



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

- Rob:** Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English, I'm Rob and with me is Neil.
- Neil:** Hello.
- Rob:** Today we're talking about class. This is something of an **obsession** with British people; it's something they talk about and think about all the time! So Neil, what class are you – lower, middle or upper?
- Neil:** I suppose if you look at my background, you could say I am middle class.
- Rob:** Yes, me too – middle class. So we belong to a social group that consists of well-educated people, who have good jobs and are neither very rich nor very poor.
- Neil:** Well we are certainly not rich! But being middle class is not just a British thing.
- Rob:** No – the number of middle class people around the world is rising as people earn more money. So, for your question today Neil, can you guess how many people are predicted to be middle class in the world by 2030?
- a) 2.9 billion  
b) 3.9 billion  
c) 4.9 billion
- Neil:** Such large numbers, I don't know. I'll go for b) 3.9 billion.
- Rob:** We'll find out the answer later. So, being middle class involves a number of factors – good education, a good job, sometimes owning your own home and having a number of **possessions** like a car or a TV.
- Neil:** It's quite a **privileged** or comfortable position to be in – but the most important factor is having **disposable income** – that's spare money to spend on more than just things you need for everyday survival, like food. That's what you've got Rob, right?

**Rob:** A little – spare money to spend on little luxuries like a holiday, a computer or a meal at a restaurant. But we always complain we never have enough money, don't we!

**Neil:** Yes, we do: the UN says to be middle class you have to earn between \$10 and \$100 per day. In the UK I think that's quite a small amount so we could say, very generally, we are quite **well-off** – but in places such as Asia there has been a huge shift recently from people in poorer working class jobs to middle class ones.

**Rob:** It's interesting: that by 2030 there could be 3.2 billion middle class people in Asia – overtaking Europe and America. The BBC's John Sudworth can explain what is happening now in China. What does he say people are becoming?

**BBC reporter, John Sudworth:**

*Now there's a new chapter, the farmers leaving these fields for cities like Zhengzhou, are becoming not just workers but consumers too. In short – they're off to join the middle class.*

**Neil:** So, people are now moving to the city not just to find work but to spend the money they earn. They are becoming **consumers** because their **income** – the money they earn – has gone up.

**Rob:** So, this is because of **industrialisation** – a change from an economy based on farming to a growth in factories making things. Now, this happened in China in the 1970s but it is now **upgrading** or improving its industries again making people wealthier.

**Neil:** This has led to a **consumer society** – that's where people are spending money on things like fridges and washing machines.

**Rob:** Let's hear from John Sudworth again, talking about a consumer from China – what does this woman do if she can't afford to buy something?

**BBC reporter, John Sudworth:**

*Jessica Zhao earns a little more than \$12,000 US dollars a year and she spends every last bit of it, often with the help of a credit card. My parents would never spend money they don't have, she tells me, but attitudes are changing fast.*

**Neil:** So that woman uses a credit card – it means she can buy now and pay later. It's a change in attitude – it's not what our parents or grandparents would do. I do it all the time. You pay for the goods later but with a high interest rate. What have you bought with your credit card recently Rob?

- Rob:** A new carpet... a pair of jeans and some train tickets. But I'm not looking forward to my credit card bill!
- Neil:** Nor me. You might think we are spending a lot – in China 2,500 vehicles are sold every hour!
- Rob:** Goodness. Well, the rise of the middle class could be a good thing. As people's standard of living improves, global poverty could be reduced.
- Neil:** Ah, but if people borrow too much money there could be a **credit crunch** – that's a bad economic situation where banks do not want to lend as much money.
- Rob:** But what I really want to know is when will I become upper class?
- Neil:** Sorry Rob, you'll never get there – it's all about your **upbringing** and your family – something you can't change, even with money. But let's prove how well educated I am by seeing if I got today's question right.
- Rob:** OK. Earlier I asked you how many people are predicted to be middle class in the world by 2030?
- Neil:** I said 3.9 billion.
- Rob:** You were wrong. The figure is 4.9 billion. Now, Neil, could you remind us of some of today's language?
- Neil:** **obsession**  
**possessions**  
**privileged**  
**disposable income**  
**well-off**  
**consumers**  
**income**  
**industrialisation**  
**credit crunch**  
**upgrading**  
**consumer society**  
**upbringing**
- Rob:** OK that's it for this programme. Do join us again soon for more 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English.
- Both:** Bye.

## Vocabulary and definitions

obsession	something or someone you think about all the time
possessions	things/ objects you own
privileged	having opportunities and advantages that some other people do not have
disposable income	money that is left after paying for everyday things like bills
well-off	having enough money to live well
consumers	people who buy things
income	money someone gets for working or from investing money
industrialisation	changing to an economy based on industry
credit crunch	economic problem where banks don't lend much money
upgrading	improving/ making more advanced
consumer society	a place where people think that buying and owning things is very important
upbringing	how someone is treated and educated when they are young - and how this affects their life

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