

Here comes the Sun (it might save the world)

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Renewables: Around the world, solar panels, such as these at the Xinyi power station in Songxi, China, produce huge volumes of clean, free electricity.

Is cheap energy the solution to everything? The world is in the middle of a silent revolution in solar energy. Some experts are saying it will lead us towards a brighter future.

What's happening?

Future archaeologists might think the modern world worshipped the Sun, when they find rows and rows of vast black panels positioned to maximise their exposure to solar rays.

Last year, manufacturers worked out how to make solar panel cells that can convert more than 30% of the sunlight they receive into electricity, and now the world is seeing a solar panel boom.

Find out more

After centuries of burning wood to keep us warm and cook our food, humans discovered coal, which is a much more efficient source of energy. It is this, historians say, that fuelled the **Industrial Revolution**.

But we now know that the more fossil fuels we use, the worse the climate crisis gets, as well as the illnesses associated with fossil fuel pollution.

Renewable energy, on the other hand, means we can continue to enjoy some of the benefits of industrialisation without destroying our health or that of the planet.

Is cheap energy the solution to everything?

Some say

Yes! Cheap energy brought us the Industrial Revolution. Now, in clean form, it will make us richer, healthier, and happier.

Others think

No! Replacing fossil fuels with clean energy will only persuade us we can keep our wasteful lifestyles regardless of the environmental damage they cause.

Some people say

"Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth."

The Buddha (563 – 483 BC), religious teacher

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What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - How excited are you at the prospect of a solar-powered future?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: Will the future be better than the present? Explain why.

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - You are made Minister of Energy for a day. What changes would you make and why?

5. Express

What do others believe? - Organise a class debate on the question, "Is humanity doomed?"

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - The year is 2050 and the whole world is running on cheap renewable energy. Write a diary entry describing what life is like.

Glossary

Industrial Revolution - A period of sudden, rapid industrialisation that transforms a country from an agricultural to an industrial economy.