By S.B. Harris

In many ways, Greta Thunberg is like any other teenager. She has two pet dogs, and she likes to eat noodles. In other ways, she is less typical. Greta is an activist, and she is famous. She also has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism. Greta has a unique way of seeing things, and that helps her focus on making a difference in the world.

Greta began a protest in August 2018. That summer, Sweden experienced the country’s hottest temperatures in hundreds of years. Greta became so worried that she went on strike. She didn’t attend school for three weeks. Instead, she sat alone outside Sweden’s parliament building and held up a large sign that said, “School Strike for Climate” in Swedish. She wanted the Swedish government to reduce carbon emissions, a type of air pollution that causes global warming. (In case you’re wondering, Greta wasn’t just lazy or trying to avoid school. She did all her schoolwork on the street!)

Then, people shared Greta’s message on the Internet. Soon, many more people joined her protest. Greta’s strike was so successful that it turned into an international movement called Fridays for Future. By September 20, 2019, more than four million people in 170 countries joined Greta in the Global Climate Strike!

Can just one person make a difference?
Greta Thunberg
Born: 2003, Sweden
Occupation: Student, Climate Activist

The Power to Change the World
What Is Greta’s Message?

Greta wants everyone to know that there’s a climate crisis. We can’t avoid dealing with it any longer. And, we must all take action right now. She wants people to use only clean energy and stop using fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas. Using fossil fuels releases harmful gases into the atmosphere.

Why is that her message? Because Greta is very concerned about the negative effects of climate change. They can include fires, droughts, food shortages, flooding, and other problems. All of these problems are bad enough, but they can also force some people to become climate refugees. Climate refugees have to leave their homes because of the environmental problems in their country or region. Greta understands how difficult it is for these people. And she wants everyone to know that climate change is a serious problem around the world.

Greta has made a lot of changes in her own life to reduce her carbon footprint. She doesn’t eat meat, and she doesn’t travel by plane. That’s why she travels around Europe by train and went to North America on a special type of sailboat. The boat, the Malizia II, runs on clean energy. It uses wind power and electricity from solar panels and hydroelectric generators. It doesn’t put any carbon dioxide into the environment. And, in October 2019, she traveled by electric car in Canada partly to protest Canada’s oil industry.

Greta traveled to the United States on the Malizia II, an environmentally friendly sailboat.

Greta’s goal isn’t to become famous. It’s to change the world.
Why Should People Listen to Greta?

We don’t all need to change our lives in the same ways that Greta has. But we do need to listen to her message and start making changes to the way we live. Some people think that conservation and recycling are enough to save the environment. Greta is convinced that they are no longer enough. She thinks we need to change society. If humans don’t stop using fossil fuels, climate change will get worse. There will be more severe weather, like droughts, flooding, and hurricanes. There won’t be enough water in some places, and then it will be harder to grow food. Many plants and animals will die. Life on Earth will change. Soon, there may be no coral reefs because ocean temperatures will rise even more. Endangered animals, such as elephants, orangutans, and polar bears, may disappear. Someday, glaciers and polar ice caps will melt. Then, oceans will rise and some cities will be underwater. As Greta has said, “You must take action. You must do the impossible. Because giving up can never be an option.”

Greta has spoken in front of many international organizations, including the U.K. Parliament, the European Union Parliament, the World Economic Forum, and the United Nations. She has asked world leaders to change the way things work. She was even nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. And, in September 2019, she became the youngest person ever awarded the “alternative” Nobel Peace Prize, or Right Livelihood Award. In just one year, Greta has inspired many others to demand climate action in their own countries. She has had a huge impact all over the world!