

Crisis and Opportunity

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Explain how a crisis can be a moment of change, and that our response to crisis can lead to something better or worse.
- Analyze the recovery effort of the town of Greensburg, Kansas following its destruction by a super tornado in 2007.
- Create specific plans for how they would reimagine and rebuild a model “green school” if a crisis like a natural disaster destroyed your school.

Themes

- Civic Engagement
- Economics
- Democracy
- Environmental Stewardship
- Social Justice

Materials Needed

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

Handout: A Model “Green Town” (p. 45-46 of this guide)

Film clip:

- “Climate Crisis in China” (6:38) (for optional Go Further activity)
- “Transportation in New Delhi” (2:10) (for optional Go Further activity)

Activities

1. Ask students to consider the question, “Can a crisis also be an opportunity?” Then give each student a handout and instruct them to read the text and answer the related questions. After students have completed the handout, discuss their responses as a class. Emphasize how in the process of reinventing their town, the citizens of Greensburg re-energized civic participation, sought solutions that benefited everyone, and created an alternative economy that worked in partnership with nature for the success of the community.

2. Ask students to now imagine that their school has been destroyed by a major storm and it is up to them to rebuild it. Divide the class into teams of 3-4 students. Each team will develop a plan to reinvent their school as a model “green school.”

Following the example of the citizens of Greensburg, teams will first identify a set of core values shared by members of the school community. For the purposes of this assignment, the value of “being good environmental stewards” will be a given. To determine other values, all students should survey five of their friends and ask them

what phrases, values, and attitudes should represent what is best and most important about your school.

Teams should then meet to review the responses they have gathered, find common threads among them, and pare them down to a set of 4-6 core values (including being good environmental stewards) that they believe best represent the school community and should be used to guide the rebuilding process.

3. Have teams connect each of their core values to a specific strategy they will use to create the model "green school." Some examples of values and related strategies could include: "Be good stewards of the environment" - Install solar panels on the roof of the school, or "Promote healthy living" - Provide space for an organic vegetable garden. Conduct additional research as needed. Students should create a poster or digital slideshow to display their ideas.

4. Allow time for each group to share their plans with the class. Discuss which parts of their plans your school could implement now and how students could take action to make those things happen.

Go Further

- Explore how something considered a "crisis" affects how we spend our time and money. Start the discussion by having students bring in news articles about a recent crisis, such as a natural disaster. How have citizens and government leaders responded to the situation? What has prompted them to take action? Then have students watch the *This Changes Everything* film clip, "Climate Crisis in China" (length: 6:38). What does Naomi Klein mean when she says, "China is literally choking on its own economic growth." How did the air quality crisis provide a moment of change for China? What are some specific ways that Chinese citizens responded to this crisis and fought for something better? What strategies shown in the video demonstrate that China is starting to shift its model of economic growth to reduce its negative impact on the climate? What motivated the actions of both citizens and government leaders? Based on this case study, what would it take for climate change to be considered a crisis in other areas of the world and prompt more aggressive levels of response? How could this happen in your community?
- Design a better transportation system for your city. Begin by having students review and discuss the *This Changes Everything* video, "Transportation in New Delhi" (length: 2:10). How do the 15% of residents in Delhi who own a car affect the quality of life for everyone else in the city? How can the transportation crisis in Delhi be an opportunity to create a better mobility pattern for all? After discussing the video, divide students into small groups and have them brainstorm a list of the various ways that people get from place to place in your community (ex: car, bus, train, bicycle, walking, etc.). Use a T-chart to discuss the pros and cons of each type of transportation (ex: how much does each benefit or harm the environment, what impact does each have on human health, etc.). How does your community's existing infrastructure affect people's transportation choices? How could your city's mobility patterns be reimagined and improved? Conduct additional research as needed. Have groups then create an online slideshow that proposes specific changes to your city's transportation system that are more environmentally-friendly and improve public health. Allow time for each group to present their ideas to the class. Consider inviting a city official to hear the student presentations and give feedback on their proposal.

Lesson 7 Handout**A Model “Green Town”**

Instructions: read the excerpt from the book *This Changes Everything* below, then respond to the questions. Excerpt from *This Changes Everything*, by Naomi Klein:

“In 2007, a super tornado ripped through the [rural town of Greensburg, Kansas], turning about 95 percent of the town into rubble. As a result of an extraordinary, community-led process that began just days after the disaster, with neighbors holding meetings in tents amid the wreckage of their former lives, Greensburg today stands as a model “green town,” often described as the greenest in America. The hospital, city hall, and school have all been built to the highest certification level issued by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). And the town has become a destination for hundreds of policy makers, anxious to learn more about its low-energy lighting and its cutting-edge green architecture and waste reduction, as well as the wind turbines that earn municipal revenue by producing more power than local residents need.

Most striking of all, this “living laboratory” is taking place in the heart of an overwhelmingly Republican-voting county, where a great many people are entirely unconvinced that climate change is real. But those debates seem to matter little to residents: the shared experience of tremendous loss, as well as the outpouring of generosity that follow the disaster, have, in Greensburg, rekindled the values of land stewardship and intergenerational responsibility that have deep roots in rural life. “The number one topic at those tent meetings was talking about who we are—what are our values?” recalls Greensburg mayor Bob Dixson, a former postmaster who comes from a long line of farmers. He added, “Sometimes we agreed to disagree, but we were still civil to each other. And let’s not forget that our ancestors were stewards of the land. My ancestors lived in the original green homes: sod houses.... We learned that the only true green and sustainable things in life are how we treat each other.” (pg 406-407)

Questions:

1. How is a crisis like a natural disaster a moment of change that can lead to something better or worse?

2. According to the text, how did values play a central role in the decisions made by the citizens of Greensburg to build a model "green town?"

3. How did the crisis faced by the people of Greensburg transform these types of activities: Political, Social, Economic?

4. Would you describe the Greensburg, Kansas recovery as a success? Justify your response.
