

COMMUNITY LIFE

HOUSES

In ancient times, the Maya lived in the mountains and rain forests. Imagine trying to build a home on a mountain or in a rain forest. Most of the ancient Maya lived in simple homes. They made their homes from materials that were nearby, such as vines, mud, and wood. Farmers lived in huts near their fields. A hut usually had one or two rooms. It had a dirt floor. The roof was made out of long grass or the leaves of palm trees.



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This thatched-roof house looks like a Maya house of long ago.



Rollout photograph K2573 © Justin Kerr

Rulers sat on "thinking" mats.

Rich families lived near the town centers. They had large houses with many rooms. The rooms were divided by cotton cloths. The walls were made out of stone and covered with stucco, a kind of plaster. These homes usually had a **patio** at their center. Family members ate and relaxed there. Statues of the gods stood outside these homes to protect them.

Today, many Maya people live in small houses in the country. The homes are much like those of the ancient Maya. Inside the homes are mats. The mats are where everyone sits. Long ago, mats were used as "thinking" chairs. People sat on the mats to think. Today, the Maya still use their mats as a place to think.

CLOTHES

In ancient times, how did the Maya stay cool in their tropical climate? They grew cotton, wove it into cloth, and made it into clothes. Their clothes were usually white. White cotton clothes were cool in the heat. Sometimes, they used plant dyes to add color or designs to cloth.

LOOKING BACK

The ancient Maya thought that flat heads were a sign of beauty. When their children were born, they placed the baby's head between two boards. This would flatten and lengthen the head. The Maya also thought crossed eyes were a sign of beauty. They hung a colorful bead between a baby's eyes to encourage crossed eyes!

To stay cool, men usually wore just loincloths. Women wore skirts and long shirts or loose dresses. People went either barefoot or they wore sandals made of straw or leather.

The ancient Maya liked tattoos. They loved jewelry, too. Men wore huge earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. Men wore more jewelry than women. Rich people also wore large **headdresses**, sometimes decorated with colorful feathers.

Today, most Maya wear the same kinds of clothes that are popular in the United States. Some women still handweave white cloth for shawls, men's shirts, and children's clothes. Women also embroider bright designs using ancient patterns.



How do we solve the growing power problem? Why not just build more power plants? After all, that's worked in the past. So why not? Well, power plants are expensive. Also, how many people want a power plant in their backyards?

But there is an even bigger problem—the environment. Today almost two-thirds of the electrical power we use comes from power plants that use **fossil fuels** to make electricity. Fossil fuels, such as oil, coal, and natural gas, are burned to make electricity. Burning fossil fuels releases pollution and carbon dioxide gas into the air. As more carbon dioxide is released into the air, more heat gets trapped near Earth's surface. The more fossil fuels we burn, the warmer the air around Earth gets. So building fossil fuel plants is not always the best answer.

Blow, Wind, Blow

Luckily, burning fossil fuels isn't the only way to make electricity. For example, people have been using the power of wind for centuries. So why can't we use this energy to make electricity? Well, we can. In very windy places, power companies have installed dozens—even hundreds—of large windmills. Windmills change the energy of moving air into clean electrical power. Wind power won't solve all our energy problems, but it can help meet some of the demand in certain places.

Power plants that burn fossil fuels can release pollution and large amounts of carbon dioxide into the air.

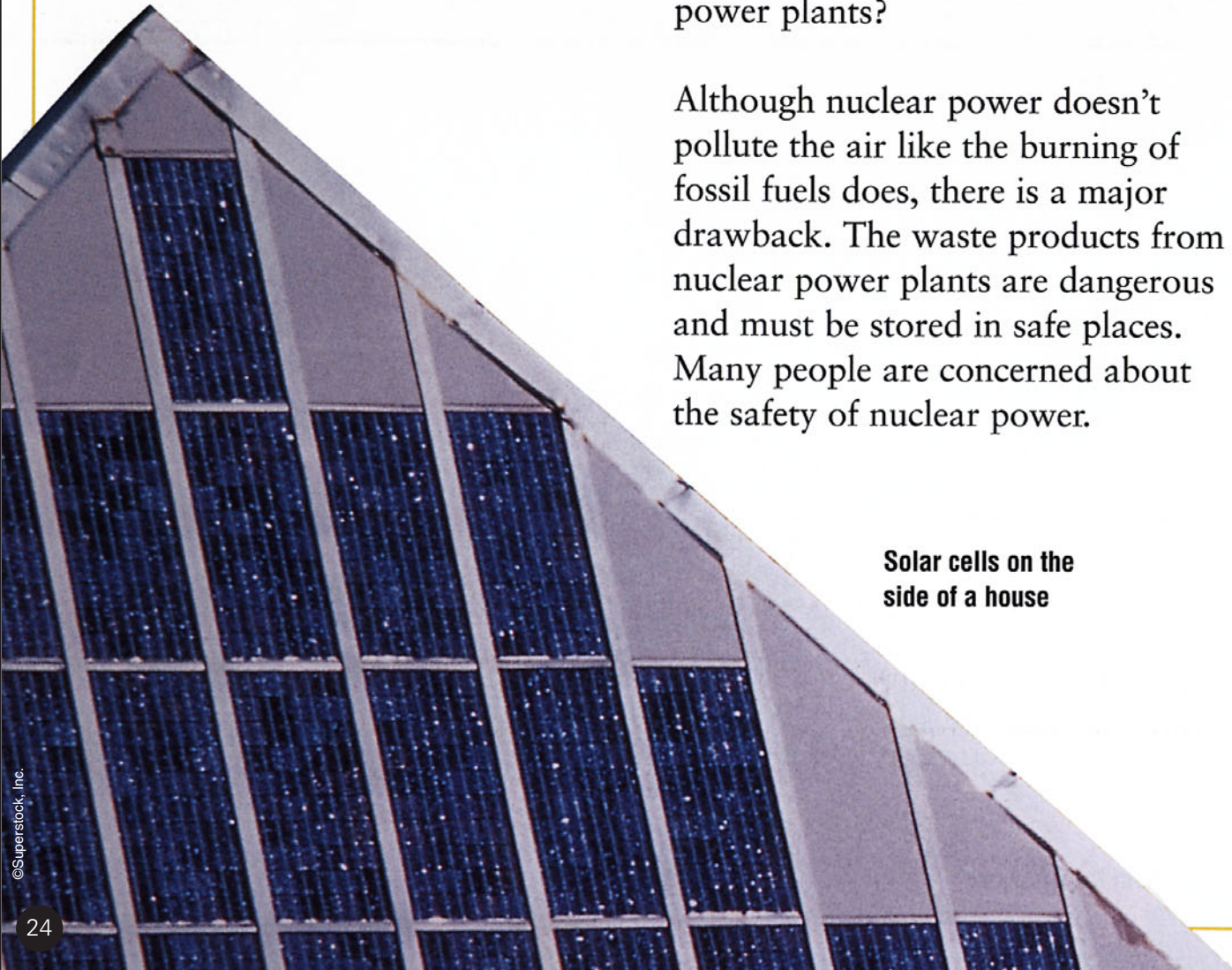
Here Comes the Sun

If you're looking for a source of energy that doesn't pollute, look to the sun. The sun provides most of the heat and light on our planet. Since the late 1800s, scientists have been working to turn the sun's energy into electricity using devices called **solar cells**. The problem is, solar cells are expensive. But scientists are hopeful that someday soon, everybody will be able to take advantage of the sun's energy to make electricity.

Energy From Atoms

There are other ways to make electricity without burning fossil fuels. Scientists have learned how to change some types of atoms into other types of atoms. When this happens a large amount of energy is given off. This energy from atoms, called **nuclear energy**, has been used to make electricity for more than 50 years. Today about 10 percent of all the electricity used in the United States comes from this source. So why don't we build more nuclear power plants?

Although nuclear power doesn't pollute the air like the burning of fossil fuels does, there is a major drawback. The waste products from nuclear power plants are dangerous and must be stored in safe places. Many people are concerned about the safety of nuclear power.



Solar cells on the side of a house