

## **Part 1.**

Good evening. I'm Adrienne Thorne, and this is a special edition of Earth Watch.

Our top story tonight: As the global thermostat reaches a critical tipping point, we examine a world that is no longer just warming, but actively igniting. While the headlines often paint a picture of uniform chaos, a closer look at the data reveals a far more complex and deceptive reality.

Starting in the Mediterranean basin, Turkey has arguably set a new precedent in proactive disaster mitigation. While many expected Ankara to simply succumb to the record-breaking destruction witnessed across the Americas, the reality on the ground is a masterclass in tactical prevention.

Authorities have effectively decoupled the nation's food security from the volatile forest peripheries. By re-engineering buffer zones, they aren't just fighting flames; they are ensuring that vital agricultural land remains

shielded – an oasis of resilience amidst the encroaching embers.

The narrative shifts as we move to the British Isles, a territory traditionally synonymous with damp predictability. Here, the public psyche is fixated on the current heat, viewing it as an unprecedented historical zenith. And while the ecological toll is undeniably staggering, the cold, hard statistics tell a different story. If we look past the immediate smoke, this season – though devastating – actually stands in the shadow of the absolute zenith witnessed in 2023. It remains, by a narrow margin, the second most severe wildfire cycle on record, a fact often lost in the heat of the moment.

Crossing the Atlantic, the scale of devastation in Canada has reached a point of statistical absurdity. To put it in perspective, if you were to combine the total scorched earth of Spain and Turkey, it wouldn't even approach the magnitude of what we're seeing in the North this year. We are no longer witnessing a 'routine' fire season; we are seeing a total collapse of previous environmental benchmarks. It is a record-shattering anomaly that has quite literally rewritten the history books of boreal ecology.

Further south, in Spain, the crisis manifests not in the breadth of the flames, but in the sheer, punishing brutality of the atmosphere. While neighboring regions struggle with forty-degree heatwaves, the Spanish interior has seen the mercury push into uncharted territory. We are talking about a sustained thermal siege where thermometers have stubbornly persisted north of the fifty-degree mark – a threshold once deemed an impossibility for the Iberian climate, now turned into a suffocating reality.

## **Part 2.**

**Hanya Richardson = HR**

**Jeffery Walsh = JW**

**Interviewer:** Welcome to the programme. Today our guests are the sociologists, Hania Richardson and Jeffrey Walsh, who study friendship. Hania, friendships too easily fall by the wayside in adulthood, don't they?

**HR:** They do indeed. In the research for our book, we found that people make the most friends between the ages of 15 and 25, and then try as we might to keep up with people, our friendship circles shrink as we move into adulthood. We become engrossed in our careers. We get married, have kids. We might even end up relocating for one reason or another. In our daily lives, we're still surrounded by people of course, but they are in the same position as ourselves, busy, short on energy and free time.

**JW:** We have fewer friends as adults, but not usually by choice. One study found that the average adult won't have made a new friend in the last five years, even though about half would have liked to.

**HR:** And so the question is, how can we fill this friendship gap? It's a bit of an uphill battle, as we all know. It can take between 40 and 60 hours to develop a casual friendship. But of course, it's also possible to spend hundreds and hundreds of hours with someone and think of them as just a workmate or an acquaintance.

**Interviewer:** So what else can be done to turn these everyday encounters into real friendships?

**JW:** Most of us, we assume friends will just sort of fall into our lives, and it's not entirely unreasonable that we should make this assumption, because it fits with the way many of the friendships developed when we were younger. Back then, we were stuck in the same building with

lots of potential friends, and it was as simple as going through shared experiences. As adults, we have to put ourselves out there a bit more.

**HR:** And it can't be a one-off thing. It's not enough to go to just the one networking meeting, better to look for a professional development group. Don't go to a book lecture. Look for a book club.

**Interviewer:** What about those of us who find it hard to relax and be ourselves around people we don't know?

**JW:** That's very common, and it's often due to a cognitive bias known as the liking gap. This describes people's tendency to underestimate the degree to which they are liked by strangers they interact with.

**HR:** Like it or not, to make new friends, we simply have to get used to those small bouts of anxiety that come from engaging with new people. All too often, we resort to overt or covert avoidance strategies, like looking at our phone or playing with the host's pet. We ought not to let ourselves fall into this common trap. By trying to protect ourselves from rejection, by limiting our eagerness or enthusiasm, we only make the chances of rejection more likely. Other people, after all, are just as afraid of getting the brush off as we are.

**Interviewer:** So let's say you meet someone you really click with. What then?

**HR:** Here also, a bit of courage can pay dividends. We sometimes get too caught up in our own heads about who chose to invite whom to do what when and whose turn it is now. But the truth is, there are a lot of people out there who really appreciate being asked, but are really terrible at asking. It's normal to worry about being clingy, but we probably underestimate that nice to be wanted feeling that people get when you pick them to spend time with.

**JW:** And to fast forward a bit, once a friendship is established, if or when things don't live up to our expectations, we shouldn't get too hung up about it, because they won't. People need the space to be imperfect. With friends, it's best to avoid resentment and reserve judgment when life gets in the way.

**Interviewer:** Speaking of tough times, these days there is a school of thought that says we should ditch one-sided friendships and take better care of ourselves. And yeah, what's your take on that?

**HR:** So, I wouldn't advise anyone to be friends with a person who actively does things to hurt them. But this kind of self-focused attitude, you know, avoiding toxic people and all that, it muscles out the reality that we're all imperfect. Friends need us most when they're acting poorly and not thinking about the consequences. True, it can be tough when a friend is doing all the talking and you're doing all the listening, but they still deserve your respect and attention. And you know what? In the long run, it's actually very good for us to stick through other people's struggles. It's how we become better people.

### ***Part 3.***

A World War II veteran processes the devastation he's witnessed from the confines of an intergalactic zoo. As an estranged parent and child meet at a fraught family reunion, a little girl mumbles, from behind a dirty curtain. After the death of his best friend, a lonely king travels to the end of the world and search for answers and walks into a bar.

It may seem counterintuitive, but comedy is often key to a serious story. As a writer, you need your audience to experience a range of emotions, no matter what your genre. Whether you want to evoke fear, grief, or excitement, when people are exposed to one emotion for too long, they become desensitized to it. Comic relief is a tried and true way of creating the varied emotional texture a compelling story needs.

So how can you create this effect in your own stories? Whether you use characters, situations, language, or any combination of the three, timing and contrast are crucial. Take the epic of Gilgamesh. This ancient Mesopotamian tale is possibly the oldest known work of literature. And yet the story remains compelling today, as King Gilgamesh approaches the end of the world. He walks into a bar. We think we're reaching the climax of his story, only to have our expectations subverted. That brief respite allows the tension to build even higher to a later, true climax. It both relieves and creates tension. This lesson also applies to modern stories.

By briefly lightening the mood, you can build tension in your stories exactly when it's needed. The moment at the bar doesn't just amplify the audience's emotional response, it also complicates it.

The wise bartender questions the purpose of Gilgamesh's quest, setting the stage for the final, more nuanced **resolution**. You can use comic relief not only to create contrast with graver moments, but to comment on them.

Sidekicks are one of the most common and direct ways to do this. They can supply sneakily perceptive commentary on the main action, often while simultaneously serving as blundering, hapless **punchlines**. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* takes a different approach. The story continuously alternates between horrific war scenes and wacky science fiction moments. These scenes provide comic relief, but also open a dialogue about what's usually unspeakable, highlighting the arbitrary **nature** of human suffering in a way that makes it more impactful.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* takes yet another approach to comic relief. The narrative style draws upon the perspective of children to infuse a tragic story with poignant **humor**. When the adults funnel decades of tensions over race, class, and family dynamics into their expectations for their children's behavior, you can't help but chuckle with recognition when, at the moment she's expected to put on a perfect performance of politeness, seven-year-old Rahel, quote, raffles herself like a sausage into the dirty airport curtain and won't unravel, end quote.

At the same time, you know her failure to behave will only add to the tension. Afterward, she thinks, quote, the play had gone bad, like pickle in a monsoon, end quote. This punchline **underscores** the reality of the situation. The reunion is so forced and formal, Rahel feels like her family are actors in a play, and she feels powerless in the storm of what's happening.

To make the most of comic relief, think not only about what moment in your story would most benefit from a splash of contrasting **emotion**, but also what message you'd like to convey that you can't say directly. Which of your reader's assumptions would you like to call into question? To see a legend do just that, we highly recommend Trevor Noah's memoir *Born a Crime*. In it, the comedian and daily show host recounts the trials of coming of age during the twilight of South Africa Apartheid with his trademark sense of humor.