



a journal of positive futures

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## **YES! #31, fall 2004** **Can we live without oil?**

*YES! Discussion Guides are designed to help you explore your own experiences, opinions, and commitments as they relate to material found in YES! magazine. Use them in group discussions, classrooms, or study circles. We believe that when people discuss with mutual respect and caring the critical issues of our time, they create a powerful avenue for constructive social change.*

*You can find the articles mentioned below on our website at [www.yesmagazine.org](http://www.yesmagazine.org). You are welcome to download and photocopy them free of charge. If you'd like to purchase multiple copies of YES! or subscriptions for your class or group, please phone 800/937-4451 and ask for the Discussion Group Discount.*

Given that ours is a finite world, the age of oil will come to an end. The only question is how quickly—10 years, 25, 50? Whether it's 10 years or 50 years, we must start making significant changes to the way we power our lives if children born in 2004 are to have safe, reliable, and sustainable energy sources. There are choices we can make that would reduce our reliance on foreign oil and increase development and use of renewable energies. These steps would help revitalize our economy, preserve natural resources, protect our environment, and enrich our community life. *YES!* executive editor Sarah van Gelder writes in her column, "We know a lot about why we must act, what to do, and how to do it. The question that will determine the sort of world our children's children will inherit is a simpler one: will we choose to do what needs to be done?" In this issue we explore the question, Can we live without oil?, and provide stories of people already doing what needs to be done.

This discussion guide centers on the following articles:

- Thom Hartmann, "The End of Ancient Sunlight"
- Guy Dauncey, "Getting There on Less"
- Brian Edstrom, "Biodiesel Partnership"
- "Cool Technologies"
- David Orr, "The Hour before the Dawn"

### **The End of Ancient Sunlight**

Ancient sunlight, in the form of coal and oil, once formed what could be thought of as energy savings accounts. In the Middle Ages human history forever changed when we began dipping into our energy savings after discovering coal. As a result, we were able to start consuming more resources than we had when we relied on the daily sunlight captured by living plants. In the 1850s we dipped further into our savings with the discovery of oil. This allowed for a massive population explosion, and, although fossil fuel savings are quickly dwindling, our population continues to rise. China, India, and Mexico are industrializing at a record pace, and climate change driven by increasing carbon-dioxide levels appears to be shifting weather patterns worldwide. Will our modern civilization be destroyed by a shortfall in our primary fuel supply—ancient sunlight—or will we develop alternatives and learn how to live on current sunlight?



- What do you think about the article's lead questions—would you send your child to war to fight over oil? Would you go yourself?
- Do some of the statistics in the article seem hard to believe? Which ones? Why?
- The author argues that U.S. media coverage of the links between widespread use of fossil fuels and climate change is inadequate. Do you agree? How might the quality of media coverage affect American views on the nature and severity of our energy dilemmas?
- How do you and your family consume fossil fuel energy in daily life, work, and play? How significant is this energy source in your life? Could you live with much less? How would you have to change your life?

### **Getting there on less**

In an age of urban flight and suburban sprawl, can we get around without our cars? Guy Dauncey lays out a 12-step plan to break our fossil-fuel addiction and get us where we need to go on 97 percent less oil than we're using now.

- This is a dramatic reduction in oil use. Does this 12-step program or parts of it seem possible to undertake in your own life? Which ones seem more challenging than others? Why? How might you make the more challenging ones work? Which ones could you and your family or friends try out fairly easily?
- How would you have to do things differently to adopt a few of the steps mentioned by the author? What stands in the way of your adopting these steps?
- In Davis, California, 80 percent of the streets have bike lanes. Is increasing the number of bike lanes where you live feasible? What would be the main obstacles to building them? Who might be interested in pushing your city to create bike lanes?
- Near the end of the article, the author mentions additional benefits from adopting the 12-step plan—health benefits like less smog-induced asthma. What might be other benefits from breaking our oil addiction? What are the disadvantages?

### **Biodiesel Partnership**

Students at the University of Colorado partnered with the people of Gaviotas, Colombia, to bring biodiesel technology to their community. What started as a handful of young people powering campus buses with leftover kitchen grease became a youth-led project to design and build a biodiesel processor in Colombia capable of producing 400,000 gallons of the fuel a year, creating local jobs and a more sustainable source of energy in Gaviotas.

- How would the possibility of creating your own fuel change your life? Your community?
- What do you think about the pros and cons of creating biodiesel mentioned in the article? Can you think of other advantages or disadvantages? Could the limitations be overcome? How?
- Youth across the country are involved directly in environmental issues, including promoting alternative energy and sustainability and battling climate change. Are you one of them or do you know any young people in your community who are tackling these issues? How might you get more involved in supporting these youth?

### **Cool technologies**

Fuel-efficient clean-burning stoves, an electric hub motor that combines a wheel and motor in one unit, wind power, urban oil-free agriculture, getting gas from trash, painting dark roofs white, hydroelectric battery-charging sneakers, green energy grants from the states, heat-collecting low-tech solar roofs, and “daylighting” schools are just a few of the cool ways to become part of the sustainable energy party.

- Which of these stories caught your attention and imagination and why? Which seem most promising? Which seem easiest to try? Which seem hardest and why?
- Using these examples as a kick-off point, can you think or brainstorm a few new cool technologies for kicking the oil habit?
- How do you conserve energy or resources in your daily life? What steps to conserve energy could you try now?



### The hour before the dawn

With so much bad news in our world today, it's easy to get depressed or to simply withdraw. Either has devastating effects on the prospects for change. Author David Orr says that amidst the gloomy realities of famine, terrorism, and climate change, there are things to recognize and celebrate. He gives 10 reasons to be hopeful.

- Did you find the author's reasons for hope compelling? Do you agree that we have much to celebrate in items such as public opinion shifts towards clean air, water, and solar energy, for example?
- The author says that the current course of the U.S. runs counter to our history and best traditions. Do you agree? Some might argue that we've been long on powerful documents and short on performance—what might our "best traditions" be, and how do we foster them? Are we called to higher things, as the author claims, and what does that mean?
- What sustains you and gives you hope during difficult times?

### What are you doing?

Send us stories of what you're doing to change the world for the better. We'll publish selected stories in our Readers Take Action column. E-mail stories of up to 500 words to: [Editors@yesmagazine.org](mailto:Editors@yesmagazine.org).

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