

Greta Thunberg

Meet the teenager trying to save the world.

Greta Thunberg is one of the most influential figures in the fight against climate change (see box below). In just over a year, she has gone from being a regular student to a leading activist who has inspired a global movement to help protect the environment. Thunberg is publicising the scientific evidence for climate change and trying to force politicians to take action.

The beginning

Thunberg is from Sweden. Her mother is an opera singer and her father is an actor and author. Thunberg first learned about climate change when she was around eight years old. She says she was shocked that adults were not taking the problem more seriously. "Some people can just let things go, but I can't," Thunberg told *The Guardian* newspaper, "especially if there's something that worries me or makes me sad."

After a while, she realised that feeling sad about the issue was not the way forward. "It is just a waste of time," she says, "because I can do so much good with my life."

The first people Thunberg inspired to change were her parents. She persuaded her mum give up flying, because it causes pollution, and convinced her dad to become vegetarian (stop eating meat). "She changed us and now she is changing a great many other people," her father says.

Asperger's

When Greta was around 11 years old, she found out she had Asperger's syndrome. This is a type of autism, which is a condition that affects the brain and can change the way people communicate and understand the world. Thunberg describes her Asperger's as "a gift". She says, "It makes me see things from outside the box. I don't easily fall for lies, I can see through things. If I would've been like everyone else, I wouldn't have started this school strike."

Taking action

At school, Thunberg says she was part of a group who were concerned about the effect of climate change on the environment.

They also worried that adults were not doing enough to protect the planet. In August 2018, when she was 15 years old, Thunberg decided to skip school to go and protest by herself outside the Swedish parliament. She made a sign on a piece of wood and some flyers that listed a few climate change facts, and spent the whole day sitting there.

On the second day, a few people joined her, and after three weeks of striking she gave a speech at a climate protest. Thunberg's strike was spoken about in newspapers and on TV around the world. She encouraged other students to take action, and a global movement began called "Skolstrejk för Klimatet", which translates as "school strike for climate". Now young activists around the world skip school on Fridays to hold demonstrations, demanding politicians and businesses take more action to reduce emissions of harmful gases that cause climate change.

CLIMATE STRIKE

The largest climate strikes in history took place on 20 September; millions of people protested all over the world.

On the world stage

Thunberg is now a leading spokesperson for those protesting about the lack of action taken against climate change. In August 2019, she went to New York, in the US, to speak at a climate change conference. Rather than flying, she sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. Thunberg had a message for politicians: that they weren't trying hard enough to stop climate change. She said, "If you want advice for what you should do, invite scientists, ask scientists for their expertise. We want the science to be heard." Many US politicians still say that climate change is not real, and don't believe the scientific research that shows that it is a serious problem.

Thunberg is now taking a year out of school to spread her message about the importance of taking action to stop climate change. She has recently been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.

What is Greta's advice?

Thunberg says the best thing people can do is to inform themselves about what is happening. She says the world is running out of time to solve the problem and so action has to be taken quickly. Her advice is "no one is too small to make a difference".

What is climate change?

Climate change is long-term shifts in Earth's average temperatures. Human actions such as burning fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas), farming and cutting down forests are a major cause of climate change. These activities release certain gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, into Earth's atmosphere, which absorb the Sun's heat and stop it from escaping into space. Rising temperatures can result in extreme weather, such as droughts, floods and storms.

A UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said emissions of these gases have to fall by 2030, to stop further damage to the environment. There are some easy things you can do to help. Some good tips are to walk, cycle or take the bus or train instead of using a car, avoid flying and try and use less electricity.



Many young people, feel the same way as Thunberg.

