

# A Teachable Moment

Human history becomes more and more a race  
between education and catastrophe.

—H. G. Wells

## **AS AN OCEANOGRAPHER AND CLIMATE SCIENTIST,**

I have had the opportunity to witness and play a part in the research that has built an overwhelming case for human-caused climate change. The science community has the responsibility to inform the public about the rapid changes occurring in our climate, to foster a scientifically literate electorate, and to educate tomorrow's citizens and leaders about the perils of not acting swiftly and comprehensively to reverse the forces driving global warming.

I have given dozens of public presentations and lectures, many of which our son and daughter attended. Even in grade school they could explain the mechanisms of global warming. At a beach party they were able to study the waves and warn us all that the rising tide would sweep away our fire (yes, it really happened!). My wife and I have taken advantage of numerous “teachable moments” to talk about climate change, such that it has become a running family joke; “Science Talk with Frank Schwing,” our kids would proclaim whenever I began telling some story about science in the everyday world.

As I approach the later stages of my scientific career, I could define my legacy in a number of ways. I've been fortunate to serve as a researcher and manager in a federal agency dedicated to understanding climate change and guiding our nation's efforts to address its effects. With a cadre of talented colleagues, I've published scientific papers, helped plan our national climate-change research program, and reviewed international climate assessments. My family has two hybrid cars, and this year we installed a solar-power generating system for our house.

But my greatest legacy is a living one. Eye-rolling and joking aside, our children, now young adults, recognize—as do many others I’ve encountered—that the consequences of climate change will be their unfortunate inheritance. They also understand that dealing with and solving this global problem will be theirs. My wife and I share a great pride, not only in what they have learned, but in the joy with which they pursue scientific truth and their appreciation of the urgency of creating a scientifically literate public.

Our children will carry on the fight to slow and ultimately reverse global climate change because no one else can do so; there is no other option. I look at their young, confident faces, and I, too, am confident that they will succeed.

**...my greatest legacy is a living one.**



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# Thoreau's Legacy

A Project of the Union of Concerned Scientists and Penguin Classics

# American Stories about Global Warming

**With a Foreword by Barbara Kingsolver**

Richard Hayes, editor

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