
Climate Change vs. Economic Growth

Videos:

“The Problem with Consumerism”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0ckvo2Z5BU>

(10:21 minutes)

“Top 3 Ways Economic Growth will Solve Climate Change”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjNtnx2AUC4>

(9:05 minutes)

Guide:

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video.

Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

Analysis Questions:

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. In 2009, South Korea invested 2% of its GDP into environmental projects to spur economic growth and reduce carbon emissions. According to Our Changing Climate (OCC), what was the result of this?
3. In the Learn Liberty video, Trevor Kraus said: “Yes, businesses want to make as much money as possible, but increasing their revenue is only one way they can do that.” What was the other way he explained?
4. OCC said Americans spend \$2.6 billion on wrapping paper for Christmas. Does this seem wasteful to you? Why/Why not?
5. Trevor Kraus cited this quote from Matt Ridley: “It will always be possible to raise living standards further by lowering the amount of resource that is used to produce a given output.” What did Ridley mean by this?
6. OCC said that the consumer experience in the U.S. is driven by “a complex mix of personal desire, social pressures, status signaling, stress, and propaganda....” Do you agree with this assessment? Why/Why not?
7. Trevor Kraus said that while it might seem wasteful to have “three bakeries on the same city block,” the fact that these bakeries must compete with each other leads to more efficient production. Have you encountered areas where there seem to be a wasteful number of businesses? Did this video change your thoughts on that? Why/Why not?

8. OCC said that the average American uses over 100 times the energy of someone from India. Did this surprise you? Why/Why not?
9. Trevor Kraus said that it's in all of our best interest "to be as efficient as possible and to waste as little as possible." Why is this? How do we benefit from efficiency? Is it just an environmental benefit, or are there other benefits?
10. OCC said: "Companies and corporations have a vested interest in making you buy more stuff...which is why they slap green labels onto their products and advertise everywhere." Have you seen companies use climate change and sustainability in their advertising? What do you think of this strategy? Have you bought products because they were marketed as green?
11. Trevor Kraus showed that despite America's growing population, the U.S. was using less steel, aluminum, and copper compared to their peak use, and that farms are using less fertilizer and water while producing more food. Did this surprise you? Why/Why not?
12. OCC said: "Over the last 40 years, global emissions have skyrocketed despite dramatic expansions of renewable and energy efficiency technologies." Does this impact your views on renewable energy? If so, how?
13. What were some of the reasons that Trevor Kraus gave for cities being good for the environment?
14. OCC used the word "decoupling." What does "decoupling" mean in this context?
15. Trevor Kraus said: "Contrary to popular belief, as people get wealthier, they actually start to care more about their environment." How did he explain this?
16. OCC cited a study that proposed that "consumption levels must drop by as much as 95% in countries with today's highest per capita consumers." Do you think this is a realistic option? Do you think people in the developed world would be willing to drop their consumption levels by this much? Would you be willing to do that?
17. Trevor Kraus said: "If you're struggling to put food on the table, you don't care whether your beef is grass-fed." What did he mean by this?
18. OCC suggested that the government could require fossil fuel companies to "address [their] complicity in climate change by leaving fossil fuels in the ground and developing renewable energy, rapid public transportation, and energy efficiency technologies." Is it the government's place to require companies to do something like this? Why/Why not?
19. Before watching these videos, had you heard about the degrowth movement? If so, what did you think about it?
20. How concerned are you about climate change?
21. Did these two videos share any common ground? Were there any points on which they agreed? If so, what were they?

22. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
23. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
24. What else would you like to learn about this topic?