

TERRIFIC TEENS CHANGING THE WORLD

AUTHOR MARGARET ROOKE TELLS
HANNAH HILES WHY TODAY'S TEENAGERS
ARE FAR FROM BEING "SNOWFLAKES"



TEEN ACTIVISTS LIKE GRETA Thunberg, Emma Gonzalez and Jazz Jennings have made headlines with their passionate stance on big issues and it's never been easier for teenagers to make their voices heard.

Author Margaret Rooke decided to find out more about the ordinary young people who are making an extraordinary difference.

For her book *You Can Change The World: Everyday Teen Heroes Making a Difference Everywhere*, Margaret spoke to more than 50 teenagers from around the world about the small and big changes they have made to improve their own lives and their local and global communities.

The book features the inspiring stories of young social entrepreneurs, fundraisers, volunteers and campaigners, and includes a toolkit for readers keen to make a change themselves.

What gave you the idea for *You Can Change The World!* ?

I think it was realising how much talk there was about teenage mental health, and people badmouthing teens, calling them "snowflakes" and saying they are obsessed with self-promotion, shopping and celebrities.

I thought we shouldn't dismiss teens like this because if we do, they will dismiss themselves. You can't disrespect them and expect them to achieve.

My son and daughter were both teenagers when I started writing the book, and I noticed that when you tell people you have teenagers they sometimes look at you with pity. Something has gone wrong – teenagers are doing some amazing things. >



How did you find and choose your case studies?

People might think the book will be about people fighting against climate change and so on, but it's also about things like dealing with bullying. It shows teenagers making changes in their own lives and in society.

I wanted a broad range of teenagers from different countries who have achieved in different ways. I could have written a book twice the size. It was amazing. I found my case studies through social media, charities, organisations and word of mouth. I just wanted to make sure that teens reading the book could relate to at least some of the people featured.

The book is written for teenagers but their parents can benefit too. If parents feel that communication with their teenagers isn't going well there are some tips in there.

Which teenager inspired you most?

It's too hard to choose! A few that come to mind right now include Lucy, who was 14 when she started a petition which persuaded a number of supermarkets to stop stocking eggs from caged birds; Will, who was 11 when his dad died of prostate cancer and who has campaigned to raise

awareness and funds to fight the disease; Guro, who started a viral campaign to change the way girls are portrayed in society; and Zainab, who helps rebellious kids as a youth worker at her old school.

Anyone could do these things, so there's lots of food for thought in the book. They are normal, everyday heroes. They could be your children or mine.

How have times changed since you were a teenager?

Young people today are used to being heard, and used to having their opinions listened to. There are problems with social media but a lot of the successful campaigns in the book have been achieved through using social media as a force for good. You can reach thousands of people around the world which we could never have done as teenagers. Teenagers now are digital natives and they are so good at it.

I think this book has come out at the right time. There's something in the air – it's like this is the moment for teenagers. They could have a greater impact than any of us have dreamed.

This book is to show them that they can celebrate who they are. They are the next generation but they don't have to wait. They don't need to feel intimidated.

How can we encourage our teens?

Speaking to people for this book, it was clear that when a young person found their niche, often just one adult – maybe a parent or a teacher – was on their side encouraging them. They are heavily influenced by their peers but it's so important to have an adult give them validation, even though it's a teenager's job to disagree with their parents as they become independent.

We need to keep our eyes and ears open as parents for the things that inspire our teens, and then help them and encourage them. Just be on their side. It costs nothing but it really is gold dust.

Many of the teenagers featured in the book have had the strength to stand apart from the crowd and create this real belief in themselves, and have shown others the way. This starts with parents of younger children, who can encourage their children to have confidence in themselves.

Are you hopeful for the future?

There is definitely something about this generation that makes me hopeful for the future. Three-quarters of media coverage about teenagers is negative but when you delve under the surface there are so many positive things going on.

A lot of the case studies from the book have already moved on to new campaigns. They have really grasped the ability they have to make real changes. They see things clearly and don't think it's up to someone else to do something.

When a teenager has a clear desire to make a change for themselves or their community, with the right support they achieve exactly this. It's so important we see teenagers for who they are. If we dismiss them as "generation snowflake", we are discouraging them from living their best lives.

Teenagers are NOT to be underestimated.

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READ Margaret is also the author of *Creative, Successful Dyslexic and Dyslexia is my Superpower*. Her website is margaretrooke.com

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