

The EcoLens Education Guidance Model has been developed in response to a growing need for clearer, more ethical, and more practical guidance on the use of visuals in climate education. The model comprises three interconnected pillars: visual impact, climate messaging, and ethical responsibility. It provides educators and communicators with a practical tool for making more deliberate visual choices. It supports climate education that empowers learners, strengthens engagement, and reinforces values such as justice, equity, and agency.

PILLAR 1	FOCUS AREA		GUIDELINES
<p>VISUAL IMPACT</p> <p>Visual Impact refers to how visuals communicate meaning, attract attention, and influence emotion and understanding. It focuses on the <i>how</i> of communication – the medium, composition, and experience that together determine how effectively a climate issue is seen, felt, and understood.</p>	<p>Medium The medium supports the message</p>	<p>Medium is the format or channel through which meaning is communicated visually – for example a photograph, illustration, infographic, or video. The choice of medium shapes how a message is received and interpreted, and may combine different modes such as text, sound, or movement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Messaging – Choose a visual medium that strengthens your climate message and suits your goal. A photo can tell a human story, a video can build empathy, an infographic can show systems and data, a diagram can explain how something works, and art can help build wonder and love for the natural world.
	<p>Composition The design guides understanding</p>	<p>Composition is the intentional use of spatial features (such as framing, size, and scale) and stylistic qualities (such as colour and texture) to guide attention and reinforce meaning. Thoughtful composition helps viewers recognise relationships and systems rather than isolated objects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context – Choose a visual medium suited to the context. Consider the purpose of the visual, viewers' age and background, and how and where the visual will be used (e.g. classroom slide, printed text, or online post).
	<p>Experience The visual is clear and engaging</p>	<p>Experience describes how viewers emotionally and intellectually respond to a visual – for example feeling moved, curious, reflective, or inspired. It also includes how access is provided, ensuring all viewers can engage with the visual.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangement – Use spatial features (such as framing, size and scale) to help viewers notice how things connect, not just what they are. Arrange elements so relationships and patterns are clear at a glance.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Style – Use stylistic qualities (such as colour and texture) to support the message. Keep visual choices consistent and balanced so that design enhances understanding rather than distracting from it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement – Choose visuals that capture attention and sustain interest. Use meaningful content that inspires curiosity, empathy, and discussion, helping viewers connect emotionally and intellectually with the subject. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility – Use clear, coherent visuals that viewers can understand. Keep designs readable and uncluttered, and provide alternatives such as text or audio descriptions or captions so all viewers can access the message. 		

PILLAR 2	FOCUS AREA		GUIDELINES
<p style="text-align: center;">CLIMATE MESSAGING</p> <p>Climate Messaging focuses on what visuals communicate — the stories, values, and emotions they convey. It highlights how visuals connect the climate crisis with local realities, influencing how viewers understand their role within systems of people, planet, and power.</p>	<p>Resonance The message is real and relevant</p>	<p>Resonance is the extent to which viewers can relate to, identify with, or see themselves represented in visual content across cultural, social, and local contexts. Real and relatable visuals help viewers connect the climate crisis to their own lives and communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authenticity – Choose visuals that show real people, real communities, and real environments in truthful ways that reflect lived realities, not staged or generic stock imagery. • Relevance – Use visuals that reflect viewers’ cultural, social, and local realities, helping them connect global issues to their own experiences. • Equity – Prioritise visuals that include diverse voices, identities, and regions. Represent marginalised communities with dignity and agency, not as victims or symbols of crisis.
	<p>Narrative The story is interconnected and forward looking</p>	<p>Narrative refers to the story or set of messages communicated through visual content. Every image tells a story about people, planet, and power. Just and equitable narratives highlight connections and inequalities, and show that meaningful change depends on fairness, inclusion, and collaboration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection – Use visuals that show humans as part of nature and as active participants in interconnected environmental, social, and economic systems, while emphasising shared experiences that connect and unite people. • Justice – Use visuals that uncover inequality and amplify underrepresented voices. Show who benefits, who bears the costs, and how fairness, solidarity, and collective action drive positive change. • Future – Use narratives that balance realism with optimism, imagining a healthier planet for future generations built on equality, care, and collaboration.
	<p>Impact The message encourages reflection and action</p>	<p>Impact is the overall effect a visual has on viewers, including emotional responses (e.g. hope, fear, curiosity) and behavioural responses (e.g. reflection, action, disengagement). Effective visuals are deliberate in the emotional and behavioural responses they are likely to create, prompting reflection and raising questions. Balancing realism with optimism can help build empathy and shared purpose.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hope – Use visuals that show both the real impacts of the climate crisis and the benefits of climate action. Present difficult images with care and context, pairing them with hopeful, future-focused stories that build resilience and shared motivation. • Agency – Choose visuals that empower viewers to see themselves, individually and collectively, as capable of meaningful change within systems of fairness and collaboration. • Solidarity – Use visuals that show cooperation across communities, generations, and regions. Emphasise shared responsibility (rather than individual blame) and collective action for the common good.

PILLAR 3	FOCUS AREA		GUIDELINES
<p>ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY</p> <p>Ethical Responsibility focuses on how visuals are created, shared, and interpreted. It emphasises fairness, dignity, and transparency to ensure that creators, subjects, and viewers are respected and represented truthfully.</p>	<p>Creator The creator is valued and respected</p>	<p>The creator is the individual or entity that produces a visual, such as a photographer, illustrator, videographer, designer, or AI system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation – Respect copyright and licensing laws, observe fair usage, and credit creators. Prioritise human-made visuals, using AI only with caution and full transparency. • Respect – Do not alter, crop, or caption images in ways that change the creator’s intended meaning. Keep the original message and integrity of the work intact.
	<p>Subject The subject is respected and represented with dignity</p>	<p>The subject is the main focus or central element of the visual – the people, places, events, issues or ideas represented. Subjects should be portrayed with accuracy, dignity, and respect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accuracy – Choose images that portray the subject truthfully and without exaggeration, sensationalism, or stereotype. Show people, places, and issues as they really are. • Consent – Obtain informed consent whenever possible, especially for identifiable individuals and vulnerable groups. Treat everyone with dignity and, where possible, include their own words or stories alongside the image.
	<p>Viewer The viewer is informed and considered</p>	<p>The viewer is the intended or actual audience – the people who will see, interpret, and engage with the visual, often from diverse cultural and social perspectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust – Check image content is accurate and ethically sourced. Be transparent about digital alterations and AI use. Use AI-generated visuals only with extreme caution as content can be misleading. • Sensitivity – Be mindful of how different audiences might interpret visual content. Consider cultural context, history, and emotional impact. Use visuals that build understanding rather than reinforce bias or harm.

The *EcoLens Education Toolkit* includes a glossary, guidance on sourcing effective climate visuals, and a range of additional supporting resources for educators.