

## Water Scarcity, YA Climate Change Fiction, and Literary Activism

Since the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, climate change fiction (or “cli-fi”) has emerged as a significant subgenre of young adult literature. More often than not, YA cli-fi novels are dystopias that imagine futures ravaged by global warming and therefore compel their readers to think about the long term, wide-ranging consequences of anthropogenic climate change.

Unsurprisingly, water figures prominently in many of these novels. In addition to rising sea levels that threaten to engulf coastlines and even entire islands, climate scientists agree that global warming will intensify fresh water shortages around the globe. Experts warn that water scarcity will intensify and create new social conflict—even wars—as individuals and nations strive to ensure the security of their water sources.

Water scarcity is central to the plots of many YA cli-fi novels, including Marcus Sedgwick’s *Floodland* (2000), Cameron Stracher’s *The Water Wars* (2011), and Mindy McGinnis’s *Not a Drop to Drink* (2013). For example, in *Floodland*, an island off the coast of England has lost all its fresh water sources. In the opening scene, Zoe, the teenage protagonist, flees from a group of people who want to steal her remaining water bottles. She is acutely aware they will kill her for the water. Although cli-fi for adult readers has garnered a significant amount of critical attention in recent years, relatively few ecocritics have devoted attention to water scarcity in cli-fi or cli-fi written specifically for YA audiences. This presentation seeks to fill that gap in the scholarship. Focusing on the three novels listed above, my talk will examine representations of water scarcity and conflicts over water in YA cli-fi, and contextualize the rise of the genre. I argue that such novels strive to raise the awareness of their readers about water scarcity caused by climate change and thus represent a type of literary activism aimed at solving the global water crisis.