Does Language Matter?

Michele Sedor

Do the words we use make a difference? When we are talking about the changes in the environment, sometimes we hear “climate change”; other times we hear “global warming.” Another term we sometimes hear is “climate catastrophe.”

Does it matter which words are used? Use the following questions to have a discussion about this with your classmates. After you are done, look at the illustration on the next page and see what other adult education students have said.

Discussion and Activities

1. Which term do you think is best for describing what is happening in the environment? Why?

2. Are there better words or phrases that would describe what is happening in our environment? If yes, what are they? Write a new term in the right column.

3. Write the names of your classmates in the left column. Ask them which term they think is best. Put a check mark in the appropriate box. Which term got the most checks?

4. What do you think? Does language matter?

Michele Sedor works at SABES in western MA. She thanks the students in Lynne Paju’s GED class at the Valley Opportunity Council, Chicopee, MA, and in Aliza Ansell’s ABE class at Holyoke Community College’s Adult Learning Center, Holyoke, MA. The dialogues on p. 17 are based on their discussion.