

Title: *The Right to Be Cold: One Woman's Story of Protecting Her Culture, the Arctic, and the Whole Planet* by Sheila Watt-Cloutier

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Why this book?

Let's Read for Climate Action with the Halton Climate Collective Reads (#HCCReads) campaign.

The Right to be Cold provides a timely and enlightening look at the human impact of climate change. Part memoir and part call to action, *The Right to Be Cold* explores the parallels between safeguarding the Arctic and the survival of Inuit culture—and ultimately the world—in the face of past, present, and future environmental degradation. Sheila Watt-Cloutier passionately argues that climate change is a human rights issue and one to which all of us on the planet are inextricably linked. This book will lead to discussions about what people everywhere stand to lose if efforts to stop or reverse climate change fail.

About the Author

Let's Talk for Climate Action with Sheila Watt-Cloutier on November 19, 2020. [Watch BPL website for details.](#)

Sheila Watt-Cloutier is one of the world's most recognized environmental and human rights activists. Experienced in working with global decision makers for over a decade, Watt-Cloutier offers a new model for twenty-first-century leadership. She treats the issues of our day—the environment, the economy, foreign policy, global health, and sustainability—not as separate concerns, but as a deeply interconnected whole. In 2007, Watt-Cloutier was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her advocacy work in showing the impact global climate change has on human rights, especially in the Arctic,

where it is felt more immediately and more dramatically than anywhere else in the world.

In addition to her Nobel nomination, Watt-Cloutier has been awarded the Aboriginal Achievement Award, the UN Champion of the Earth Award, and the prestigious Norwegian Sophie Prize. She is also an officer of the Order of Canada. From 1995 to 2002, she served as the elected Canadian president of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC). In 2002, she was elected international chair of the council. Under her leadership, the world's first international legal action on climate change was launched with a petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. At a time when people are seeking solutions, direction, and a sense of hope, this global leader provides a big picture of where we are and where we are headed.

About the Book



One of Canada's most passionate environmental and human rights activists addresses the global threat of climate change from the intimate perspective of her own Arctic childhood.

The Arctic ice is receding each year, but just as irreplaceable is the culture, the wisdom that has allowed the Inuit to thrive in the Far North for so long. And it's not just the Arctic. The whole world is changing in dangerous, unpredictable ways. Sheila Watt-Cloutier has devoted her life to protecting what is threatened and nurturing what has been wounded. In this culmination of her regional, national, and international work over the last twenty-five years, *The Right to Be Cold* explores the parallels between safeguarding the Arctic and the survival of Inuit culture, of which her own background is such an extraordinary example. This is a human story of resilience, commitment, and survival told from the unique vantage point of an Inuk woman who, in spite of many obstacles, rose from humble beginnings in the Arctic to become one of the most influential and decorated environmental, cultural, and human rights advocates in the world. (Excerpted from the publisher)

Author Talks

Sheila Watt-Cloutier discusses [The Right to be Cold](#)

Sheila Watt-Cloutier's Tedx Talk on [Human Trauma and Climate Trauma As One](#)

Book Reviews

"Loss, suppression and ultimate rediscovery of voice are themes that run through this courageous and revelatory memoir." –Naomi Klein, The Globe and Mail

"This is a book that needs to be read as the North becomes central to our future. It offers a perspective grounded in the culture and wisdom of northern people, seen through the lens of a remarkable woman as they seek to preserve 'The Right to be Cold.'" –Lloyd Axworthy, academic, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Nobel Peace Prize nominee

"This is a moving and passionate story from a committed woman who has bridged the ice age to the digital age. Her sophisticated views on the environment and the way the world works from her engaged involvement are brilliant and convincing."

–The Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, journalist and former Governor General

Get the Book

The Right to Be Cold is available to borrow in print or can be downloaded as an eBook:

[OverDrive for Burlington Public Library](#)

[OverDrive for Hamilton Public Library](#)

[OverDrive for Mississauga Library](#)

Discussion Questions (from Amnesty International Book Club)

For discussion tips & tech support: [How to Start Your Own Online Book Club](#)

1. Watt-Cloutier writes that "ice is life." What does she mean by that?
2. When Watt-Cloutier was 10, she was selected to go to school in the south with her friend Lizzie. She describes how one experience that she had while she was away was responsible for a "fear of retribution or censorship whenever I attempted to

express myself honestly.” What was the experience? How did it affect Watt-Cloutier and how did she strive to overcome her fear?

3. Watt-Cloutier returns to her community at the age of 18 to find noisy snowmobiles instead of dog teams. Preoccupied at the time with teenage priorities, she doesn't question what has happened to the dogs and only finds out years later. She writes that, “So horrific was this story, and the wounds caused by it so deep, that no one spoke about it for years. But as I would discover, it was just one of many tragedies to befall my community.” What happened to the dogs and why? How did it affect the community?
4. Watt-Cloutier and other Inuit People were given a number by the federal government. She calls the number – hers was E8-352 – a “dog tag.” What was the purpose of the number and what did it symbolize?
5. Mark Gordon – a childhood friend and second cousin of Watt-Cloutier who was part of the negotiating team for the James Bay agreement – compared the land claims settlement to a story about a snowy owl that had just eaten a lemming. What was the story and how does it relate to the agreement? What does the story say about the relationship between the Inuit and Cree and the federal and provincial governments?
6. In the summer of 1995, Watt-Cloutier attended the Inuit Circumpolar Council general assembly, where she heard in detail about Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) poisoning the Arctic food chain. What do POPs mean for the Inuit in terms of their health and the environment? Why do POPs affect the Arctic disproportionately and how does that impact the Inuit hunting and food-sharing culture? What were some of the barriers to eliminating the use of POPs and how do those barriers relate to the struggle to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow climate change?
7. What are some of the implications of a warming climate for the Arctic and the Inuit? Why is the Arctic like the canary in the coal mine for global warming?
8. What prevents us, as a country and a global community, from making significant reductions to greenhouse gas emissions and preventing further climate change?
9. Where did the expression “the right to be cold” come from and what does it symbolize? Is it the same thing as the right to be protected from climate change?

10. Watt-Cloutier played a fundamental role in a petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which asked that protection from climate change be recognized as a fundamental human right. The petition was titled, "Seeking Relief from Violations Resulting from Global Warming Caused by Acts and Omissions of the United States." What was the outcome of that petition and how did it help form the basis for the continuing discussion about the power of a human rights approach in addressing climate change?

Read-alikes

- [*This Changes Everything*](#) by Naomi Klein
- [*Circling the Midnight Sun*](#) by James Raffan
- [*Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming*](#) by Paul Hawken