

Temperature Life Stories:

FEELING THE HEAT

Experiencing a changing climate
through stories, poetry and data

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CONTENTS

4 Introducing Temperature Life Stories

5 How to use this toolbox

EXERCISE 1

6 MEMORIES

8 I Remember

EXERCISE 2

10 CHAPTERISING

12 Life chapters as an immersive installation

EXERCISE 3

14 COLOURS

16 Colours



EXERCISE 4

18 PLAYING WITH TIME

20 Extracts from Temperature Life Story

EXERCISE 5

22 GRAPH JAMMING

EXERCISE 6

26 DATA DIALOGUES

28 Nine things I thought about my graph

30 What next?

31 Further information

Introducing Temperature Life Stories

Temperature affects us all personally and societally, physically and culturally in different ways. What causes us to experience, remember and respond to temperatures differently? Temperature Life Stories seeks to facilitate an exploration of human experience of rising temperatures through poetry, data and storytelling. How we tell stories and imagine futures, whether through words or data, shapes how we live with temperature.

A series of workshops were run in September 2021, led by Caleb Parkin (Bristol City Poet, 2020-2022). Participants explored the blurry, messy edges between art and science, of how their personal life story as told by state-of-the-art climate data matched up to their own experiences and memories.

The project facilitated personal exploration of human experiences of climate change with the non-human (weather, climate, heat-waves and ecological surroundings), building connection and understanding of our environmental lives. It also helps inform climate impacts science of the breadth, movement and idiosyncrasies of human experience of temperature.

How to use this toolbox

This toolbox will guide you through many of the exercises that were run as part of the Temperature Life Stories project, so you can start to tell your own story. Although many of the creative methods are rooted in written word and poetry, that form need not be rigidly stuck to. Use your skills and create in a way that interests you. The exercises can be done in many ways and in any order.

For each exercise, you will find some examples of work produced by participants as part of the project. Feel free to take inspiration from them, but don't feel constrained. Take your time and explore further. There are no right or wrong answers.

Each participant at the Temperature Life Stories workshops had a personalised temperature life graph created for them, showing the temperatures they experienced each day of their life where they lived or travelled. Unfortunately a similar graph can't be recreated easily for you through this toolbox, but the next best options are included instead.

Read on and enjoy.



EXERCISE 1: MEMORIES

How do we remember the temperatures we have experienced? Is our memory like a microchip or more like a compost heap?

Following the style of the memoir *I Remember* (2001) by Joe Brainard, write using the stem, "I Remember", holding in mind experiences of temperature and heat – but staying open to the potential for other memories.

Allow and welcome strange collisions, unexpected associations.

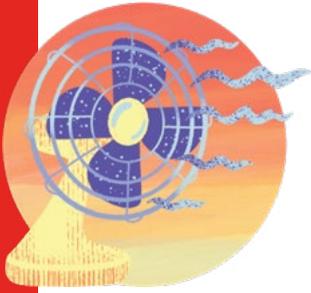
Stare out the window and see what crops up.



YOUR NOTES

A shared temperature life story as told by participants

I Remember



I remember the unrelenting noise of the fan all night long.

I remember dreaming of being cool.

I remember not caring my nose was a pus-y, oozing scab from sunburn on sunburn on sunburn.

I remember walking to the store to buy more water, my head spinning from the sun, stopping to unwrap a piece of melting chocolate. I remember when we went to Cyprus and it was so warm, I felt like I was melting.

I remember when we had a heatwave last summer and I was so scared about my guinea pigs getting heatstroke (they didn't thank goodness).



I remember sand burning the soles of my feet as I ran from my beach mat to the water's edge. My mum told us that we had to wear sun hats, even as we swam in the water.



I remember it used to be so cold in my childhood bedroom that in winter, the windows would freeze on the inside.



I remember bushfires in Australia and the eerie claustrophobic light clogging up the sun's rays.

I remember sitting on a dam watching summer burn houses. I remember the sun feeling closer.



I remember dry, dry, dry desert heat. Lizards hiding in shadows of rocks. Ancient songlines guiding proud peoples to communal waters.

EXERCISE 2: CHAPTERISING

Consider your life as a story, with chapters - like in a novel, perhaps the scenes in a film or something else entirely.

Create a summary of between five and ten chapters in your life.

Again, keep in mind extreme temperatures during each - and see what comes up.

We might mis-remember, but that's part of telling a story, isn't it?

YOUR NOTES



RACHEL A

Life chapters as an immersive installation

- a self-led journey through a building, each space a new chapter.

The first space is 'The Hay Barn of Wild Things'.

It smells of cut grass and bara-brith, wet dogs and pink bubble-gum. There's melting snowmen - many, wet wellies and a one-eyed doll called Emily. You climb a tree, make a bow and arrow, write a story and have a midnight feast. In the roof there's an attic, we call it the O Zone, there's a hole in it, everyone knows about it, but no one goes up there, it smells funny.

Next it's the Hangar of 'How Did I Get Here'.

It's all punk and politics, loneliness and angst, too much too young and rock against racism. Cavernous, concrete floors, corrugated iron roof, sturdy metal tables to hide under for when they drop the nuclear bomb. It's warm and steamy, smells of battery chickens, stale beer and fresh fags. In here you turn the music up too loud and drink and dance all night.

Then there's the land of Perpetual Sunlight.

In it there's the sea, a beach, a flow, warm rain, a path emerging from the woods and leading to an ever expanding horizon, soft pastels, sunshine, shanties, puppet shows, you get to go on boats, bikes, trains, planes, cobbled streets and stairways to heaven. A humming bird hovers in front of your face for one suspended magical moment. It's a space you'd like to stay in forever.

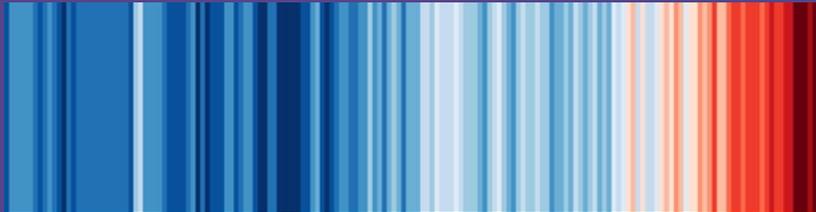
On the way out, if you look hard enough, you'll find a hidden door to a broom cupboard. Its paint is jaundiced yellow and peeling, inside is a clammy close feeling. There's closed and sealed up boxes with labels in code, they hold hordes of hot facts, the kind that kill the world... Like the fact that the plastic bags I have used and thrown will be my most long lasting legacy.

The last rooms are one full of fire, one full of a violent storm, one full of people battling to get in being fended off by people trying to keep them out, and another with well fed, well-dressed people, clutching their belongings on a small sand bank as the water gradually fills the space. And in the very last space, in total darkness, lit by a single spot, a small bird perches on an olive branch and sings a song of indescribable beauty and longing.



EXERCISE 3: COLOURS

Scientists use colour regularly to visualise data. Have you seen these 'climate stripes' before? They show how the world has warmed since 1850.



showyourstripes.info
Professor Ed Hawkins (University of Reading)

Look at what you have written so far. Which colour or colours crop up and might be associated with temperature, or heat? If you were a scientist, what colours would you use to visualise heat?

Start a collection or scrap book of words, shades, images, objects that capture those colours and resonate with you.

When you are ready, order them like a collage.

YOUR COLLAGE



ARYO FELDMAN

Colours

Grey is cold

a thin shadow haunts—dim edges of bodies—drab decay—
faded photographs—faded tattoos—faded lives

fester in dingy, dusky corners of dust—
bathe in dripping drops of murky water

a solitary stance—or abandoned absence—it has taken
away—a pencil mark scraped off the page

Golden warming

sand tickles cuticular crust
shingle tingles sanded surfaces
mingle with bleached crustacean dust

a field of straw
brushes fingers
dry - drought - desert

the sun comes in
all directions
reaches every cell
penetrates deeply
searing scars



EXERCISE 4:

PLAYING WITH TIME

A Process for Recovering Fugitive Memories

1. Jot down a list of some of the places where you have lived.
2. Jot down a list of any jobs you've had (or any 'official roles' in school or college too). Include the weirder ones.
3. Jot down a holiday you've been on, a trip somewhere – what's the most vivid thing you remember about it?
4. Jot down a list of old friends, people you don't see much of anymore.
5. Jot down two embarrassing things you've done, and a lie you once told.
6. Jot down one triumph and two failures.
7. Jot down a list of remembered kisses, or moments you've felt close to someone.
8. Jot down the names of someone who hurt you, someone who helped you, and someone you admired.
9. Describe a pet either you or a friend has owned, even if you didn't like it.
10. Describe a piece of clothing you once loved, name a piece of music you still love, and two old movies you still remember.

Twist: Do all of these through the lens of temperature...

Write a poem with the same structure as "How I Knew Harold" by Deborah Harding. Begin each line with the phrase "Around 19-/20-" or some variation on it. Plug in a few choice items from the above exercise, each of them sketched briefly with a few well-chosen details. Add other memories as they come to you. Jumble the chronology so that the memories don't move in a clear progression but jump back and forth with some interconnection, if only tangentially.

YOUR NOTES



LAIZ SOUTO DE CARVALHO

Extracts from Temperature Life Story

Around 1995, Sao Paulo was known as the Brazilian London. Weather was often mild and rainy, typically foggy in the morning. The sky was grey and cloudy most of the time. Summer did not use to last long near the tropic. If you wanted to experience summer all year round, you would have to travel to the Northeast of Brazil.

Around 2015, Sao Paulo felt much warmer to me – as much as the Northeast of Brazil. Did I spend too much time in Stockholm? Maybe I did, but seemingly it was not just me...

Around 2013, I could put up with typical subtropical weather in Sao Paulo, especially because that was the only option I knew. At the time, I did not expect that it would change dramatically.



Around 2014, I moved to Stockholm for an exchange study program. I arrived in summer and was amazed to see the sunlight at night, but that would not last long. When the darkness and snow came, I really missed the sun.

Around 2020, Sao Paulo felt unbearably warm to me – as much as Austin, Texas. Did I spend too much time in Europe? Maybe I did, but clearly it was not just me...

Around 2021, I moved to Bristol for work. Weather reminded me of Sao Paulo in the early days of my life – often mild and rainy, typically foggy in the morning, and very unpredictable. Feels like I am back where I started. How long?



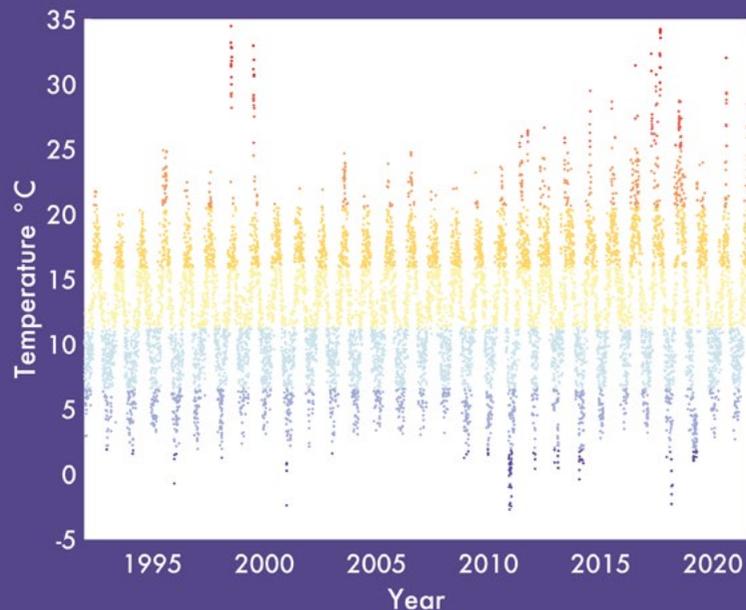
EXERCISE 5:

GRAPH JAMMING

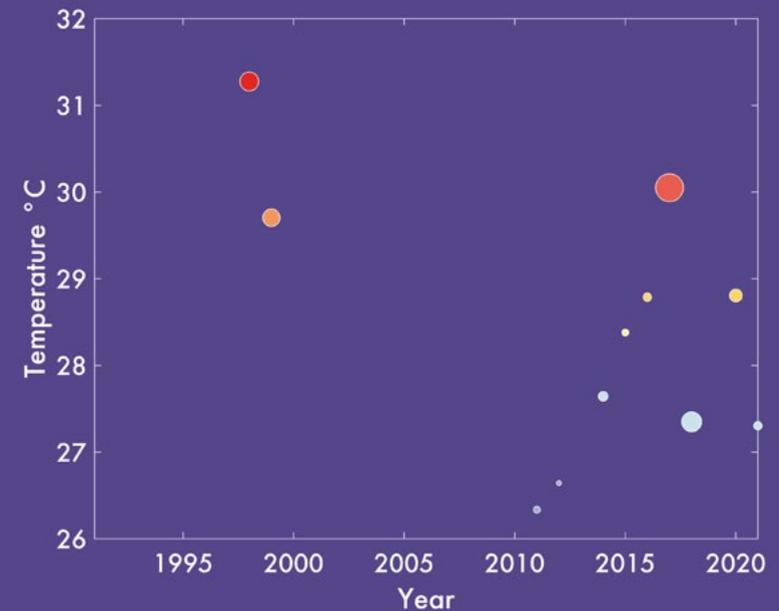
Graphs and data are used all around us. They are used to explain and bewilder. They prove points and are open to interpretation.

In Temperature Life Stories, participants each had personalised temperature life graphs made for them. Here are some examples. Each graph uses exactly the same data, but visualises it very differently. Can you guess what they show?

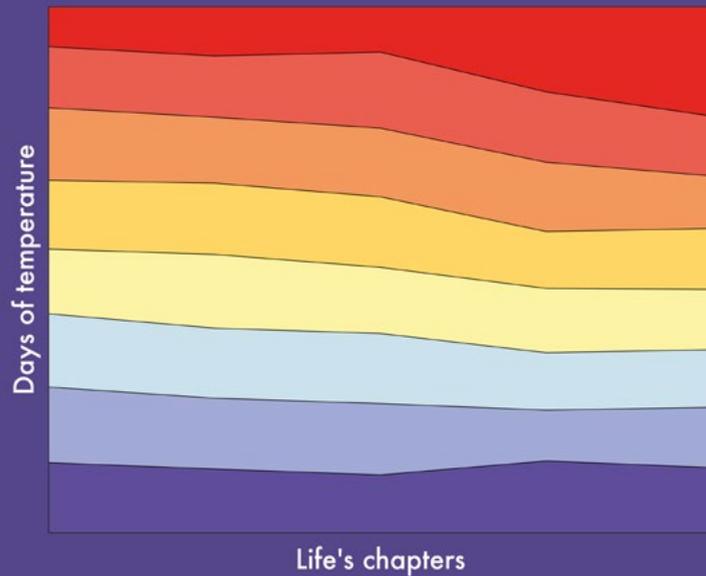
This shows the daily temperature experienced by one participant throughout their life, from the place they were born, to all of the places they travelled. Look at the seasonal cycles: hot spikes from summer holidays, a Beast from the East. Is there any long term trend? (Here, time is going from left to right, temperature from bottom to top.)



What about just the hot days? Here are the 100 hottest days they experienced in their life, grouped by year. The size of each dot shows how many of the hot days happened that year, the colour how hot they were on average. A dot-to-dot of heat-waves and holidays.



Finally, their life was split into 5 chapters of equal length, and coloured by the proportion of cold days (blue) through to hot days (red) that they experienced. Their early years are on the left and recent years on the right. The growing red wedge shows both a warming planet and migration to (mildly) sunnier climes.



Graphs use colour and form and, often, only two dimensions. How else might we tell stories through graphs? Are the rings of a tree a record? Can aerial silks be an axis? Does music capture movement, amplitude and mood?

[LISTEN to a piano piece by participant Samantha Pugh](#)
[Visit: bit.ly/TempLifeStorySP](http://bit.ly/TempLifeStorySP)



An aerial silk performance of a graph.
A common oak provides the baseline.
By Isla Keesje Davidson

EXERCISE 6:

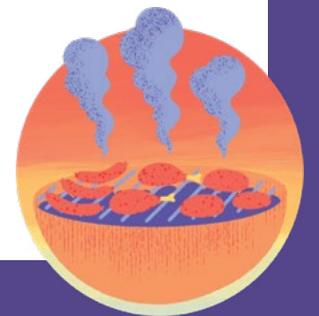
DATA DIALOGUES

Conduct an interview with the colour graph in Exercise 3 or one of the graphs in Exercise 5 (pretend it's your own). You might want to consider:

- How might your graph feel? Its likes, dislikes, how it feels about itself too - how it came into being, what it might represent.
- How the graph relates to you, the interviewer? How do you feel about it?
- The language of your graph, how it might speak, what its voice is like
- Is there anything you'd like or need from the graph? Does it / will it / could it oblige, or not? Why?
- What else might the graph like to be or become?
- Anything else you might like to ask your graph?

Then respond, as your graph.

YOUR NOTES



MARÍA-JOSÉ CARVALLO

EXTRACTS FROM:
NINE THINGS I THOUGHT ABOUT MY GRAPH

I thought about nothing.
He came to me. I did not like him very much.
He said he wanted to become a circle.
I thought about placing him on a circle. (I really like
mandalas.)

I thought about him pointing at my past.
Is that what graphs are supposed to do?
My entire journey is about revisiting my past.
I thought about his colours. (I don't like them.)

I thought about the period of drought.
I thought about how thirsty I was.
I thought about him getting warm.
I thought about the heat and about him becoming lava.

I thought about him and soil layers.
I thought he is getting hot, like in my country.
I thought about how great he looks on green. (Yes, he
definitely he needs it.)
I thought about green, I thought about water, I thought
about rivers.



What next?

We hope this toolbox has helped you think about your own temperature life story in new ways.

Want to share your story? We'd love to hear it!
Please get in touch with us through the website below.

To see more of the amazing stories produced by workshop participants, go to:
temperaturelifestories.blogs.bristol.ac.uk



Further information

Temperature Life Stories was funded and supported by the Brigstow Institute at the University of Bristol.

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Dr Kirk Sides (University of Bristol)
Dr Cassandra Phoenix (Durham University)
Karen MacDonald (Bristol Museums)
Sarah Mountford (Windmill Hill City Farm)

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