

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

High Gas Prices Changing Habits, Consumer Choices, 07/15/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/july-dec08/gas_7-15.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 is happening to the price of gas?

2. Even if you don't drive yourself, in what ways have higher gas prices impacted your daily life?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. How has the high cost of gasoline impacted the car industry in negative or positive ways?

ANSWER

Sport utility vehicles, or SUVs, were the most popular vehicles on the market for some two decades, but rising fuel costs have curbed their production. Sales of trucks and SUVs are at their lowest mark since 1995, causing Nissan, General Motors, Ford and Toyota to all announce they are scaling back production.

MotorTrend Magazine reported that more fuel-efficient Honda Civics were sold in one month than Hummer is on target to sell all year. The shift is the most drastic change the car industry has seen in decades.

2. What has been the impact of high gas prices on public transportation systems?

ANSWER

More and more people are opting for public transportation if it's available, in some cases overwhelming bus and train systems.

Transit agencies in Denver and Atlanta have had to add parking lots to accommodate all the new transit users, in some cases renting space from movie theaters and churches.

3. Why have higher gas prices created a greater demand for telecommuting?

ANSWER

Telecommuting is also receiving renewed attention, and a growing number of students are choosing to take online courses instead of driving to university campuses.

Villanova University's engineering school has seen an unexpected 40 percent increase in online enrollment this summer. College administrators attribute the jump to high price of gas.

4. Rural schools face an especially large challenge with high gas prices, what impact is this having?

ANSWER

Rural school districts have been hit especially hard by the gas prices. One school district in rural Minnesota is saving \$65,000 in busing costs by switching to a four day week with slightly longer hours on those days. At least 86 school districts are on four-day weeks, according to the National School Boards Association.

5. How are higher gas prices impacting housing and real estate trends?

ANSWER

While mass migrations into cities have not started just yet, there are signs that more Americans are seeing the advantage of living in an urban location.

In a June survey of Coldwell Banker real estate agents, 96 percent said that rising gas prices were a concern to their clients, and 78 percent said higher fuel costs are increasing clients' desires for city living.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. What do you think? How has the rising cost of gasoline impacted your daily life? Compare the situations described in the article to your own experience? How are your experiences similar? How are they different?

2. What are some ways that you could change your own daily life to use less gas? How reasonable are some of these changes? Are there some things about your life that you would not change no matter how high gas prices become? Why?

3. Some environmentalists are happy about the rise in gas prices because the situation is forcing people to change their consumption habits. Do you think it is good that fewer people are driving, which means less crowded roads, fewer traffic accidents and less carbon dioxide in the air? Or do higher gas prices mean that only rich people can use cars and poorer people are forced to move and make sacrifices?

4. This article describes the impact that high gas prices are having on communities. Do a little research. Why are the prices rising? What might reduce the price of gas?

Look to the NewsHour Transportation Archive for more information:

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/topic/transportation/>

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.