



Dialogic Objects

This offers some ideas on how you can run a workshop similar to those delivered by Kimberley Foster and Bridget McKenzie. It involves mapping meanings of both ordinary objects and artist-created objects to stimulate dialogue about environmental issues.

1. Preparatory research into the Earth crisis

As a facilitator, it will help you to have some grounding in environmental issues and terms, with 3 or 4 key ideas that you might introduce into the participants' conversations. These ideas might be about:

- the impact of fast fashion or the food system on climate change and ecosystems,
- links between climate change and biodiversity,
- links between injustice for people and for other species,
- connections between pollution of air and water, and climate change.

Find some background information in this Climate Museum UK resource:

<https://imaginefutures.net/understanding-the-earth-crisis>

2. Create your museum

You will need at least one **artist-created object**, which could include the images of artworks by Kimberley Foster (collaborative artistic practice [sorhed](#)). Or you could spend one session creating artworks inspired by these, by combining and/or adding elements to found objects. Display what everyone has made in your museum.

Gather some ordinary objects or invite participants to bring in an item from home, or simply hunt in their bag or pockets. These objects might be clothes, packaging, toys, domestic implements, ornaments, books or technology.

3. Model how you map meanings of an object

Demonstrate the process that you want participants to follow. Involve them in responses and questions, to get them practising.

- First choose an object from your museum
- Place it on a large sheet of paper to demonstrate how an object can stimulate feelings, memories, questions and new ideas.



- What is obvious about the object? Start by looking, touching and smelling the object. Note down any words or sketches that describe its physicality.
- What associations and personal memories come to mind?
- What would you like to know more about? Can someone else in the room help?

4. Mapping meanings in groups

Invite participants to choose an ordinary object in their groups of 2-5 people. Ask them to run through the process you practised above.

Then run through this process again using an artist-made object, whether one of the artworks here, by Kimberley Foster, printed out, or one made by your group.

Prompt with questions like:

How does it make you feel? What does it remind you of? Who would own this? Does it do anything and if so what? If it spoke, what would it say? Why would somebody make it?

Throughout all of this, keep in mind your environmental focus. Bring the conversation back to that at any point.

Iterations and extensions

- Instead of just mapping one ordinary object, participants could choose two or three from the start, mapping the interconnections between them.
- More visual modes of interpretation can be encouraged, for example, by providing more coloured pens, drawing round the object as a silhouette then removing it, or encouraging participants to use visual symbols for emotional responses before starting to use words.

Follow-up activities

- *Consider:* what is my own strength and role? What is my particular lens on the Earth crisis which I can use to power my conversations with others? Examples of such lenses might be: exposing injustice; empathising with animals; imagining new inventions; or many other approaches. For an artwork that explores lenses, see Lygia Clarke's [Oculus](#) (Goggles).
- *Participants can plan* an occasion when they will have a conversation with someone about the Earth crisis using an object. It might be the object they have created, or a



random found thing. They could ask : when you look at this, what does it make you think? You might suggest themes that encourage them to think more widely about climate, nature or injustice. Invite participants afterwards to reflect on their feelings, where the conversation went, and what they might do differently next time.

- *Explore* examples of wearable art or portable objects to make visible environmental problems. See artist Rob Greenfield who wore all his rubbish in a clear plastic suit for 30 days! Also, see Kasia Molga's The Human Sensor, performers wearing costumes that change colour as air pollution worsens.
- *Make* a wearable or portable object that you can always have ready to use for conversations. This might be strange enough to stir questions or emotions. It might be funny. It might be powerful and clear in its message. You decide.

These examples show how artists can explore 'adjacent possibles' to draw out new ways of thinking. Artworks can also show what is invisible and ignored, such as the 'externalities' of our wasteful system.