

People, the Planet, and Economic Growth

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze a quotation that describes the conflict between the finite resources of the planet and the current push for growth.
- Break down a case study that illustrates the relationships among people, the environment, and economic growth.
- Work with a partner to develop a solution to the conflict presented in the case study.

Themes

- Environmentalism
- Social Inequality
- Economic Development
- Capitalism

Materials Needed

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

Handout: People, the Planet, and Economic Growth [p. 17-18 of this guide]

Film clip: "People, the Planet, and Economic Growth" (length: 7:13)

Clip Summary: As part of the push for rapid economic growth, the government of India supported the efforts of a private company to build a coal-based power plant in Sompeta, Andhra Pradesh. If the plant had been built, it would have covered the local wetland with landfill. Thousands of community members rely on the wetland for their livelihood and believe that the power plant will make them poorer.

Book excerpt: for Go Further: "Growing the Caring Economy, Shrinking the Careless One" (pg 93-95, *This Changes Everything*)

Activities

1. Ask the class to record their thoughts in writing about this quote from Naomi Klein:

"What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a reduction in the use of finite resources. What the economy needs to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. These two needs are at war with one another. Only one set of rules can change, and it is not the laws of nature."

Students can consider the following questions as they write: How does the use of finite resources like fossil fuels benefit the economy? How is it harming the environment? What is Klein saying is the way to end this conflict?

2. Give each student a handout and show the class where Sompeta, Andhra Pradesh, India is on a map (an online search will quickly bring this up). Explain that a situation in Sompeta can serve as a case study for exploring issues related to economic growth and its impact on people and the environment. Tell students that they are going to watch a video and record details about these issues on their handout. Review the questions before playing the video so students will know what information to watch for. Then show the clip, "People, the Planet, and Economic Growth" (length: 7:13) from the *This Changes Everything* documentary. It may be helpful for students to be able to watch the clip more than once in order to get all of the information.

3. Ask students how they would resolve the struggle in Sompeta. Are there alternative strategies for providing electricity that are better for people and the planet? Have students work with a partner to consider the needs of those involved, brainstorm and discuss possible solutions, and decide on the best option. Pairs should explain in writing their solution and their rationale for choosing it.

Go Further

- Evaluate different methods that society uses to measure progress. Gross Domestic Product (GDP), for example, measures the size of an economy based on factors such as production, income, and expenditures. GDP indicators influence important decisions about interest rates, investments, wage increases, and other factors that affect quality of life. Some believe, however, that it is a mistake to place too much emphasis on GDP as a measure of progress. They argue GDP does not do a good job of measuring human well-being, and does not take into account harm to the environment. Have students conduct an in-depth investigation of GDP and alternative measures of progress (Example: <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/>). Create a chart that organizes information for each method about what specifically is measured, how it is calculated, and its limitations and criticisms. Which method do students believe is the best measure of progress? Why?
- Explore alternatives to economic growth that serve human needs and minimize the impact on the environment. Begin by having students read the *This Changes Everything* book excerpt, "Growing the Caring Economy, Shrinking the Careless One" which can be found online. List out the strategies described in the text. Then, have student pairs read and discuss the examples of real-life alternatives provided in the Build Another World activity by the German organization [fairbindung.org: http://www.fairbindung.org/bildungaktuelleprojekte/endlichwachstum/beyond-growth-methods/chapter-5-outlook-and-alternatives/](http://www.fairbindung.org/bildungaktuelleprojekte/endlichwachstum/beyond-growth-methods/chapter-5-outlook-and-alternatives/) Afterwards, discuss which of these strategies may already be a part of students' lives. Are there any that they would like to try?

Handout Lesson 2

People, the Planet, and Economic Growth

Instructions: Watch the video, "People, the Planet, and Economic Growth" from the documentary, *This Changes Everything*. Then respond to the questions below.

1. What action did the government of India take in the area of Sompeta that upset local residents?

2. Summarize the concerns that the people of Sompeta have about the proposed coal-fired power plants.

3. What policies and incentives has the government of India put in place to stimulate private energy investments in coal-fired power plants? Who will benefit from these measures?

4. In the video, V.S. Krishna of the Human Rights Forum criticizes what he calls India's "mindless pursuit of growth." What are his concerns?

5. How does Naomi Klein (the narrator) describe the Western model of economic growth?

6. Does nature have limits in terms of how much economic growth it can support? Why or why not?
