CLEAN ENERGY INSTITUTE
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

Model Sustainable Town Activity

Overview

This free-form activity challenges elementary students to create a physical model of a sustainable town that includes energy production from renewable sources, energy storage and distribution in a grid. Other inputs and outputs such as food, water, waste, materials and transportation can also be included. Students can use printed cut and fold templates for common structures or build their own from scratch.

Next Generation Science Standards

- 4-ESS3-1 Obtain and combine information to describe that energy and fuels are derived from natural resources and their uses affect the environment. [Clarification Statement: Examples of renewable energy resources could include wind energy, water behind dams, and sunlight; non-renewable energy resources are fossil fuels and fissile materials. Examples of environmental effects could include loss of habitat due to dams, loss of habitat due to surface mining, and air pollution from burning of fossil fuels.]
- 4-PS3-2 Make observations to provide evidence that energy can be transferred from place to place by sound, light, heat, and electric currents. [Assessment Boundary: Assessment does not include quantitative measurements of energy.]
- 4-PS3-4 Apply scientific ideas to design, test, and refine a device that converts energy from one form to another.* [Clarification Statement: Examples of devices could include electric circuits that convert electrical energy into motion energy of a vehicle, light, or sound; and, a passive solar heater that converts light into heat. Examples of constraints could include the materials, cost, or time to design the device.] [Assessment Boundary: Devices should be limited to those that convert motion energy to electric energy or use stored energy to cause motion or produce light or sound.]
- 3-5-ETS1-1 Define a simple design problem reflecting a need or a want that includes specified criteria for success and constraints on materials, time, or cost.

Learning Objectives

After this activity students should be able to describe

1. What energy and materials move into an out of a town?
2. Measures that can be taken to improve sustainability
3. How solar and wind sources could work with battery storage to achieve constant power.
4. How solar is also use to grow plants, heat homes and perform other tasks.

Grade:- 1st – 6th grade

Time: 1-2 hours

Materials:

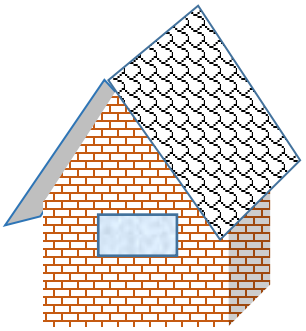
- Cut and Fold templates printed on card stock
- Tape
- Butcher paper to cover table
- Marking pencils, paint, scissors, construction paper, hot glue
- Recycled materials cardboard tubes, plastic salad trays, plates
- Copper tape, LED, Motor, wire, batteries

Introduction:

Does anyone know what the word sustainable mean? (Explore student prior knowledge about sources of energy, renewables, solar, conservation, recycling, organic etc.) Sustainable means that something can keep going on forever without running out or breaking. Today we are going to build a model sustainable town. What are the things that people in our town need to survive? (Look for things like food, water, air, energy, houses, heating, clothing, school, cars, plants, animals, soil). Guide the construction with a series of prompts for each necessity. How can people get their energy? Will solar energy run out? What happens when the sun goes down? (need batteries, use other sources).

Construction Tips

Solar house

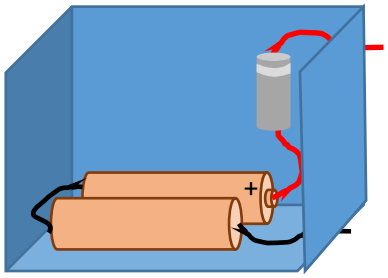


1. Print the solar house on card stock.
2. Cut out the shape following all solid blue lines.
3. Fold on the dotted lines. Fold the roof eaves under so that the roof hangs over the side of building.
4. Fold up the bottom and tape the wall seam and wall to floor seams.
5. Fold the roof closed and tape roof peak.
6. Attach a 1.5 or 3 volt solar panel on the house and use copper foil tape to make a circuit with an LED. Note that the longer lead of an LED should go to the positive (red) wire of a cell. Test the house under a strong light or the sun.
7. Orient all the houses towards south.
8. Use copper tape to complete a circuit to the Storage unit.

Discussion

- Why should solar houses be pointed toward the south? (In the northern hemisphere the sun is always south of the zenith at noon.)
- What might limit the power available to solar houses? (area of cells, shading by buildings)
- What could be done to keep the light throughout the day and night? (add storage)

Storage Unit



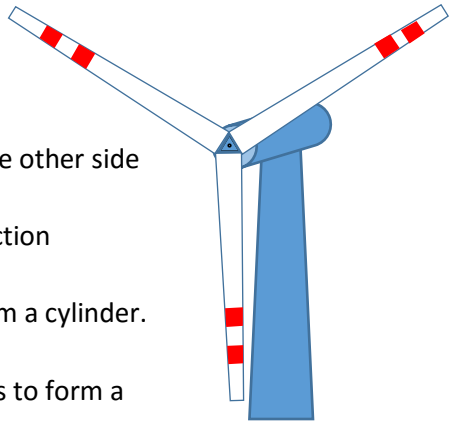
1. Place a rechargeable battery in a single or double batter clip inside the storage unit.
2. Measure the voltage of the battery using a multimeter.
3. If you want the system to hold its charge for a longer time include a diode in series in the circuit. Face the arrow of the diode towards the positive lead of the battery. This allows electricity to flow from the cell when the cell voltage is higher than the battery, but no current will flow through the solar panel when the batter has a higher voltage than the cell, (at night)
4. Connect the lead from the storage to copper tape placed on the outside of the storage unit.
5. Connect the storage unit to one of more solar cells. Measure

Discussion

- Where does the storage system get its power? (from wind or solar)
- When does the storage system absorb energy? (when the electricity coming from the sources is higher voltage than the battery)
- When does the storage system give up its energy? (When a load is connected to the battery and a complete circuit is formed.)
- What would it take to keep a house supplied with power all night? (a big enough battery and enough charging power)
- What does the diode do in the circuit? (It prevents the electricity leaking out through the solar cell when the cell is not producing a charging voltage.)

Wind turbine

1. Cut out the three wind blades. Fold the blade gently along the dotted line. Notice that the line is not in the middle. The narrow half will be the flat side of the blade, the wider half will be the curved side of the blade. You may need to run your thumbnail along the middle of curve section to give it a gentle airfoil like an airplane wing.



2. Run a strip of adhesive tape along the printed side of the flat edge. Fold the other side over and complete the seal.
3. Cut out the hub and attach the blades so that each is facing the same direction
4. Attach the hub to a plastic gear.
5. Roll up the cowling with the small electric motor at one end. Tape it to form a cylinder. Press gear on the completed blade on to the shaft of the motor.
6. Cut out the tower. Roll it into a cylinder. Fold the top inwards in two places to form a curved saddle.
7. Place the turbine blade and cowling into the saddle on top of the tower and tape it in place.
8. Attach the wind tower to a piece of cardboard with tape and fix this to the table.
9. Spin the blade while measuring the current coming from the wires of the motor (now a generator).

Questions

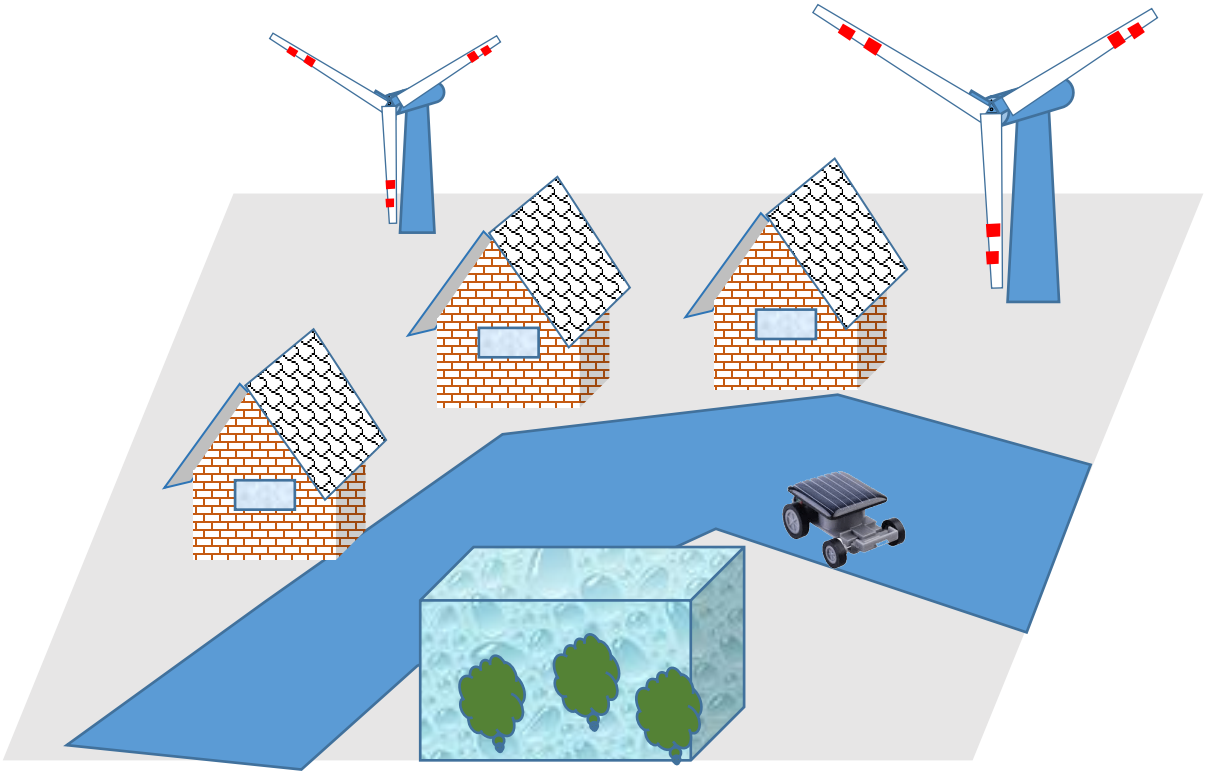
- Where would be the best place to locate a wind turbine? (open area where it is windy)
- What is a disadvantage of wind power? (you can't predict when it will be blowing very accurately)

Other Elements

- Arrange the houses facing south and then draw roads.
- Add solar cars from the CEI Sundawg bags
- Add a greenhouse made from a clear plastic salad box.
- Use boxes labeled "recycling center, bicycle barn
- Create terrain in the backdrop paper to form a location for a hydroelectric dam and lake.
- Add a community solar farm

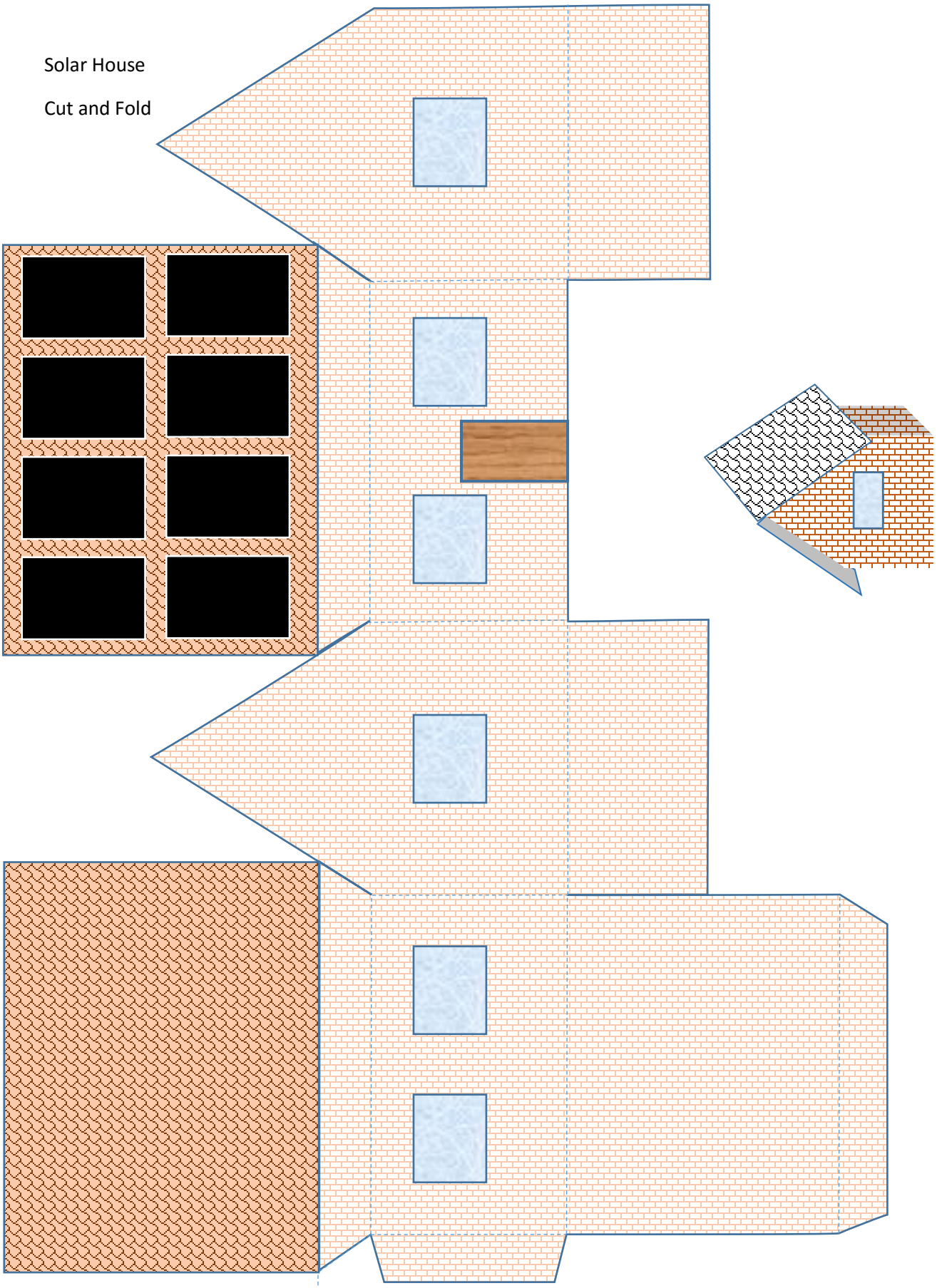
Links

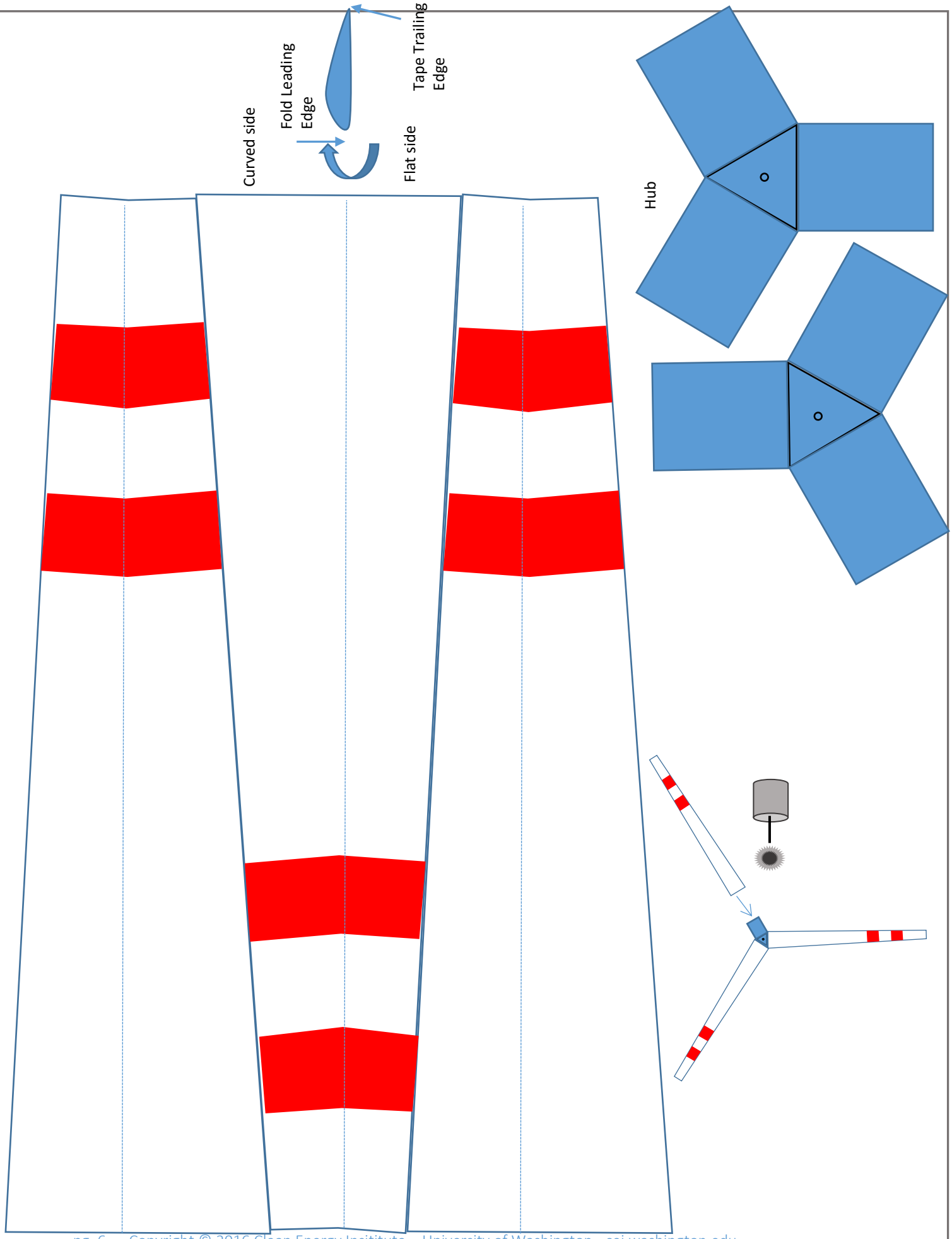
https://www.teachengineering.org/activities/view/cub_solarcity_activity1



Solar House

Cut and Fold





Wind Turbine Tower

1. Assemble tower as cone
2. Fold top edge in to form saddle
3. Roll motor into paper tube
4. Place gear on motor
5. Attach turbine blades to gear