, people with low incomes or Indigenous communities—are more vulnerable.
6. How does the book address the issue of climate change denial?
 - Klein discusses how some groups spread misinformation about climate change to protect their interests, making it harder for society to take necessary actions. Klein argues that climate denial is a deeply ingrained



aspect of the emphasis on endless growth and profit, which is fueled by powerful corporations and think tanks that benefit from things staying in this loop. She contends that denying climate change is a way to protect their profits and power, rather than addressing the root causes of the crisis.

7. What responsibilities do governments have to protect citizens from climate-related harms?
 - Governments should be expected to safeguard the well-being of their people, which includes taking action to prevent and mitigate the impacts of climate change.
8. How can local communities in B.C. contribute to climate solutions? Have you seen examples of communities coming together to solve environmental problems?
 - Communities can engage in activities like supporting local sustainability projects, advocating for green infrastructure and participating in public consultations on environmental policies.
 - Reflect on local stories, news articles or even small actions that show people working together for change.
9. What challenges do rural and remote areas in B.C. face concerning climate change?
 - These areas may experience unique challenges, such as increased wildfire risks and limited access to resources and services—such as emergency or specialised health services.
10. How does climate change affect public health in Canada?
 - It can lead to health issues like heat-related illnesses, respiratory problems from poor air quality and the spread of certain diseases.
 - See pages 16, 26 and 27 in [Mobilizing Public Health Action on Climate Change in Canada](#)⁶
11. What is one thing you learned from this book that surprised or challenged you?
 - This could be an idea, a statistic, or a story. Answers will vary.

⁶ Government of Canada. 2022. “Mobilizing Public health Action of Climate Change in Canada.” <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/state-public-health-canada-2022/report-rapport/report.pdf>.



12. How does the book suggest individuals can make a difference?

- Klein emphasizes the power of collective action, such as joining community movements and advocating for policy changes, voting, participating in public discourse, rather than focusing only on individual lifestyle choices.

13. What strengths do you bring to climate solutions (for example, creativity, organizing, teaching)?

- Everyone has something to offer—what can you do to be part of the solution?

