

## Readers Guide for Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*

**Key phrases and terms:** austerity; capitalism; deindustrialization; deregulation; divestment; free trade; intersectionality; Marshal Plan; market economy; NAFTA; neoliberalism; political left; political right; privatization; public sector; private sector; shock doctrine; World Trade Organization; zero emissions

1. How does climate change rate as an issue to you? Is this a phenomenon that alarms you or one that you have considered deeply? If so, describe why. If not, describe why.
2. In your own words, articulate the argument that Klein presents in the introduction of her book.
3. Klein proposes that the only way to understand the climate crisis is through a deeper understanding of our economic system. What are the key economic drivers of climate change? Does she successfully link economics to climate change in your view? Why or why not?
4. According to Klein, if approached correctly, addressing the climate crisis would address several other urgent matters facing the United States. Describe these other societal crises and how Klein links them to addressing climate change.
5. What does Klein mean by “gentle market mechanisms” and “heavy duty interventions?” In what ways must the climate crisis be handled, according to Klein?
6. Klein asserts that the climate crisis has become such a charged debate “because we are locked in – politically, physically, and culturally.” What does she mean by that? What are the politics and culture that have led to the intense polarization of the debate on climate change?
7. What does Klein mean by the phrase “free market fundamentalism?” Do you agree with the sentiments behind the phrase? Why or why not?
8. Why does Klein refer to the largest subsidy that the fossil fuel industry receives as the “theft of the sky (page 70)”?
9. In what ways does Klein suggest that a level of “redistribution” is in fact necessary to chart a world with zero emissions? What impact does she suggest this will have on global inequality if it’s implemented democratically?
10. First, define “shock doctrine.” Next, use the concept to describe some of the reasons and arguments that proponents of privatization have used to advance their cause? How did the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009 undermine the efforts to halt privatization and propel a model of economic development based on the principles of neoliberalism? How has this contributed to the climate crisis?

11. Describe and evaluate a few of the “redistributive climate mechanisms” that Klein has proposed. Which of these strikes you as most feasible? Which ones, if any, do not? See pages 96-118 for assistance.
12. Why does Klein look favorably upon the local organizations and actions that have sought to buy back their power grids from larger utility corporations? Why does she have some skepticism towards these same efforts?
13. Define intersectionality and relate it to our theme of resilience. Are the social movements that Klein discusses throughout the book intersectional in their emphasis? How do intersectional social movements relate to such issues as resilience, economic justice, and environmentalism?
14. What are some local organizations that could be viewed as an alternative means of governance, ones that take into account the value of labor, climate justice, and democratic decision-making?
15. What does Klein mean by “extractivism?” How might we relate this concept to Alaska? What are the problems Klein associates with it? Do you agree? If so, why? If not, why?
16. What is meant by “natural sinks?” Are these a panacea to the climate problem, according to Klein? What are some other alternatives?
17. Why has Naomi Klein titled a chapter, “Roots not Fruits?” Why have some social movements and environmentalists sought partnerships and support from big business and corporate interests? Has this support been unwavering or unconditional? Has it, on balance, been effective? Provide an example from the text to discuss the limits that broad-based coalitions comprised of social movements, environmental activists, and carbon-emitting industries have forged in the name of cleaning up the environment.
18. Describe why Klein’s views the ability of “Green Billionaires” to address the climate crisis with skepticism? What alternatives does she present? Do you agree?
19. What does Klein mean by the label “messiahs?” Are these figures reliable allies in the broader struggle in addressing the climate crisis?
20. What are some achievements of grassroots organizing? What are some of the most serious challenges activists have faced? What are the types of activism that have succeeded in the past? Which ones, according to Klein, are most likely to succeed in the future?
21. In your own words, articulate the tone of Klein’s conclusion. Is she optimistic? Or is she pessimistic about the future? Perhaps it’s a mixture of both. Explain the largest barriers to change and how the resilience of local communities, in the past, present and future, might provide a source of inspiration and even a model to address the enormity of the crisis presented by human-caused climate change

Relevant Website and secondary readings:

<https://thischangeseverything.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/48780-this-changes-everything-curriculum-singlepages-1.pdf>