

Student Reading 1

Climate Strike: What's this all about?

Young people around the world are planning a global climate strike on Friday, September 20, 2019. The strike follows earlier school strikes for climate change. It is led by youth, but will involve adults as well. It is supported by a wide range of organizations, including environmental and religious groups, unions, and others.

If events go as anticipated, people in thousands of cities worldwide will walk out of school and work to demand action on climate change.

Why a Climate Strike?

The warnings from scientists get more dire and the window of opportunity to prevent the most drastic consequences of climate disruption gets smaller.

We're already experiencing destructive, sometimes deadly effects of climate change – from more violent storms and floods to fires, drought, and the spread of insects and diseases. But these conditions will almost certainly worsen in the years and decades ahead – especially if we fail to take action immediately to slash the rising carbon levels that are setting off the crisis.

It is increasingly apparent that young people will bear the brunt of the deepening climate crisis. College students, teens, and young people of all ages have begun to recognize the threat to their standard of living. For a variety of reasons, the adults—especially the political and corporate leaders—have failed to take any meaningful measures to address the crisis. In fact, despite years of promises and resolutions by world bodies, global carbon emissions rose to a higher level in 2018 than in the previous years.

Sometimes political movements that have percolated quietly for years suddenly receive a spark that thrusts them into high gear, inspiring millions to join the fight. This seems to be the case with a Swedish girl who at the age of 15 began a solitary “school strike for the climate.”

In August 2018, Greta Thunberg stayed out of school for several weeks to sit in front of the Swedish Parliament holding a sign and passing out leaflets that stated, “I am doing this because you adults are sh**ting on my future.” After she changed the protest to every Friday and it received media attention, the hashtag #fridaysforfuture went viral.

In late 2018, the students already active on climate issues, joined by thousands more inspired by Greta Thunberg, organized hundreds of groups around the world and quickly networked to coordinate actions.

- On November 15, 2018, Harriet O'Shea Carre and Milou Albrecht, both 14 years old, initiated school strikes across Australia involving over 15,000 students.
- In December, 17-year-old Anuna De Wever organized a strike and march that brought 3,000 teens into the streets of Brussels. (The next week the number grew to 12,000 and to 35,000 by January 24.)

- 10-year-old Lilly Platt began her weekly strike in Zeis, Netherlands, and sixth-grader Sophia Mathur in Sudbury, Canada.
- Other daily or weekly student protests inspired by Thunberg were initiated in dozens of other cities including London, Hamburg, Helsinki, Cork and Denver.

Fridays for Future hosts an interactive map of over 1600 strikes across the globe at <https://www.fridaysforfuture.org/events/map>

On March 15, 2019, the first Global Climate Strike drew over one million youth in 120 countries. The marches expanded beyond Europe and North America to involve students in India, Philippines, New Zealand, South Korea, Colombia, Chile, South Africa, Uganda, Israel, Nigeria, and other nations. The second global student strike was May 24. Over 1,600 towns and cities held protests or marches and again over one million participated.

- “Why don’t we cooperate to protect nature from climate change? It would be the first time all people on the Earth united together.” -- Aina Koide, 21-year-old protester organizer in Japan
- “We will not be kept silent so that companies can make money without thinking about their impact on our environment.” -- Camila Gonzalez, 15-year-old climate activist from Mexico City
- “We are the future and we have a voice and power to change things. It starts with us.”--11-year-old Yola Mgogowana, speaker at Capetown, South Africa event
- “Friday used to be ordinary, but now it is the busiest day of the week.” --14-year-old Leah Namugerwa Fridays for Future activist
- "We are humbled and inspired by the determination with which youth activists across the world are challenging us all to confront the realities of the climate crisis. Every young person taking part in Fridays for Future embodies what it means to act on your conscience. They remind us that we are more powerful than we know and that we all have a role to play in protecting human rights against climate catastrophe." -- Kumi Naidoo, Secretary General of Amnesty International

Discussion questions

1. How worried and/or angry are you about growing up with the threat of climate change disasters?
2. Do you feel you are safe from the impacts of climate change? Why or why not?
3. Do you talk with friends or family about the climate crisis? If not, why not?
4. Have you been active in any way in the movement to address the crisis? Why or why not?
5. Were you aware of the climate strikes and Greta Thunberg? If you were not aware of them, why do you think that is?

Student Reading 2

The September 20 Global Climate Strike

On Friday, September 20 and Friday, September 27, students will stay out of school to participate in climate marches, rallies, and vigils. People in about 150 countries have committed to strike on one or both of the days.

The actions are timed to coincide with a Climate Action Summit taking place at the United Nations in New York City on September 23, 2019. Fridays For Future and hundreds of other organizations worldwide are planning school strikes and other activities for the entire week of September 20-27.

The climate strikes are youth-led events. Part of the message from student leaders is that adults have so far failed to act in a responsible manner and that it's the kids who will face the harshest consequences of climate inaction. Adults (who are used to running things!) are being asked to participate as allies, not as leaders. As 350.org, one of the largest climate organizations, tells adults:

But remember – your role is to listen and amplify the call to action from young people, not step in and take over.

Not everyone supports the global climate strike. Some people, including President Donald Trump, question the very reality of human-caused climate change. However, there is virtually no evidence to support this position. Climate disruption is already happening all around us. The world's scientists have been telling us about climate change and its causes for decades, and they correctly predicted its impacts – though it is happening much faster than they had projected.

Some people acknowledge that the climate crisis is real, but question whether a strike that takes students out of school is a good strategy for addressing it. One teacher commented: "I worry that it could really have an impact on their attendance records. If it's put down as unauthorized absence, this could really impact on their future, in terms of getting into college, or with apprenticeships and jobs." Another said: "I think it can be powerful, but only when students are well-informed. I think there are dangers in terms of peer pressure and students jumping on the bandwagon and therefore not getting involved for the right reasons."

But youth organizers of the climate strike insist that the climate crisis is an emergency that must be addressed now. "School can wait, but climate change won't," said 11-year-old Turkish protest organizer Atlas Sarrafoglu.

In New York City, public school officials announced that students would not be penalized for participating in the climate strike. Students would still need parental consent, and younger students would only be allowed to leave school with a parent.

Protests are planned in thousands of cities and towns, not just on September 20, but throughout the following week. A sampling of events include:

- Nonviolent direct action in Abidjan, Ivory Coast

- Tree planting in Atalanta Brazil
- A debate and exhibition in Bangkok, Thailand
- Prayer vigils in Wellington, New Zealand
- A forum on extinction in Bath, England
- A teach-in in Burlington, Vermont

The climate change movement is decentralized. No one group is determining the strategies or goals for the strikes. Some of the top demands are:

1. Support for a green new deal
2. 100% clean energy
3. Keeping fossil fuels in the ground
4. Helping climate refugees
5. Honoring treaties which respect indigenous land
6. Investing in communities most affected by pollution and poverty
7. Protecting biodiversity and ending deforestation
8. Invest in sustainable agriculture
9. Declaring a national emergency around climate change

Two lessons have already been learned by the climate strike activists. The first is that one person—no matter how young—can make a difference. Dozens of the school strikes started with just one person skipping school, making a poster and standing in a public place.

A second lesson learned is that young people don't need adults to organize an action or a group. While it is always helpful to have adults as allies, sometimes younger people are better off organizing among themselves.

Some of the youth-led organizations leading the September strikes in the United States are:

- Sunrise Movement: <https://www.sunrisemovement.org/>
- Youth Climate Strike US: <https://www.youthclimatestrikeus.org/>
- Zero Hour: <http://thisiszerohour.org/who-we-are/>

Discussion questions

1. What do you think of school strikes as a tactic to promote action on the climate?
2. What are the obstacles standing in the way of participation in school strikes?
3. What level of urgency is needed to risk suspension from school or punishment from parents? Is climate change an emergency that warrants some risk?
4. What other strategies should students employ to pressure our leaders to begin the huge changes that are necessary to halt global climate change?