

## Five teens who changed the world

*These young people know how to get things done*



BBC

Harvey Day

Too often, teens are lazily thought of as apathetic and self-centred. But a new generation of young activists has proved that many teenagers are, in fact, deeply concerned with social, political and environmental issues - and they're fully prepared to do something about them. Chief among them is 16-year-old environmental activist Greta Thunberg, who has urged British politicians to "listen to the scientists" regarding climate change, while speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme. Here are five inspirational people who've had a massive impact on the world in their teen years.

### **Greta Thunberg**

Born in 2003, this Swedish teen activist has become a leading voice for climate change activism.

In 2018, she came up with the idea for the school strike movement after staging her first, solitary, protest in August on the steps of the Swedish parliament in Stockholm. Since then, more than one million students have joined her by walking out of their classrooms to protest against climate change inaction.

"Since our leaders are behaving like children, we will have to take the responsibility they should have taken long ago," she told a UN climate change summit last year. "We have to understand what the older generation has dealt to us, what mess they have created that we have to clean up and live with. We have to make our voices heard."

Greta, who has been open about how her autism has shaped her activism, recently joined the Extinction Rebellion protests in London and gave a speech at the House of Commons.

### **Malala Yousafzai**

When she was 11, Malala Yousafzai wrote and published an anonymous diary about her life in Pakistan under Taliban rule, which quickly gained huge attention. Soon, she began to speak out more publicly about the need for girls to have proper access to education.

But three years later her life changed forever when, in retaliation for her activism, she was shot in the head by a gunman on a school bus.

The assassination attempt didn't stop her, however, and her profile has only risen further

since then. She has appeared on the front cover of Time magazine and in 2014 she became the youngest person ever to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

"This award is not just for me. It is for those forgotten children who want education," Yousafzai said in her acceptance speech. "It is for those frightened children who want peace. It is for those voiceless children who want change. I am here to stand up for their rights, to raise their voice. It is not time to pity them."

### **Emma González**

In February 2018, a gunman stormed Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, killing 17 people.

But rather than being defeated by this tragic event, many of the teens who survived the shooting instead began a national campaign to try to end gun violence.

Emma González, then just 18, emerged as one of the leaders of this new movement and co-founded the gun-control advocacy group Never Again MSD.

In March 2018, she delivered a powerful speech at the March for Our Lives in Washington, D.C. when she read out the names of her dead classmates and then stood defiantly silent for four minutes - the length of time it took the gunman to carry out his attack.

Following the shooting and the campaigning from Emma and her fellow students, Florida lawmakers passed the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act in March 2018, which raises the age to buy a firearm from 18 to 21 and requires a three-day waiting period for most weapons.

### **Jack Andraka**

At the age of 15, US high school student Jack Andraka invented what appeared to be a new, cheap way to detect pancreatic cancer.

The teen, who won \$75,000 (£58,000) at the 2012 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair for his creation, said he came up with the idea by reading free science papers he found online.

The test, which is still undergoing feasibility studies, is made up of a strip of filter paper covered in a solution of carbon nanotubes and a special antibody, according to Wired, and requires a sixth of a drop of blood.

However, some, (including Jack himself) have been careful to point out that although his invention was an exciting development, it remains more a 'proof of concept' than a finished product.

### **Amika George**

After reading about a charity which usually provides menstrual products to girls in Africa having to redirect products to Leeds - because there were girls there who couldn't afford them - Amika George decided she had to do something to fight period poverty in the UK. Amika, who founded #FreePeriods when she was 17, organised a protest outside Downing Street which saw 2,000 people dressed in red, demanding the government take action.

In the wake of this pressure, the UK government announced in March 2019 it would be funding free sanitary products in all English schools and colleges.

"For me, #FreePeriods highlighted how a single, angry teenage girl can have real political impact purely through activism, as well as the power of the internet to connect with like-minded, and equally angry people," Amika said.