

Reinventing a Clean and Just Economy

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Examine a case study in which an entrepreneur creates a decentralized renewable energy company to provide both economic and environmental benefits to the community.
- Identify non-economic factors that can influence economic decision making.
- Analyze strategies for reinventing the economy based on impact, benefits, fairness and potential barriers.
- Create two-minute videos that could be used to educate the public about these strategies to reinvent the economy.

Themes

- Capitalism
- Economics
- Incentives
- Just Transition
- Renewable Energy

Materials Needed

All materials are available for download at thischangeseverything.org/studyguide.

Film clip: "Red Cloud Renewable Energy" (length: 3:38)

Clip Summary: The solar power company, Lakota Solar Enterprises, provides clean energy training and jobs for an Indian Reservation in North Dakota and other native communities. The company's vision is to help First Nations become energy independent before mainstream America. The clip shows Henry Red Cloud providing training to members of the Northern Cheyenne.

Handout: Idea Analysis (p. 34-35 of this guide)

Activities

1. Show students the video clip, “Red Cloud Renewable Energy” (length: 2:35) from the *This Changes Everything* documentary. Focus student viewing by asking them to identify what motivated Henry Red Cloud to start his own solar power company.

Discuss:

- Why did the owner of Red Cloud Renewable Energy choose to leave his job in the steel industry so he could start his own solar power company?
- How does the solar power company provide both economic and environmental benefits to the community?
- In the video, Vanessa Braided Hair explains the principle, “Take what you need, and then put back into the land.” How is this perspective about land use and economic activity different from capitalism’s continual push for growth?
- Would a solar power company like Red Cloud Renewable Energy help the economy and environment in your community? Why or why not? What incentives could your community provide to create more clean energy jobs in your area?

2. Tell students that in the book, *This Changes Everything*, author Naomi Klein argues that we should choose to address climate change and develop the economy in ways that make society fairer and more humane. She proposes a number of strategies that she believes would fundamentally change our economy to reflect humanitarian values, create good jobs, and protect the air, land and water:

- reducing the gap between rich and poor (ex: basic income for all, higher taxes for the affluent)
- regulating corporations to reduce or eliminate greenhouse gas emissions (ex: tax each unit of pollution, enforce emissions limits on power plants and industrial facilities)
- rejecting extractive projects like deep-water drilling, fracking and tar sands mining
- investing heavily in infrastructure like public transit, health, and education
- re-localizing economies based around the production of food and goods
- recognizing the rights of indigenous people to protect lands from extraction
- putting in place community-controlled clean energy systems

3. Using the provided handout, have students research and write a brief explanation of each proposed strategy. They should also predict short- and long-term results of each proposal, and determine who would benefit from these strategies and who wouldn't.

4. As a class, discuss:

- Are the ideas proposed in these strategies fair? Why or why not?
- What obstacles might prevent these types of changes from happening?
- Which approaches do students support and why?
- How would these strategies affect your community if they were implemented?

5. Organize the class into groups of 2-3 students and have each group create a two-minute video that could be used to educate the public about one of the strategies from the handout. For visuals, students could consider using an interview format, the creative use of photographs, etc. When the groups have finished their videos, share them at a mini film festival with another class, with the principal, or on social media.

Go Further

- Learn more about the term, "just transition." Have students research its meaning as it applies to climate change. Then, discuss this quote from the Call to Action statement for Canada's March for Jobs, Justice, and the Climate: "We don't have to choose between the economy or the environment. Real climate action means investing in mass public transit, clean energy infrastructure and affordable housing. It means expanding low-carbon sectors like healthcare, education and sustainable agriculture. By taking real climate action, we can create an economy that is more fair and equal and offers hundreds of thousands of good new jobs." Have students explain how the different parts of this statement support the idea of a just transition.
- Analyze organizations that are based on worker and community ownership. Have small student groups visit the Beautiful Solutions section of the *This Changes Everything* website (<https://solutions.thischangeseverything.org/>) and choose a story featuring a cooperative, credit union, clinic, or similar enterprise. Alternatively, groups could choose an organization in your community or one that they learn about in their own research. Each group should create an infographic that illustrates how the organization they selected functions and the values, goals, and incentives that drive its activities. Do students have their own strategies for how to develop a clean and just economy that the group should consider? Allow time for each group to share a summary of their discussion with the rest of the class.

Lesson 5 Handout: Idea Analysis

In the book, *This Changes Everything*, author Naomi Klein proposes a number of strategies that she believes would fundamentally change our economy in ways that reflect humanitarian values, create good jobs, and protect the air, land and water.

Use the table below to analyze these ideas.

Proposed Strategy	Brief Explanation	Short-term result	Long-term result	Who benefits? Who doesn't?
Reduce the gap between rich and poor (ex: basic income for all, higher taxes for the affluent).				
Regulate corporations to reduce or eliminate greenhouse gas emissions (ex: tax each unit of pollution, enforce emissions limits on power plants and industrial facilities).				
Reject extractive projects like deep-water drilling, fracking and tar sands mining.				

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Invest heavily in public infrastructure like public transit, health, and education.				
Re-localize economies based around production of food and goods.				
Recognize the rights of indigenous people to protect lands from extraction.				
Put in place community-controlled clean energy systems.				