

18.11 European Teens Strike for Climate Action

Sources: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/31/world/europe/climate-change-protests-students.html>

Background: In January 2019, European high school students in Belgium, Germany, France, Sweden, and Switzerland began a series of weekly school boycott days demanding international action to reverse global warming and climate change. A Belgium demonstration had over 100,000 participants. In France, an online student petition quickly drew over two million signatures. In Germany students carried signs reading “Climate S.O.S.” A 16-year-old Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg, is credited with initiating the school strike movement. In January 2019 she addressed the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland with a call for immediate action.

Instructions: Watch Greta Thunberg’s World Economic Forum speech

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjsLm5PCdVQ>), read the excerpts, and answer questions 1-5.



Questions

1. Where did Greta Thunberg deliver this speech?
2. What is the source of Greta’s data?
3. Why does Greta believe teenagers must act?
4. In section D Greta calls for “transformational action.” What does “transformational” mean?
5. In your opinion, why did Greta decide to give this speech at the World Economic Forum?

Photo: Greta Thunberg (left) takes part in a school strike for climate action at the World Economic Forum (The Guardian).

Excerpts from Greta Thunberg’s Speech at the World Economic Forum

A. “Our house is on fire. I am here to say, our house is on fire. According to the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), we are less than 12 years away from not being able to undo our mistakes. In that time, unprecedented changes in all aspects of society need to have taken place, including a reduction of our CO₂ emissions by at least 50%.”

B. “Financial success has come with an unthinkable price tag. And on climate change, we have to acknowledge we have failed. All political movements in their present form have done so, and the media has failed to create broad public awareness.”

C. We are facing a disaster of unspoken sufferings for enormous amounts of people. And now is not the time for speaking politely or focusing on what we can or cannot say. Now is the time to speak clearly. Solving the climate crisis is the greatest and most complex challenge that Homo sapiens have ever faced. The main solution, however, is so simple that even a small child can understand it. We have to stop our emissions of greenhouse gases.

D. We all have a choice. We can create transformational action that will safeguard the living conditions for future generations. Or we can continue with our business as usual and fail. That is up to you and me. Some say we should not engage in activism. Instead we should leave everything to our politicians and just vote for a change instead. But what do we do when there is no political will? What do we do when the politics needed are nowhere in sight?

E. “Adults keep saying: We owe it to the young people to give them hope.” But I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.”

Exit Ticket: Do you agree with Greta’s claim that “Our house is on fire” and humanity must act? Explain your views and support your position with evidence from the background, the text of her speech, and other knowledge of the subject.