



| **OKRE** |

CLIMATE SPRING

COMEDY & CLIMATE

Finding the Funny Side

Comedy & Climate: Finding the Funny Side

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Laughing Matters is an
OKRE programme to
identify new ways for
comedy to authentically
reflect climate and
health issues and
provide practical
support to writers,
producers and creators
to do so.



If you pitched a joke about an interfering mother-in-law, tiny in-flight snacks, or three Brits from different nations entering a bar, the only laughs you'd expect would be those accompanying your rapid exit from the writer's room.

Yet when it comes to climate change, it can be hard to think past the same hack tropes – sad polar bears on drippy glaciers, people gluing themselves to bits of infrastructure, reusable cups. This can be a massive roadblock if you're ultimately just trying to land a gag – not ruminate on our imminent extinction.

As comedy producers, all instinctively we know that comedy can be a powerful tool for messaging – but that it will always be judged primarily, maybe even solely, on whether it's funny. Climate change may be many things – fascinating, terrifying, dramatic, complex – but funny?

At this point, we are beyond needing to simply raise awareness about climate change. Everybody's heard about it, and the majority are deeply concerned. Audiences need to move beyond terror and fatalism towards action – which means a deeper engagement with how it's affecting us and our health, who's responsible how our lives will change, and where we want to go. Climate issues already affect every every aspect of our day-to-day lives; happily for us, the texture of daily life is where comedy thrives.

But what does good climate comedy even look like?

It helps if we stop thinking about climate change as a single issue. It's more of a context – an umbrella term for thousands of smaller topics that encompass everything - our physical and mental health, our daily routines, the weather, politics. Push past the clichés, and we find that not only is there a wealth of material ripe for comedy, but that mainstream, popular comedies have in fact been talking about this stuff for over five decades.

We believe the most impactful content meets audiences where they are. We've been working to identify examples of where mainstream comedy has authentically reflected climate matters, and we've used these to create eight strategies for bringing climate topics into comedy. We think there are a wealth of creative possibilities beyond the obvious clichés; if you're in the comedy game and you're grappling with how to reference climate matters, we hope you find these strategies useful – and we can't wait to see what you do with them.

STOP THINKING ABOUT POLAR BEARS: EIGHT CREATIVE STRATEGIES FOR CLIMATE COMEDY

Here are eight creative strategies for bringing climate topics into your work, drawn from five decades of British and American comedy hits, scripted and unscripted (along with some titles from elsewhere that you might want to check out).



GO OUTSIDE



**Comedy can build
connection and empathy
with the landscape.**

Comedy can be the ultimate empathy machine – think of how much we identify with characters like Del Boy and even monsters like Basil Fawlty. The landscape can be a character too, as exemplified by the beautiful – and often highly moving – **Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing.**

First broadcast on BBC Two in 2018, this unscripted series follows comedians Bob Mortimer and Paul Whitehouse, both of whom had recently experience heart-related health scares, as they visit fishing locations around Britain.

The experience of being out in nature is restorative for them, and provides an enabling backdrop for the two men to have frank discussions about issues that, by their own admission, they have previously struggled to address openly – including mental and physical health, ageing and mortality, male identity and vulnerability, as well as the changing environment.

Their love of the landscape both enables and tempers these conversations; even at its most emotionally raw, the show is as gentle and charming as the fishing spots they visit. What better case could be made for the urgency of preserving it?

GO OUTSIDE

Further Viewing

In **The Change**, the landscape is an engine of transformation for Bridget Christie's Linda. And in rural sitcoms like **Detectorists**, **This Country**, **The Vicar of Dibley** and **Last of the Summer Wine** it's the environment that binds together and gives purpose to charming characters we love. If the landscape vanishes, what and who does it take down with it?



The Change © Channel 4



This Country © BBC



Detectorists © BBC



Last of the Summer Wine © BBC



The Vicar of Dibley © BBC

PUNCH UP



**Actually, this IS
someone's fault
– let's give them hell.**

Decades of corporate propaganda have attempted to spread the blame for climate collapse – whereas in reality the responsibility lies with a relatively small number of fat cats and politicians.

Luckily, comedian **Joe Lycett** is on hand wind them up and waste their time in any number of silly, playful and ultimately revealing ways. In his Channel 4 special **Joe Lycett vs The Oil Giant** (2021), Joe uses sketches and monologues to unpack the various ways Shell has attempted to use greenwashing to distract from its ongoing polluting activities, before invading their offices to gift CEO Ben Van Beurden a pot plant.

In **Joe Lycett vs Sewage** (2024), he lays bare the extent to which water companies are deliberately discharging untreated sewage into public waterways and drawing attention to the light-touch regulation and financial incentives to keep doing so. At the heart of all his work lies a simple message – even if fixing the problem entirely feels insurmountable, there are still people in positions of power who could improve the situation – but refuse to do so.

PUNCH UP

Further Viewing

For more examples of someone giving the bad guys both barrels, look no further than **Politically Awah** – South Africa's answer to **The Daily Show**; in a country already grappling with the real, day-to-day consequences of climate change, they have no qualms about telling the people responsible for this mess where they can shove it.



EXPERTS ARE FUNNY



Some of the nitty gritty of climate science can get extremely technical, and needs an expert to make sense of it. Experts can be straight laced – and therefore the perfect foils to a character like **Philomena Cunk**, an earnest yet dim-witted presenter, interviewer and commentator, portrayed in various programmes since 2013 by Diane Morgan.

In the mockumentaries **Cunk on Britain**, **Cunk on Earth** and **Cunk on Life**, she regularly interviews real-life experts who are given the space to talk in surprising detail about their areas of expertise, only for it to be completely misunderstood by Cunk herself. Uniquely, the experts are not being pranked or made the butt of the jokes; Cunk's word-salad answers and exquisite idiocy only get funnier if you've been paying attention to what her exasperated guests are trying to tell her, giving them a surprisingly effective platform for complex messaging.

Experts aren't always comedians – but they can still set up a gag

EXPERTS ARE FUNNY

Further Viewing

Comedy thrives on this kind of tonal clash – and as **Horrible Science** proves, there is plenty of potential for absurdism, silliness and fun lurking within the stodgy facts and dusty stats





IT'S THE JOURNEY, NOT THE DESTINATION

Living a more sustainable, ecologically-aware life is something we all want to do - but it doesn't always go smoothly. Comedy loves these bumps in the road.

Classic BBC sitcom **The Good Life** debuted in 1974 and tells the story of a young(ish) suburban couple who decide to quit the rat-race and live a completely self-sufficient life, rearing animals and growing fruit and vegetables in their back garden.

This prompts bemusement and occasional conflict with their relatively straight-laced, upper class neighbours. The show is frank about the chaos Tom and Barbara have unleashed in their lives and mines it ruthlessly for comedic situations every episode, but also celebrates the joys they find in their achievements, never judging them for their decisions or that implying that self-sufficiency is a waste of time. Honesty can be far more persuasive than sugar-coating – and is far funnier.

Doing the 'right' thing is hard, full of pitfalls – and therefore funny.

IT'S THE JOURNEY, NOT THE DESTINATION

Further Viewing

There are many examples of shows about idealists who find the road tough - including **Parks & Recreation**, **Ted Lasso**, **Abbott Elementary** and French/Belgian/ sitcom **Parlement** (think The Thick of It set in the European parliament). The characters are often frustrated in their aims but not judged for them; we're not demanding perfection – just effort.



HAVE A CHARACTER WHO CARES...



**They can give voice
to the issue – so
you don't have to!**

Who cares about the environment? Globally, 89% of people do, so there's plenty of scope for putting one of them in your script – and without resorting to cheap tree-hugger or fruitarian stereotypes.

Lisa Simpson, the eternally 8 year-old daughter from legendary US animated sitcom **The Simpsons**, embodies a particular kind of eco-aware young person found in the American zeitgeist at the turn of the 90s.

The contrast with the rest of her family – especially her rebellious and often nihilist brother Bart, and her lazy father Homer – is an irresistible engine of comedic conflict, often with Lisa as the killjoy.

But she is frequently given a platform to make the case for pro-climate policies and puts her parents on blast for their unsustainable lifestyle choices; many episodes position her as the show's moral conscience.

In doing so, she mirrors and empowers many other young people, who relate to her exasperation with their parents' generation.

You'd never describe the show as being 'about' climate issues, yet it gave us probably one of the most influential climate campaigner characters ever.

HAVE A CHARACTER WHO CARES...

Further Viewing

Absolutely Fabulous's Saffy may be stuffy, but in a world otherwise populated with grotesques she's the nearest thing to an audience identification figure - a tether to reality who quietly normalises climate concerns.

Danish comedy **Call Me Dad** takes a different approach – dreamboat Alex Høgh Andersen rides a cargo bike, cleans canals and cooks mouthwatering vegetarian food; these things are rarely discussed but they all help code him as a heartthrob.



**Succumbing to greenwashing
and performative sustainability
can be very funny indeed.**



**...OR
DOESN'T.**

Characters who demonstrate unsustainable behaviours can be just as instructive as their opposites – particularly if they're succumbing to greenwashing. Amanda Hughes, the title character from the 2025 BBC One sitcom **Amandaland**, is a Tesla driver, and she performatively flaunts this in order to appear progressive and environmentally conscious.

But other scenes show her casually and thoughtlessly behaving in environmentally unsustainable ways; she is portrayed as deeply flawed, though often in a very sympathetic light.

Foregrounding her complexities and contradictions encourages the audiences to put the pieces together and reflect on their own behaviours – through a nuanced lens of someone getting it “wrong”.

...OR DOESN'T

Further Viewing

The Fast Show's Dave Angel: Eco Warrior, purveyor of straight-talking, no-nonsense monologues about environmental issues, is forever undermined by his tyre-burning, aerosol-emptying wife Shirley, showing us that talking the talk is no substitute for actual behavioural change.



The Fast Show © BBC



**The climate is already
changing how we live our
lives in ways that are rich
with storytelling potential.**

**THIS IS HOW
WE LIVE NOW (OR
WILL DO SOON)**

As the climate changes, our lives will need to change too. Happily for comedy, this creates a wealth of new dynamics and situations to explore.

Peter Kay's Car Share, a well-loved BBC sitcom that ran from 2015 to 2018, is centred around the evolving relationship of John and Kayleigh, two colleagues participating in their employer's car share scheme.

Climate themes are never explicit, but the car sharing arrangement - a great climate-positive behaviour - is foregrounded so heavily that by the second episode it doesn't seem remotely unusual, even as only 15% of commuters do likewise.

This normalisation is an invaluable part of the conversation about how we are responding to the climate crisis, not just how it's impacting us – whilst offering an undeniable engine for stories and jokes.

THIS IS HOW WE LIVE NOW (OR WILL DO SOON)

Further Viewing

French shortform sitcom **La Haut Sur La Montagne**, set in mountain ski resort in the year 2080 when – crucially – all the snow has melted, makes the case for action on an extremely practical level.

Even the **Last of the Summer Wine** lads attempted to harness renewables back in 1987 in an episode called Wind Power (albeit to create some super-speed roller skates), while in 2024 comedian Romesh Ranganathan saw first-hand the resilience and ingenuity of communities in Madagascar in adapting to their new reality in BBC Two's **The Misadventures of Romesh Ranganathan**.



SWING FOR THE FENCES



As comedy makers, we have a platform to discuss climate issues – but it’s not our responsibility to solve them. It’s okay to be bold, spiky and imperfect. A **Rickonvenient Mort**, a 2021 episode of the anarchic animated sitcom **Rick & Morty**, is a dense, multilayered look at corporatised eco-activism and eco-terrorism that sidesteps easy answers.

Its deeply ambivalent tone might not immediately seem like effective messaging, but the episode inspired pages of engaged and in-depth Reddit analysis and debate and even an academic paper. Sometimes bad taste shock tactics can reach the parts the earnest message purity can’t!

**Good taste
optional!**

SWING FOR THE FENCES

Further Viewing

I May Destroy You's vegan storyline goes to some disturbing places, but the shock tactics are a useful way to get us thinking differently about the intersection of climate and race.



I May Destroy You © BBC

OKRE supports the development of entertainment that improves public understanding of social issues. We bring together the key ways that people learn about the world – research, lived experience and entertainment – and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and ideas that makes for more engaging and impactful storytelling.

As the well-connected hub of a global network, we make it easy for charities, researchers and people with lived experience of specific social issues to find and collaborate with the creative talent that can help them share their stories.

We also fund the development of socially-minded collaborative projects that aim to engage new audiences through entertainment. And all the while, we're demonstrating the value of entertainment as an important tool for social change by measuring and sharing the impact of what we help to create.

Laughing Matters is an OKRE programme delivered with funding from Wellcome.

CLIMATE SPRING

[find out more](#)

Climate Spring is a global organisation dedicated to shifting our cultural response to the climate crisis by championing storytelling that transforms how it is represented in film, TV, and popular culture.

Climate Spring supports the screen industries with early-stage development funding for scripted and unscripted projects; editorial consulting on the climate elements of film and TV content; training and world-building workshops; writers' development opportunities; and bespoke advice on moving a project from idea to distribution.

To date, Climate Spring is funding and co-financing development, supporting and consulting on 60+ film and TV projects, in a range of genres from crime to thriller to romantic comedy.

Climate Spring is home to the Climate Fiction Prize, the first literary award of its kind to celebrate novels tackling the climate crisis, as well as a campaign partner of Green Rider, an actor-led movement dedicated to making the screen industries greener, cleaner and fairer.



**YELLOW DOT
STUDIOS**

[find out more](#)

Yellow Dot Studios is a non-profit media studio founded by Adam McKay, the Academy Award-winning writer, director, and producer known for Netflix's second most watched film of all time Don't Look Up, as well as Vice, The Big Short, Anchorman, Step Brothers, Talladega Nights, and television shows Succession and Winning Time.

Yellow Dot Studios raises awareness and mobilizes action on the climate emergency by creating entertaining, memorable, and scientifically accurate digital media and videos that challenge the decades of disinformation pushed by oil companies and amplified by large swaths of elected leaders and the media.



Matt Nida

Programme Manager,
Laughing Matters

Matt is a producer, writer and creative with over two decades' experience making and developing television programmes, live shows and podcasts – primarily comedy, as well as entertainment, fact-ent and arts shows.

He produced Channel 4's annual *Big Fat Quiz of the Year* from 2010 to 2019, and more recently oversaw the highly acclaimed *Joe Lycett vs Sewage* documentary as well as the BAFTA and Broadcast Award-winning *Joe Lycett vs David Beckham* project.



Josh Cockcroft

Director of Research and Impact,
Climate Spring

Josh is Director of Research & Impact at Climate Spring, where his work focuses on building and disseminating the evidence for effective climate storytelling. He chairs the Climate in Screen Entertainment Research working group, and collaborates with the climate storytelling ecosystem on research and impact measurement initiatives.

Josh has experience producing for film, TV and theatre, as well as working for philanthropy and leading research on culture and diversity, including authoring reports on the BFI's funding practises and in applying natural language processing to analyse screen content.



Staci Roberts-Steele

Executive Director,
Yellow Dot Studios

An alumni of Vassar College as well as Second City and IO Chicago, Staci Roberts-Steele has acted in shows including *Parks and Recreation*, *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, *90210*, and in the film *Vice*, while producing numerous political and comedy videos at Funny or Die.

She was co-producer at Hyperobject Industries since 2018, until transitioning to Managing Director of Yellow Dot. At Hyperobject, she produced the spoof Chevron ad, and co-produced *Don't Look Up*, also appearing on-screen in the film, and producing the Webby and Ambie nominated companion podcast, *Last Movie Ever Made*.



Stuart Goldsmith

Internationally award-winning Climate Comedian and speaker

An internationally award-winning Climate Comedian and speaker, who specialises in performing stand up relating to the climate crisis.

His TV credits include performing his climate comedy on BBC institution Live at the Apollo and he also performed stand up on Conan in LA, hosted by comedy icon Conan O'Brien.

Comedy is a powerful strategy for engaging audiences on climate change, offering emotional relief and alternative narratives beyond the problem, and towards the answers.

Academic research from across communication, media studies, psychology, and environmental science has demonstrated the value of stories, and humour, as a way to engage audiences and shift the narrative on the climate crisis.

One of the key strengths of comedy lies in its ability to support emotional engagement and help people cope. The climate crisis is a complex set of interconnected, systemic issues, and stark presentation of facts can lead to overwhelm and a sense of powerlessness. Good-natured humour has been shown to help audiences process negative emotions and reduce anxiety.

Satire, too, plays an important role. Popular shows like **The Daily Show**, **The Colbert Report**, **Have I Got News For You**, and **Last Week Tonight with John Oliver** have consistently highlighted the scientific consensus on climate change, often reaching audiences who might otherwise be disengaged or distrustful of mainstream media. By blending humour with critical insight, these programmes provide alternative pathways into the climate conversation, helping to inform and mobilise viewers without overwhelming them.

The film **Don't Look Up**, a dark climate satire, led to measurable shifts in audience attitudes after viewing. When paired with Leonardo DiCaprio's climate-focused marketing message, the film

significantly increased viewers' concern about climate change, boosted their belief in the efficacy of individual and collective action, and strengthened support for government intervention. However, another study also showed that the film was polarising, and that while it led to an increase in support for climate action from Democrats, it decreased the support for climate action from Republicans. This indicates the pitfalls of polarising comedy - and the importance of comedy which can reach across the aisle, not just preach to the converted.

Comedy can take the diffuse, systemic issues behind climate change and make them entertaining, without losing the critical edge needed to provoke thought and discussion.

Comedy's ability to connect audiences emotionally to characters outside of their usual social networks is crucial to this, as it provides an opportunity for audiences to hear and engage with different perspectives. From stand-up sets to sitcoms, comedy has the power to disarm defensiveness, reframe narratives, and spark new ways of thinking in audiences.

Why We Need Climate Comedy

by Josh Cockcroft
Director of Research
and Impact,
Climate Spring

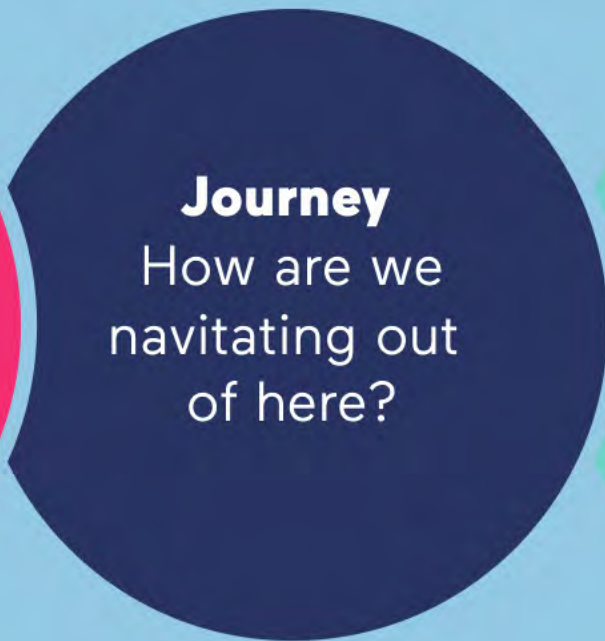


Climate Spring is prioritising the next wave of climate stories that shift focus away from having to discuss the climate problem, to focus on three areas:

Current Climate Stories



The next wave of Climate Stories

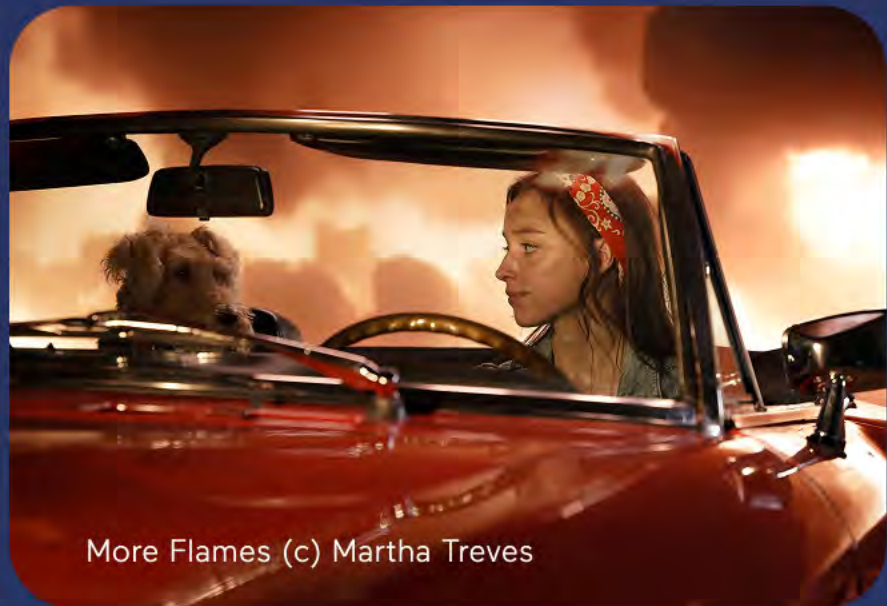


Ultimately, the stories we need to tell are the stories of how we are transitioning from an extractive to a regenerative economy. Comedy has an essential role to play in helping audiences engage and process the changes that need to happen, who is responsible and to think about where we are going. If fear paralyses, humour mobilises - climate comedy gives us the emotional oxygen to keep going, and keep imagining what comes next.



Joe Lycett vs the Oil Giant © Rob Parfitt Channel 4 PA

Further reading



**Climate Spring -
The Stories we Need -
A Storytelling Guide from
Dystopia to Regenerative Futures.**

2024

[find out more](#)



**Rare Media -
The Impact of Don't Look Up**

2024

[find out more](#)

**A Laughing Matter?
Confronting climate
change through humor.**

Boykoff, Max & Osnes, Beth.
(2018).

Comedy Studies. 10. 1-13.
10.1080/2040610X.2019.1623513.



**Climate as Comedy: The Effects
of Satirical Television News on
Climate Change Perceptions.**

Brewer, P. R., & McKnight, J. (2015).

Science Communication, 37(5), 635-657.

[find out more](#)



**"A Statistically Representative
Climate Change Debate": Satirical
Television News, Scientific
Consensus, and Public Perceptions
of Global Warming.**

Brewer, P. R., & McKnight, J. (2017)

Atlantic Journal of Communication, 25(3), 166-180.

[find out more](#)

**Good-natured comedy
to enrich climate
communication.**

Osnes, Beth & Boykoff, Max
& Chandler, Patrick. (2019).

Comedy Studies. 10. 1-13.
10.1080/2040610X.2019.1623513.



**A Comedian and an Activist
Walk into a bar**

Caty Borum & Lauren Feldman, 2020



**Lights, camera, impact: 20
years of research on the power of
entertainment to support
narrative change.**

Korobkova, K., Weinstein, D., Felt, L.,
Rosenthal, E. L., & Blakley, J. (2023).

USC Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project

[find out more](#)

**Demanding stories:
television coverage
of sustainability,
climate change and
material demand.**

Smith J. 2017

Phil. Trans. R. Soc. A 375: 20160375.

[find out more](#)

THE PRODUCER'S PERSPECTIVE

Yellow Dot Studios



What are some of the challenges and opportunities you've encountered in presenting climate issues through a comedic lens?

Comedy in climate and comedy in traditional entertainment have the same challenges. Not everyone is going to love your take but for some people it's the only way for them to be engaged. Many of the people who've tuned out the decades of traditional climate narratives need a different angle to relate to the crisis we're facing. There isn't one trick to solving the climate crisis and there isn't one type of comedy to communicate. So we just focus on what we find funny and seek out different voices to communicate the story.

Are comedy audiences receptive to climate messaging? How direct can you be without losing them?

We've found that people are ready to hear about climate because more and more people are being directly effected by climate. A comedian talking about changes in weather or health issues related to climate is no different than Sarah Silverman joking about death or Andrew Shultz talking about IVF. Climate stories are all our stories.

What is your advice to comedy creatives who want to address climate issues in their work but don't know where to start?

Start by thinking about your own climate concerns or experiences. Climate doesn't have to be the main storyline, but incorporating it to other parts of story can add texture and sophistication to elevate the overall project. Don't think of climate as something your having to jam into a story. Instead consider how empty your project will feel without an accurate portrayal of the current state of our world.

THE COMEDIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

STUART
GOLDSMITH



When people hear the term ‘climate comedy’, I imagine their first reaction is: “What could possibly be funny about the end of the world?”

It’s a fair question. The climate crisis is existential, terrifying, and filled with the kind of slow-moving dread that keeps people awake at night.

The truth is, comedy is one of the best tools we have for tackling tough subjects.

Laughter has an amazing ability to disarm people, to lower their defences just enough to let in ideas that might otherwise feel too painful or overwhelming. I know that if I can get people to laugh about it, I can get them to think about it.

And, like everything else in life, the climate emergency is packed with contradictions, absurdities, and problems. In comedy we say that “the problems are the material”, and we have plenty of problems to work with.

But comedy isn’t just about pointing out the absurdities; it’s about building connections. When I joke about my own climate failings - like the time I realised I was considering driving my diesel van to attend a climate protest - it’s not just self-deprecating humour. It’s an admission that I’m part of the problem, just like everyone else. And in that moment, the audience and I are in it together. We’re all hypocrites. We’re all trying. And that shared vulnerability is where the conversation starts. If I can make an audience laugh about something they’re scared of, I’ve started a conversation. And conversations are where change begins.

When I perform, I pause and ask the audience for their ‘climate confessions’. I want them to share the little things they do - or don’t do - that make them feel guilty. I create a space where people feel seen and heard, not judged, and it’s amazing what people will admit to.

A CEO said he put his pyjamas in the tumble dryer to make them feel all snuggly before he goes to bed. I insist that we applaud each confession, and stress that we’re applauding not the behaviour itself but the candid admission. I started doing this in 2022, and it quickly became a mainstay of my shows. It’s a really fun piece of crowd work and an opportunity for me to riff on whatever is revealed, often really boosting the energy in the room.

The most pertinent element of the ‘climate confessions’, though, is that the universality of the request allows everybody in the room to engage. Even if they decide not to interact, every single person in that room is thinking “what will I say if I get picked?” I’m not just looking for laughs. I’m inviting people to lower their guard, to feel safe enough to share. Vulnerability begets vulnerability. And when people see others admitting their imperfections, it gives them permission to reflect on their own.

Comedy can’t solve the climate crisis. I know that. But it creates a space where people feel safe enough to engage with it. And in a world where apathy and denial can feel easier than action, that’s no small thing.

Feeling inspired?

**We're here to make sure your audiences
get the message and the joke.**

**Get in touch and let's make something
brilliant: laughingmatters@okre.org**