# Climate Change Documentaries— Accessible Text Version

A slide deck with forest green backgrounds and tan drawings of various types of leaves.

## Title slide

Climate Change Documentaries. A genre of scientific communication. Violet Robinson.

## O1 Introduction (slide 2)

Everyone is responsible for applying climate science research

### Communication Genres (slide 3)

Problem: How can we effectively communicate scientific information about climate studies to the general public in an informative and entertaining way?

Solution: climate change documentaries.

But do they really work?

### Research question (slide 4)

Does *Chasing Coral* better achieve the purpose than other instances of the genre? If so, in what ways could it contribute to how we (re)make the genre in the future?

## O2 Analysis (slide 5)

Situation, style, substance, social action

### Rhetorical Situation (slide 6)

Exigence (problem): life-threatening anthropogenic effects on the environment (i.e. people’s behaviors are changing the climate for the worse)

Context: Media eco-system: Easily accessible formats, streaming services, live tv, film festivals

Purpose: To a) inform, b) educate, c) cause change in social norms and cultural values (that’s a lot for a single genre to do!)

### Who Participates in this Genre? (slide 7)

Scientists: Conducting and understanding research, reporting it

Film makers: Interpreting and reporting information in the form of a documentary

General Public: Watching documentaries, engaging in discourse

### Definition of existing genre (slide 8)

Presents indicators that may convince the public about the severity of climate change

Generates/promotes a sense of urgency

Assign personal responsibility

### Problems Within the Genre (slide 9)

Oversimplification: Scientific concepts are glazed over, entertainment is prioritized over education

Framing: Impending doom complex, scares viewers into passivity

Source: “The Rhetoric of Climate Change Documentaries and Their Strategies to Impact Public Opinion within the Public Policy Process”. *Culture & Society*

### Image (slide 10)

Image description: An underwater promotional graphic shows a snorkeler or diver with fins and a camera swimming to the right above a vivid, mostly bleached coral reef rendered in purples and whites. Large translucent letters across the center read “CHASING CORAL.” The top-left corner has the “NETFLIX” logo. Bottom-left text, beside a red vertical bar, reads “FULL FEATURE.”

### Substance (slide 11)

Coral bleaching: increasing ocean temperatures from global cimate change and causing corals to release their algae and die.

Utilizes a balance of ethos (interviews), pathos (beauty destroyed), and logos appeals

Expert interviews AND Regular people

Accessible but not condescending

### Image (slide 12)

Image description: A five-panel underwater collage of coral reefs. Top left shows a wide reefscape in blue water with boulder and branching corals, many pale or bleached. Top right shows a reef ridge packed with bushy and lettuce-shaped corals while a school of small fish streams by. Bottom left features a field of layered plate/table corals in tan and rose hues with tiny fish. Bottom center is a close-up of soft coral polyps—orange-pink tentacles extended. Bottom right is a macro of a stony coral colony, circular ridges and tubular polyps glowing bluish-purple.

### Image (slide 13)

Image description: In a lab, a man in a black polo sits at left holding a tablet and gesturing toward a large monitor that shows a magnified image of red-and-white coral; a microscope sits nearby. At right, Dr. Ruth Gates, wearing a light-blue shirt, talks with her hands raised while facing him; eyeglasses rest on the desk between them. On-screen caption at the bottom reads, “Dr. Ruth Gates, coral reef biologist, explaining corals to Richard.”

### Style (slide 14)

Focus on process of making the documentary

* How do we create an underwater time lapse that shows coral bleaching?
* Transparent about methods/approaches

Creates a story, with characters and challenges

* Follows the story of a camera technician who becomes so involved in the project that he delivers the presentation at the coral symposium
* Shows anyone can get involved.

### Image (slide 15)

Image description: In a workshop, a young man in glasses and a yellow polo sits in front of a cluttered workbench and shelves of tools and camera gear, gesturing as he speaks. Lower-left on-screen text reads: “ZACK RAGO — Underwater Camera Technician — View Into The Blue.”

### Style (slide 16)

Linear plotline (Story Chronology)

* Shows “before, middle, after” of coral bleaching
* Creates “visual evidence” not only of problem but also cause/effect

### Image (slide 17)

Image description: Side-by-side split-level photos of the same reef and shoreline. In both panels, the waterline runs mid-frame with a green, rocky island and blue sky above. Left panel shows dense, healthy brown-purple branching corals below the surface; right panel shows the same scene with stark white, bleached corals.

### Social Action (slide 18)

Gets viewers emotionally and narratively *engaged* through storytelling as well as aesthetics

Gives viewers the ability to *evaluate* the evidence

* Provides concrete/visual evidence of human impact that viewers can evaluate themselves

Makes *action* seem possible

* Anyone can get involved (not just experts)
* “It’s not too late. It’s within our power today”/ends on a positive note.

### Conclusion (slide 19)

One of the biggest challenges of communicating climate change topics is accessibility without oversimplification and avoiding “doom” syndrome

* Make the *process* visible
* Balance scientific explanation and *storytelling*
* Make action seem possible and accessible

Fulfils exiting genre conventions, expands conventions in a way that avoids genre issues

### Works Cited (slide 20)

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Branding note on original image: “OAEC” appears at the bottom; icons are decorative.