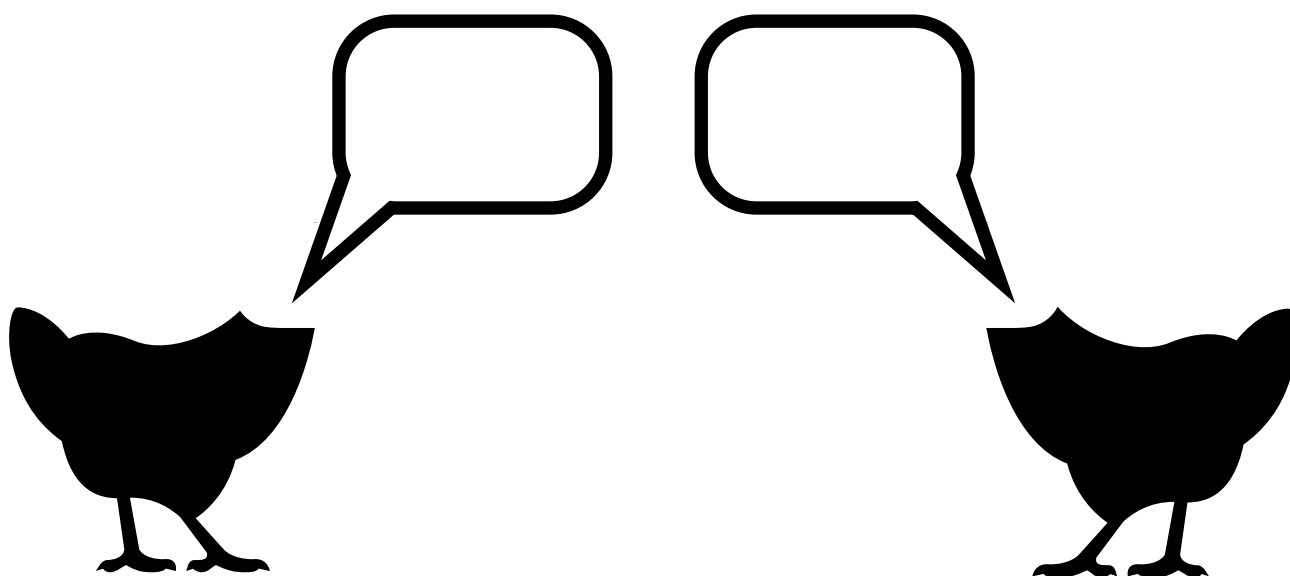


HEADLESS CHICKENS



About this activity

This is a teacher-led picture-telling activity which makes use of a political cartoon from the British newspaper The Guardian.

- ▶ Recommended language level: B1 +
- ▶ Topics: Politics, the media and the climate emergency
- ▶ Main story task: Teacher-led picture-telling

About the cartoon

The cartoon is by illustrator Chris Riddle and explores the idea that Brexit news coverage distracts from the real issue of the climate emergency. You can see it here: <https://bit.ly/32RT11t>

About picture-telling

In a teacher-led picture-telling activity, the teacher stands at the front of the class with an image in hand (a picture in a book, an image displayed on a mobile device, etc.) It is important that students cannot see the image but know that it is there. The teacher then communicates the narrative of the image as a storyteller would.

Activity outline

1. On the board, write: *Like a headless chicken*

Ask students the following:

- * Imagine a situation in which someone is like a headless chicken. In your imagination, what is that person doing? What is going on?
- * What sort of adjectives would you use to describe someone who is behaving like a headless chicken. Possibilities include: directionless, lost, confused, careless.

2. Invite students to go online (with mobile devices, for example) and find definitions of the expression.

According to some online definitions, it is common to **run around** like a headless chicken. This would describe someone who is **busy** but **directionless** and **disorganised**. It describes actions which are **careless** and **ineffective, not calm** and **not sensible**. See the following links:

- ▶ The Free Dictionary: <https://bit.ly/3477ruS>
- ▶ Cambridge Dictionary: <https://bit.ly/2Ws6WZP>
- ▶ Collins Dictionary: <https://bit.ly/366NOVs>
- ▶ MacMillan Dictionary: <https://bit.ly/2WgqVKA>

You could also show students a few book covers that feature headless chickens. There are many to find with a search of Amazon. My favourite one is *From headless chicken to golden goose: How to change your life from struggle to joy and successfully start your own business*. See here: <https://amzn.to/2WgFVIF>

3. Tell students that you are going to show them an image. But before they see it, they have to listen to you describe it. Stand at the front of the class with the image in hand (displayed on a tablet computer, for example) and refer to the picture-telling text on the next page.

Note: Before you start, you might want to write the following words and phrases on the board. Don't worry too much about pre-teaching them. They will come to life as you move through the text

Personification
The long blade

Skeleton
An hourglass

A scythe
Two speech bubbles

Picture-telling text

So, I am looking at an image. I can see it but you can't. And it's quite an interesting image. I'm going to describe it to you.

In the image, there are two headless chickens. But the headless chickens are not really running around. They seem to be fighting.

They are fighting on ... [pause here]

... the shoulder of death. [Say these words very slowly.]

The shoulder of death? Can anyone explain? The shoulder of death?

Well, you know that death is sometimes personified. In other words, in many cultures, death is represented as a person. Do you know what I am talking about?

- * What does the person/personification of death look like?
- * What does death wear?
- * What does death hold or carry?

- * In the image that I am looking at, death is a skeleton wearing a black robe.
- * In his left hand, he is holding a scythe.
- * The long blade of the scythe runs across the top of the image.
- * In his right hand, he is holding something else.

[Show students a picture of an hourglass and elicit what it is]

So let's recap.

In this image there are two headless chickens.
 But rather than running around, they are fighting.
 Fighting on the shoulder of death.
 Death is a skeleton wearing a black robe.
 In his left hand, he is holding a scythe.
 The long blade of the scythe runs across the top of the image.
 In his right hand, he is holding an hourglass.



What sort of image do you think this is? For example, could it be an advert? Could it be a piece of art. Perhaps it is a family photograph! Or maybe something else. What do you think?

There are two more things that you have to know:

On the long blade which runs across the top of the image, there are two words:
 Climate change.

There are two speech bubbles coming from the necks of the two headless chickens.
 The words in the speech bubbles are: Brexit, Brexit, Brexit, Brexit, Brexit

4. Put students into pairs and ask them to share everything that they understood. Alternatively, you could ask them to draw what they think the image looks like.

5. Show students the political cartoon (see here: <https://bit.ly/32RT11t>). Put them into pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the following questions which you can photocopy and distribute if you like:

- a. Where do you think I got this image? What type of image is it?
- b. What do you know about Brexit?
- c. What is the person who created this cartoon trying to say?
- d. Do you agree with the message of the cartoon?
- e. Why is death holding an hourglass?
- f. Does climate change get enough **coverage** in the place where you live? Or do other **issues** stop this from happening? If so, what are those other issues?
- g. The image comes from April 2019. If it had been published today, something about it would be different – a little detail. What do you think it could be?

* **Coverage:** The amount of attention that television, radio and newspapers give to something (see [here](#)).

* **Issues:** subjects that people discuss or argue about, especially relating to society or politics (see [here](#)).

5. Discuss the answers with the class.

Answers:

- a. It is a political cartoon from the British newspaper, The Guardian.
- b. Brexit: The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union
- c. That in the United Kingdom, the news media spends too much time reporting Brexit-related issues and not enough time reporting climate change – an issue which is **a matter of life and death**.
- d. -
- e. To reinforce the idea that **time is running out**.
- f. -
- g. See follow-up below

Follow up 1

On the board, write the following phrases.

- Climate change
- Global warming
- Biodiversity
- Fish stocks
- Climate skeptic

Tell students that in May 2019, the Guardian newspaper decided that these terms are a bit old and problematic. In pairs, ask students to do the following:

- i. Define the terms (or look them up in a dictionary)
- ii. Decide what the problem could be in each case
- iii. For each term, think of a new better alternative

Once students have done this, take feedback and go over the answers below.

- *Climate change*

It was decided that this term does not communicate how urgent the situation is. The Guardian decided to change its style guide to talk about the *Climate emergency*.

- *Global warming*

The word 'warming' may sound quite pleasant – like a warm bath. And as is the case with *climate change*, global warming does not really communicate how urgent the situation is. Guardian journalists now use *Global heating*.

- *Biodiversity*

This is a term that refers to the variety of life on our planet. The Guardian decided that the word is a bit too technical. From now on, the newspaper will talk about *wildlife* instead.

- *Fish stocks*

This term means the amount of fish left for people to eat. But of course, it's not just about humans. It's about the fish as well. The Guardian will now use *fish populations*.

- *Climate sceptic*

A sceptic is someone who has doubts about things that other people think are true or right (see [here](#)). In some situations, this can be a good thing. For that reason, the Guardian decided to change the style guide so that they would talk about *climate science deniers* or *climate deniers* instead. (Note that if you deny something, you say that it is not true or does not exist.)

Follow up 2



Tell students that an hourglass appears in another image that connects with the climate emergency. Ask them to guess what that image is. (They could ask you closed questions to do this.) The answer is the Extinction Rebellion logo. Ask students to investigate the group, find out where it came from, what it does and how it does it: <https://rebellion.earth/> Then, put students into groups and tell them to compare their information and share their opinions.

Follow up 3

Ask students to find a cartoon related to the climate emergency. Ask them to prepare a picture-telling text, using the example above to help them. Put students into groups of three or four and ask them to take turns telling each other the story of their image.. There are many to choose from – [here](#) and [here](#) for example.