

A Thematic Synopsis of *An Inconvenient Truth*

An Inconvenient Truth is not divided into chapters or sections. Its biographical pieces are meant to augment or illustrate Al Gore's presentation on global warming by connecting global issues to personal stories, and do not separate the presentation into discrete sections. Thus the divisions (as well as many titles) included below are my own, and are intended to help you figure out which parts of the book pertain to your line of inquiry. Page numbers are indicated in parentheses.

Introduction (8-11)

An overview of Al Gore's personal stake in the environment, the situations that led him to put together *An Inconvenient Truth*, and his vision of the planetary crisis as a generational challenge that will allow humans to rise above their differences.

Our Planet in Crisis: Greenhouse Gases and Global Warming (12-37)

A review of how greenhouse emissions contribute to global warming.

A Scientific Hero: Roger Revelle (38-41)

A brief review of the work of Professor Roger Revelle, one of Gore's teachers at Harvard and a pioneer scientist who connected human expansion to the increased levels of CO₂ in the Earth's atmosphere.

Melting Glaciers (42-67)

An overview of receding glaciers from around the world, from Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania to Glacier National Park in Montana to Upsala Glacier in Patagonia.

A Turning Point (68-71)

The story of Gore's son's accident and how it led Gore to reevaluate his public service and to focus on the global environment.

Heatwaves, Hurricanes, Flooding, and Drought (72-121)

An examination of the consequences of rising temperatures, starting with an overview of recent heatwaves in the United States, and continuing with the connection between increased ocean temperatures and the frequency and intensity of hurricanes, which may bring enormous human and economic loss, as in the case of Hurricane Katrina. The section then explains the connection between warmer temperatures and increased precipitation, which causes floods, and the connection between warmer temperatures and relocated precipitation, which causes droughts.

Concrete and Countryside (122-125)

A description of Gore's life as a child, divided between life in the city and life in a farm in Tennessee, where he learned about "caring for the land" from his father.

Melting Ice Caps I: The Arctic (126-137)

A description of the accelerated melting of the Arctic ice shelves followed by an examination of how permafrost thaw endangers the infrastructure of the land and threatens to release even more carbon into the atmosphere.

From Pole to Shining Pole (138-141)

An overview of the places Gore has visited in his attempts to actually witness the effects of global warming. The effects are most dramatic at the North and South poles.

Global Climate Change (142-157)

The segment opens with an example of how the increase in temperature has possibly affected life in the Arctic: the melting of the ice shelves may be causing the rise in the deaths of polar bears by drowning. Also, the melting of the Arctic ice could cause changes in current ocean patterns, resulting in drastic climate change in the North Atlantic. In addition, changing the climate of specific areas could mean changing their ecology, as invasive alien species begin to populate the new environments.

Across the Wilderness (158-161)

Extrapolating from his numerous camping trips to national parks and forests, Gore speculates that humanity treats nature as trivial because it has lost its contact with it.

Species Loss and Disease Vectors (162-175)

A review of species endangered due to global warming followed by a description of the threat to marine life due to changes in the oceans' chemistry followed by an overview of the increased risk that new types of disease will emerge.

Melting Ice Caps II: Antarctica, Greenland, and Rising Sea Levels (176-209)

The segment opens with an example of how the increase in temperature has possibly affected life in Antarctica: the melting of the ice shelves may be causing the decline of the Emperor penguin population, as the sea ice on which they nest becomes thinner and drifts out to sea. Also, since melting ice is one of the main reasons for rising sea levels worldwide, the drastic melting of Antarctica and/or Greenland could cause sea levels to rise between 18 and 20 feet.

Serving for the Public Good (210-213)

Drawing from his father's public service in Congress as well as his own, Gore explains how public service imbues the individual with "the spirit of freedom" that defines American democracy.

Human Civilization and Ecology I (214-255)

An overview of the three main factors that have radically changed humanity's relationship to the environment: the population explosion, the scientific and technological revolution, and humans' inability to comprehend the severity of the current climate crisis. One reason for this lack of understanding is that climate change happens gradually over time, so it is hard for humans to notice that it is happening.

My Sister (256-259)

The story of Gore's sister, who fought and died from lung cancer, as an example of how difficult it is for individuals to understand how accepted behaviors such as smoking may be harmful and even deadly in the long run.

Human Civilization and Ecology II (260-283)

Disinformation is a second reason why humans are often unable to comprehend the severity of the current climate crisis. In fact, there is a gulf between what the scientific community knows about global warming and what certain governments, such as the Bush-Cheney administration, and certain corporations, such as Exxon Mobil, disseminate about global warming. Moreover, we are slow in changing policies because we believe that environment-friendly products would be a strain on the economy, or because we believe the crisis to be so big, that nothing can be really done about it.

The Politicization of Global Warming (283-286)

An explanation of how global warming is an inconvenient and expensive truth for certain powerful people and companies that profit from not changing their current environmental practices.

Solving the Planetary Crisis (288-321)

The book ends with a call to Americans to continue the country's tradition of doing great deeds, even when they are difficult. Gore's call is followed by a review of what individuals can do to solve the climate crisis, from switching to green power to consuming less and conserving more to taking political action.