



TOOLBOX OF RESOURCES

SEQUENCE 6: Building the Structure of the Branching Story

Target: Educators, Youth Workers, Trainers

Estimated duration: 75–90 minutes

Context: Formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts

Materials: tables, chairs, blackboard/virtual board, printed or digital branching templates, computers or tablets.

Activities can be carried out individually, collaboratively, or in facilitated settings, depending on the educational context and participants' needs.

1. OBJECTIVES

- The aim of this sequence is to guide the construction of the branching architecture of their Interactive Adventure Book. Starting with the protagonist and the climate challenge identified in previous sequences, the next step is to plan the story's key decision points and map the consequences of each choice.
- Apply the logic of non-linear storytelling, in which each decision point leads to different narrative branches and distinct consequences.
- Produce a structured branching map or storyboard that serves as the backbone of their Interactive Adventure Book.
- Reflect on how branching structures can model decision-making, individual agency, and systemic complexity in the context of climate action.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE SEQUENCE

In this phase, choices are planned. The story takes shape as a branching path, in which each decision leads to different consequences, highlighting the cause-and-effect relationship between actions and outcomes; in life as in the climate crisis.



A branching story is not a linear narrative: it is a map of possibilities. Each time the protagonist faces a choice, the story can develop in multiple directions. Some paths lead to positive change; others reveal difficulties, partial failures, or unexpected consequences. This structure allows readers to experience, not just read about, the complexity of climate-related decisions.

This sequence focuses on the planning and visualisation of that structure, before any writing begins. It is a creative and strategic phase that requires participants to think simultaneously as storytellers, as decision-makers, and as climate-aware citizens.

2.1. What is a branching story?

A branching story (also called an interactive narrative) is structured around decision points, often called nodes. At each node, the reader is presented with two or more choices, and each choice opens a new branch. The story ends when all branches reach a conclusion, which may be hopeful, sobering, or somewhere in between. Key components include:

- **Nodes:** moments where the protagonist (and the reader) must make a choice.
- **Branches:** the narrative paths that follow each choice.
- **Outcomes:** the consequences at the end of each branch. What happens as a result of the choices made.

2.2. The cause-and-effect logic in climate storytelling

In a climate-themed branching story, every choice carries weight. Participants are encouraged to think about:

- **Short-term vs. long-term consequences:** a choice that helps immediately may have negative long-term effects, and vice versa.
- **Individual vs. collective impact:** some decisions affect only the protagonist; others ripple outward into communities and ecosystems.
- **Reversibility:** Can the consequences of a bad choice be undone? In some climate scenarios, they cannot.



2.3. Three branching models

Not all branching stories have the same structure. Three models are available, each with its own logic and its own strengths. Choosing the right model before starting to write saves considerable time and produces a more coherent story.

The standard tree

The most straightforward structure. The story opens with a single scene, reaches a first decision point, and splits into two or more branches. Each branch may have its own second decision point before reaching an end. Branches do not converge. Best suited to shorter stories, first attempts at branching narrative, and groups who want a clear and manageable structure.

The bottleneck

The story opens wide with multiple diverging branches, then forces every path through a single unavoidable scene, the bottleneck, before opening out again toward the endings. The bottleneck is the moment of reckoning that no reader can avoid, regardless of the choices made earlier. Each reader arrives there shaped by their path, but they all arrive. Best suited to stories where the climate crisis demands a collective moment of truth, and where the author wants to control one key scene while still offering genuine choice on either side of it.

The string of pearls

A sequence of mandatory scenes, the pearls, connected by a spine, with optional side paths hanging off each pearl. Every reader passes through every pearl; the side paths offer different experiences, detours, and revelations before rejoining the string at the next pearl. Best suited to longer or more episodic stories, stories set across multiple locations or time periods, and groups who want to maintain authorial control over key moments while still building in meaningful choice.



3. PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 - Introduction to branching logic

Duration: 10-15 min

Familiarise oneself with the concept of branching narrative by finding brief, concrete examples or referring to the provided templates.

- What makes each choice difficult or interesting?
- Which choices feel more realistic or more dramatic?
- What kinds of climate consequences follow from each decision?

Activity 2 - Mapping the branching structure

Duration: 25-30 min

Use a Branching Map Template ([Annex 1](#)) to plan the structure of their own story.

Tip: Defining the ending scenes before writing the rest of the story can help structure the story and define its content.

Standard tree ([Annex 2](#)), five steps:

- **Step 1: Defining the opening scene:** Who is the protagonist? Where are they? What is the climate challenge they are facing at the start?
- **Step 2: Identifying the first decision point:** What is the first important choice the protagonist must make? Describe two or three possible options and ask: what kind of person makes each choice?
- **Step 3: Developing each branch:** For each choice, trace what happens next: new scenes, complications, new characters. Each branch should feel different in tone and experience.
- **Step 4: Identifying a second decision point (optional):** Within one or more branches, introduce a second choice. This is also the moment to consider whether branches converge or remain separate.
- **Step 5: Defining the endings:** Each branch must reach a conclusion. Create at least three different endings: one hopeful, one difficult, one ambiguous or open.



Bottleneck ([Annex 3](#)), six steps:

- **Step 1: Define the opening scene:** Who is the protagonist? Where are they? What is the climate challenge they are facing at the start?
- **Step 2: Identify the first decision point:** What is the first important choice the protagonist must make? Describe two or three possible options. Each option opens a different branch leading toward the bottleneck.
- **Step 3: Develop each branch:** For each choice, trace what happens next. Branches should feel tonally distinct; the protagonist's situation, relationships, and knowledge differ depending on the path taken. All branches must plausibly lead to the same bottleneck scene.
- **Step 4: Write the bottleneck scene:** This is the unavoidable moment every reader reaches, regardless of the path they took. Define what happens here, why it cannot be avoided, and what the protagonist brings to it from their earlier choices. The bottleneck should feel like a reckoning, not a coincidence.
- **Step 5: Identify the second decision point:** After the bottleneck, the story opens again. What is the new choice the protagonist faces? This decision carries more weight than the first because the protagonist is now changed by what they have been through.
- **Step 6: Define the endings:** Each post-bottleneck branch reaches a conclusion. Create at least three different endings: one hopeful, one difficult, one ambiguous or open. Consider how the tone of each ending relates to the path taken before the bottleneck.

String of pearls ([Annex 4](#)), five steps:

- **Step 1: Define the string:** How many pearls will the story have? Three to four is a good starting point. Each pearl is a mandatory scene that every reader will encounter. Name each pearl briefly and note what the protagonist knows, feels, or has lost by the time they reach it.
- **Step 2: Write the pearls:** For each pearl, define the core scene, where the protagonist is, what the climate challenge looks like at this stage of the story, and what the reader must understand before leaving this scene. Pearls should feel complete in themselves, like chapters.



- **Step 3: Design the side paths:** Hanging off each pearl are optional branches. Decide how many side paths each pearl has (one or two is usually enough) and where each one leads: a dead end that reveals backstory, an alternative route that offers a different experience before rejoining the string, or a richer detour with a small secondary decision of its own.
- **Step 4: Identify the decision pearl:** At least one pearl should be an active decision point where the side paths offer meaningfully different experiences before converging again. Mark this pearl clearly on the map and ensure both of its side paths rejoin the string at the next pearl.
- **Step 5: Define the endings:** The final pearl leads to the endings. Unlike the other pearls, the last one does not rejoin the string; it opens outward into two or three distinct conclusions. Create at least one hopeful, one difficult, and one ambiguous ending.

Activity 3 - Visualising the map

Duration: 15-20 min

Once the branching structure has been planned, a visual map can be created. This can take different forms depending on context and tools available:

- Hand-drawn tree diagram or flowchart on paper or large-format cards
- Post-it note mapping on a wall or table
- Digital flowchart using tools such as Canva or Twine
- Templates

The visual map will become a navigation tool when writing the story in subsequent sequences. It should clearly show numbered nodes, named branches, and colour-coded endings (e.g. green for hopeful, red for difficult, yellow for ambiguous).

Activity 4 - Checking maps and decision points

Duration: 10-15 min

Verifying all paths, and consequences, branches that could be developed further, and reflecting on the climate logic: are the consequences realistic? Are they surprising?



4. DIGITAL TOOLBOX – Tools for the Sequence

This sequence may include optional digital tools to support the creation and visualisation of branching maps and story structures.

Category: Flowchart & Branching Map Tools

- [Canva](#)
- [Twine](#) – open-source tool for creating and prototyping interactive branching stories

5. HOW TO APPLY THESE ACTIVITIES IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONTEXTS

Formal education contexts (e.g. school)

- Integration with language arts: linking branching narrative to literary analysis of cause and effect, narrative structure, and genre
- Cross-curricular work with science or geography: validating climate consequences for scientific accuracy
- Written reflection on planning choices as an argumentative or analytical exercise

Non-formal and informal contexts (youth work, community settings)

- Collaborative map-building as a group facilitation activity, using physical materials (large paper, sticky notes, coloured markers)
- Role-playing each branch: participants act out the consequences of different choices to test their narrative logic
- Community storytelling: drawing on local environmental experiences when designing branches and outcomes

6. ADAPTATIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS WITH SLD

- Pre-structured branching map templates with boxes and arrows already drawn, requiring only short text or image insertion
- Option to use images, symbols, or icons instead of written descriptions at each node
- Simplified branching structure: one decision point, two branches, two endings



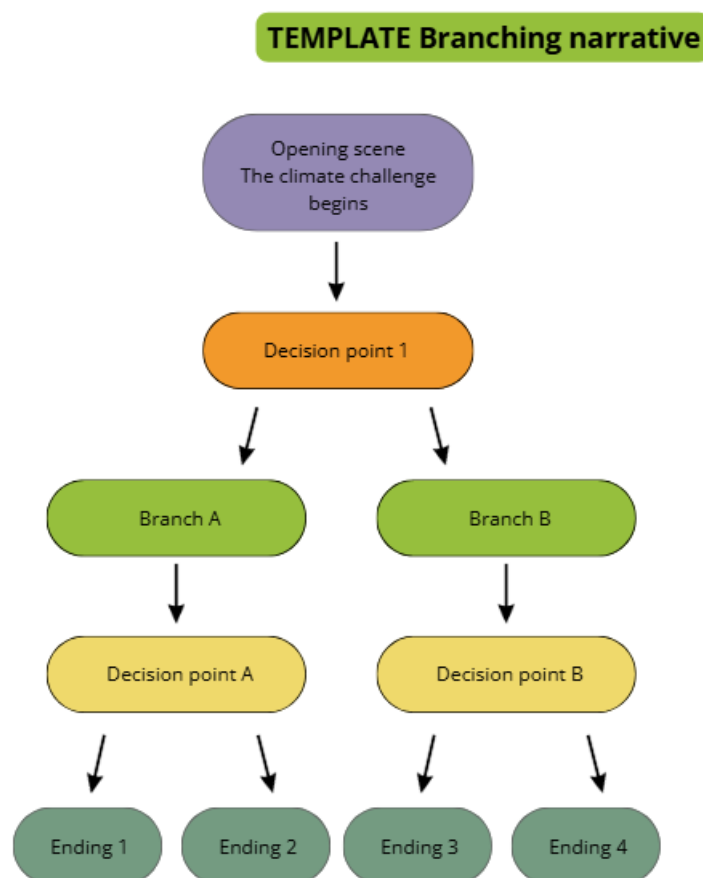
- Colour-coding system for branches and outcomes to aid visual comprehension
- Audio support for reading node descriptions and branch labels

7. RELATED TUTORIALS

- [Tutorial 3 – Crafting Compelling Climate Narratives](#)
- [Tutorial 4 – Interactive Storytelling Techniques \(Role-Playing & Decision-Making\)](#)
- [Tutorial 5 – Using Digital & Multimedia Tools for Storytelling](#)

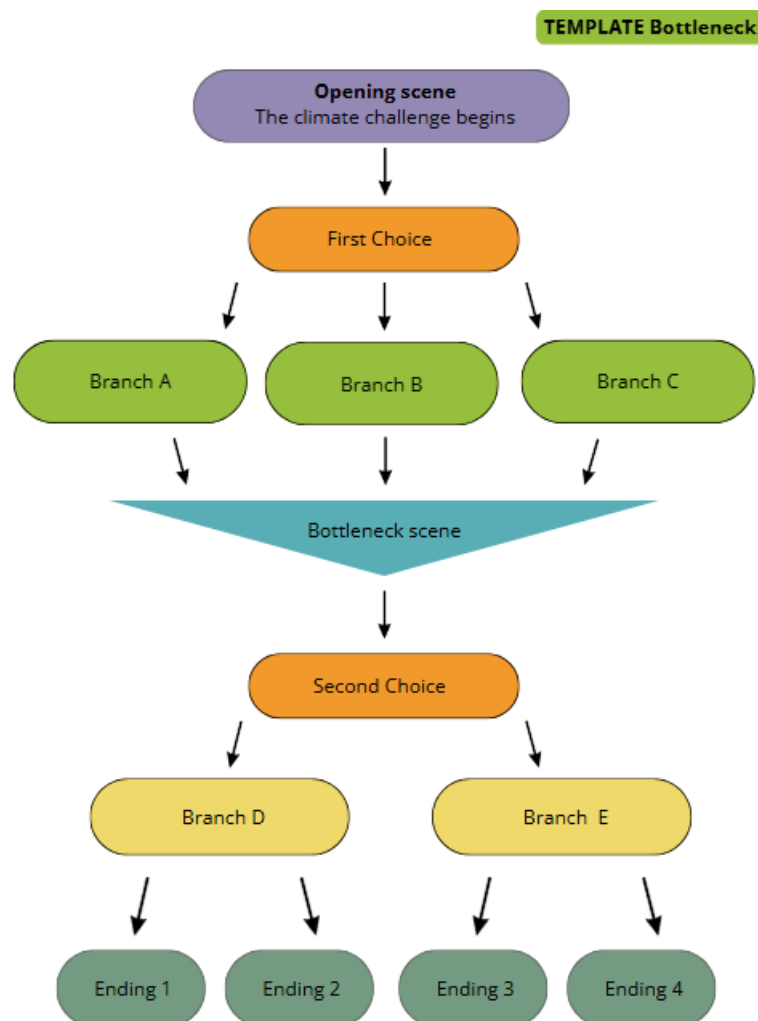
TEMPLATES:

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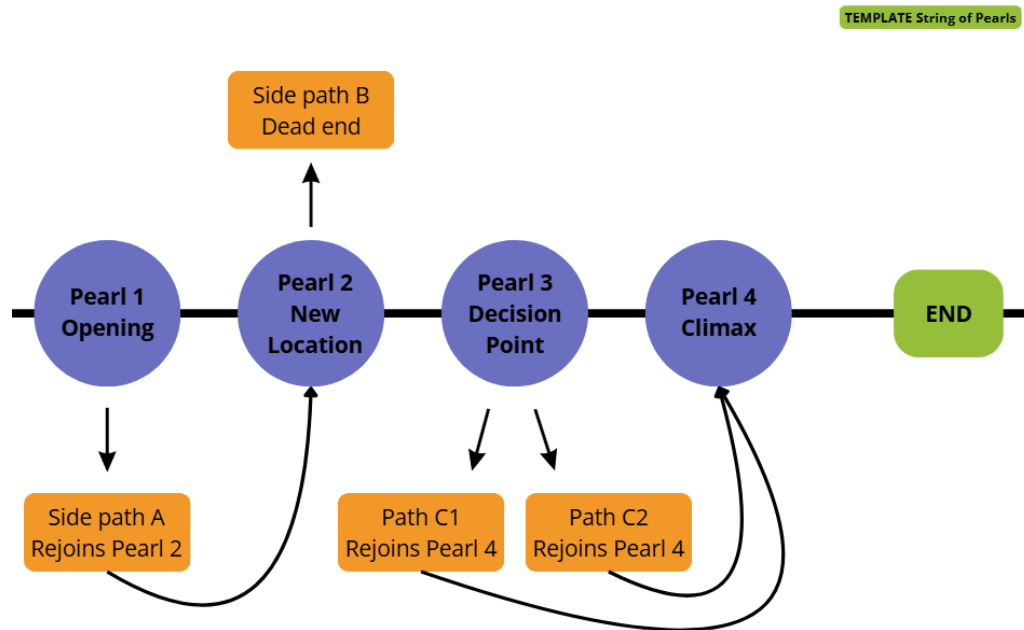


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SEQUENCE 6 – Branching Map Template

Building the Structure of the Branching Story

STEP 1 – Opening Scene

□ Where does the story begin?

Describe the setting: place, time, atmosphere. What does the protagonist see or feel?

⚡ What is the climate challenge the protagonist faces right now?

Be specific: drought, flooding, pollution, deforestation, displacement...

STEP 2 – Decision Point 1

? What is the first key choice the protagonist must make?

Describe the situation that forces a decision.

► Choice A

What does the protagonist do?

► Choice B

What does the protagonist do?

STEP 3 – Branch Development

Develop what happens after each choice. Add new scenes, characters, complications.

☐ Branch A – What happens next? New scene, new character, or new complication...	☐ Branch B – What happens next? New scene, new character, or new complication...
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STEP 4 – Decision Point 2 (optional)

Within one or both branches, is there a second key choice? Fill in as many as apply.

☐ Branch A – Second choice Describe the new decision...	☐ Branch B – Second choice Describe the new decision...
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STEP 5 – Endings

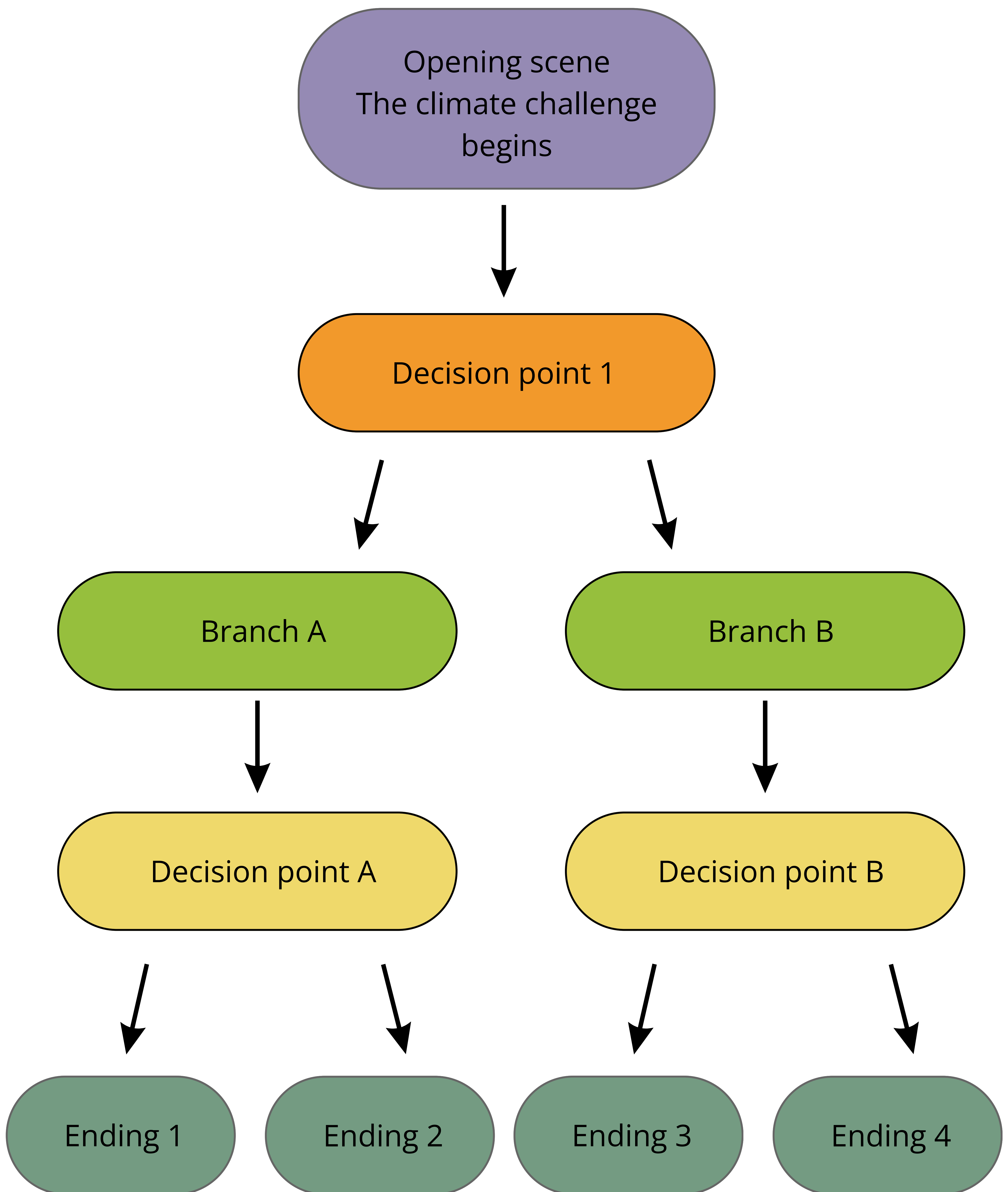
Write at least three different endings for your story. Each should feel distinct.

☐ Hopeful Ending Things improve, at least partly. What changes?	☐ Difficult Ending Things go wrong or are lost. What consequence?	☐ Ambiguous Ending The situation is unresolved. What is left open?
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☐ Reflection: Which ending feels most realistic? Which feels most important for readers to experience?

Your reflection:

TEMPLATE Branching narrative



TEMPLATE Branching narrative

