

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

U.S. Economy's Troubles Hurt Alternative Energy Plans 10/24/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/july-dec08/energy_10-24.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the issues Americans are concerned about that have been pushed out of the spotlight by the economic crisis?

2. What has been happening to gas prices recently?

3. What is an alternative fuel? Name an example.

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. What happened that could put development of renewable fuels at risk?

ANSWER

As the economy falters, investment money dries up, demand for gas goes down and oil prices fall, causing advocates for more American alternative energy sources to worry that previous excitement for new energy technology will be lost.

2. How are oil prices connected to how the overall economy is doing?

ANSWER

Because so much of the world economy depends on oil – transportation, heating, energy – the price of oil is tied to how investors think the overall economy is performing. As the world enters a possible global economic slowdown, or recession, the price of oil has dropped dramatically from the summer of 2008.

3. What is OPEC doing to try to drive oil prices up?

ANSWER

OPEC, a group of twelve countries in the Middle East, Africa and South America, announced on October 24 that they were going to produce 1.5 million less barrels of oil a day. This is an effort to limit supply and therefore drive up the price of oil.

4. What are some of the reasons that alternative fuels were getting so much attention before gas prices dropped?

ANSWER

Concern about fossil fuels causing global warming and the fact that most oil reserves are located in unstable parts of the world have encouraged Americans to find new sources of energy.

5. Why is it hard for alternative energy companies to get loans now?

ANSWER

Banks and investors are afraid to loan to each other, and that means less lending to companies who want to develop wind and solar.

6. Why might it be hard for either Obama or McCain to fund their alternative fuel proposals?

ANSWER

As the economy tanks and people spend and make less money, the government will collect less revenue in taxes, making it harder to fund expensive alternative fuel projects, while still paying for basics such as roads, schools, courts and the military.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1 When gas prices were high this summer, did your family members change their behavior to spend less money? Have things changed since the price of gas dropped?

2. Do you think alternative fuels are something the government should spend taxpayer money? What are the pros and cons of spending money to develop alternative fuels?

3. What do you think the presidential candidates should do about their promises to fund alternative fuels? Should they pledge to spend less, or borrow money in order to carry out their original plans? Why?

4.Name an energy source that you think we will use more of in the future. What are some of the benefits and risks of that type of energy?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.