



February 2019, Brussels, Belgium:
Greta at the European Economic
and Social Committee event.

Greta Thunberg

Greta Thunberg is one of the biggest names in climate activism in the world right now and she's only 17 years old. How much do you know about the Swedish teen who isn't afraid to speak up to world leaders to save the planet?

By KRISTEN DE HAAN (USA)

Greta Thunberg,
United Nations
Climate Action
Summit,
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„This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us, young people, for hope? How dare you! You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words.”

ACTIVIST IN THE MAKING

Greta was just eight years old when she first heard about climate change. She remembers feeling confused¹, wondering why it wasn't the most important story on TV and in the newspapers. Greta was determined² to make changes in her life to reduce her carbon³ footprint*. She stopped traveling by airplane and eating meat and dairy products, two lifestyle choices that add carbon to the atmosphere. Next, she encouraged her family to also make these changes by using data, graphs, and guilt⁴ to convince her parents to lower their carbon footprints as well.

FRIDAYS FOR THE FUTURE

One day in August 2018 Greta made a decision. Instead of going to school that day (in Sweden, school starts in mid of August), she was going to stand outside of the Swedish Parliament with a sign that said “*Skolstrejk för klimatet*” (school strike for the climate) and protest every day before the country’s general elections⁵. For three weeks Greta stood there with her sign and demanded that her country reduce their carbon emissions. After the elections ended, she continued protesting each Friday and encouraged other students to join her. Greta posted a picture of herself and her sign onto her social media accounts and news of her strike spread with the hashtag #FridaysForFuture. Teenagers around the world started their own strikes and by the end of the year, more than 20,000 students had joined her fight.

GRETA’S BIG YEAR

In 2019, Greta, with the financial support of her parents, began attending conferences throughout Europe. Determined to travel without producing so much carbon, she chose to travel by train. One journey, from Sweden to Switzerland, took more than 30 hours. At these conferences, Greta warned world leaders of the dangers of climate change and urged⁶ them to make the changes needed to help the planet. Her speeches received a lot of media attention. In spring 2019, she was nominated for the *Nobel Peace Prize* for her activism work. When she finished the Swedish compulsory⁷ schooling period (nine years), instead of starting 10th grade, she decided to take a year off of school to continue speaking about the climate crisis. In September, Greta was invited to speak at the UN Climate Action Summit in New York. She journeyed across the Atlantic in a zero-emissions boat. Two weeks after leaving Europe, she arrived in the US. While in New York, Greta participated in the New York Global Climate Strike which was just one of many strikes around the world that day. Across the globe, four million people joined in the demonstration, making it the largest climate protest in history. In December, Greta was named *Time’s Person of the Year* for 2019. She is the youngest person to have earned this honor⁸.

GRETA’S SUPERPOWER

When she was 12 years old, Greta was diagnosed with Asperger’s, a form of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). She has spoken openly about her autism saying that it means she’s “sometimes a bit different from the norm,” and even calls it her superpower. Her ASD allows her to focus on things and it helps her to see things from a different perspective.

GRETA’S CRITICS

Greta has about 3 million followers on Facebook and 10 million on Instagram, but she also has lots of critics. Some argue that she is a puppet that is being controlled by



Greta and her followers in the USA and Europe organize school strikes for the climate, also called *Fridays for Future*.

someone who wants to benefit from her actions. Others believe that the science and facts she references aren’t true. Others think that her carbon footprint isn’t as small as she claims. For example, two of the members from her zero-emissions boat journey had to fly back home to Europe. This created the same amount of carbon emissions that she would have created if she had flown, too.

Greta is related to Svante Arrhenius, a Nobel prize winning chemist. He was the first person to make the connection between human carbon emissions and the Earth’s climate, what we now call the greenhouse effect. Climate activism must be in her genes!



LANGUAGE NOTE

* **carbon footprint** – the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) put into the atmosphere by the activities a person does every day

VOCABULARY

- ¹ **confused** [kən'fju:zd] – zmatený
- ² **determined** [di'tɜ:mɪnd] – odhodlaný
- ³ **carbon** ['kɑ:rbən] – uhlík
- ⁴ **guilt** [gɪlt] – vina
- ⁵ **elections** [i'lekʃn] – volby
- ⁶ **to urge** [ɜ:ʒ] – naléhat
- ⁷ **compulsory** [kəm'pʌlsəri] – povinný
- ⁸ **honor** ['ɒnər] – vyznamenání

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