



MAKE YOUR MARK, MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A KID'S GUIDE TO STANDING UP
FOR PEOPLE, ANIMALS, AND THE PLANET

JOAN MARIE GALAT



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PART I

EXAMINE YOUR WORLD



1



POWERLESS OR POWERFUL? THINKING LIKE AN ACTIVIST

“We’re not waiting five, ten, twenty years to take the action we want to see. We’re not the future of the world; we’re the present, right? We’re acting now. We’re not waiting any longer.”

Salvador Gómez-Colón, climate resilience activist, Puerto Rico

You have probably noticed that life is not fair. It can make you feel frustrated and angry—even helpless—when you come across something unjust. It might be a news story about illegal elephant hunting or families separated by war. It might be something you experience close to home, like seeing smog pollute the sky, a neighbor’s dog always chained to a post, or bullying at school. Near or far, you probably wish someone would do something. You might

PART I: EXAMINE YOUR WORLD

want to help make things better but just have no idea where to start. You might even think, *What can I do? I'm just a kid.*

Let's see if you've got your facts straight.

Life is unfair.

Injustice exists in the world.

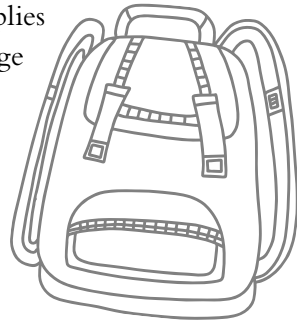
I'm just a kid.

But there is no such thing as “just a kid.” Young people from around the world are tackling problems to make the world a better place. You can too! The job begins with thinking like an activist.

THINK LIKE A WHAT?

An activist is a person who fights to stop or reduce a problem. Activists also work to make life easier for those who are suffering. They understand that the way to make a difference is to take a giant difficulty and break it into smaller ones. Look at it this way—you know war is a huge issue. Can you stop countries from fighting? Probably not. Could you help people who are suffering because of war? Absolutely! You might raise money to help feed people in a refugee camp. You could collect school supplies for children in a war zone. You could encourage others to join you.

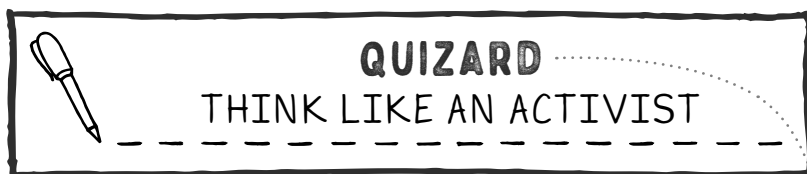
Although you might not know the best way to do these things, you can find out. Activists ask questions and play with ideas to find the best ways to help. They know problem-solving often includes these steps: practice, fail, and try again. It's annoying to fail, right? You don't hear a lot of people yelling, “Yeehaw, it



CHAPTER 1: POWERLESS OR POWERFUL?

didn't work!" Still, activists persist. What stops them from quitting? Knowing that what they do is important.

Right now, you are holding a tool in your hand. Use this book to discover the many steps you can take to be the kind of activist that makes the world a better place. Have you got what it takes? Find out with this Think Like an Activist quizard.



1. An activist is a person who:
 - (A) signs up for acting lessons
 - (B) hopes for the best
 - (C) takes action to solve problems
2. An activist takes a big issue and:
 - (A) makes it bigger
 - (B) hides under the bed
 - (C) makes it smaller
3. An activist is:
 - (A) a superhero with a gold cape who always knows what to do
 - (B) a wise person with wrinkles and gray hair
 - (C) a person who keeps trying



What's a quizard, you ask? Is that even in the dictionary? Well, not yet, but maybe an activist could make that happen. For now, let's pretend a quizard is a teeny test that can make you a wizard of wisdom on a topic.

PART I: EXAMINE YOUR WORLD

QUIZARD RESULTS

If you answered each question with C, congratulations! You're already thinking like an activist.

MEET A YOUNG ACTIVIST

Aakaash Anandan



Chennai is the very busy capital city of Tamil Nadu, a state in southeastern India. Cars, trucks, and buses crowd city streets. People on motorbikes and scooters, called two-wheelers, zip around other vehicles, searching for a clear path. Accidents are common, and traffic can make it hard for ambulances to reach accident victims quickly.

In 2015, five-year-old Aakaash was riding a two-wheeler with his parents. When he saw an accident occur, his mother had to explain that a young boy had hurt his head and died. She told him the child would have lived if he had been wearing a helmet.¹

Aakaash could not forget what happened. He understood a simple decision could have saved the rider's life. Aakaash decided to take action. When people visited his home, Aakaash talked to them about why helmets are so important. He asked his friends at school to tell their parents to wear helmets too. Aakaash even began to help the Chennai traffic police. At a busy intersection called the Indira Gandhi square, Aakaash waited until drivers stopped at a long light signal. When the traffic backed up and came to a stop, he handed motorists pamphlets.

CHAPTER 1: POWERLESS OR POWERFUL?

They included the message, “Uncle, please wear a helmet. It is for your safety.”²

IT’S MY RIGHT!

Suppose you are a famous actor. (Maybe you are! Hello—can I have your autograph?) If that’s not you, simply picture yourself as a star working on a big-deal project. Let’s put you back in time to a film being created in 1930s California. You’re getting paid for your breathtaking talent, but because you’re a kid, your parents manage your money. You never even see it! When you turn eighteen—the age that makes you a legal adult—you ask for the cash. Uh oh! Dear Ma and Pa spent every penny.

I’m not a mind-reader, but here is my best guess on what you’re thinking: *They shouldn’t have been able to do that! I have the right to my own money!*

You are correct. No matter how old you are, the money you earn should be saved for you. Fortunately, in 1938, actor Jackie Coogan took his mother and stepfather to court for spending his entire fortune. This led the California legislature to enact the Child Actors Bill, also known as the Coogan Law, which now ensures that child actors’ rights are protected.³ As a result, if you get a starring role in Hollywood today, your money will be safe thanks to labor laws that better protect the rights of child actors.⁴

The word *rights* refers to things you should be allowed to have, get, or do. You should *have* access to the basic things you need to survive, like clean water, nutritious food, and a safe place to live. You should be allowed to *get* an education and basic medical care and *do* and experience things like other kids, such as play, share your thoughts freely, and explore your world. You should not be treated

PART I: EXAMINE YOUR WORLD

differently because of your skin color, language, or clothes. It should not matter whether you are young or old, rich or poor, healthy or sick. Human rights are about how people treat one another. They are meant to make sure everyone has equal opportunities.

Across the globe, individuals and groups work to ensure all people can enjoy equal treatment. The United Nations (aka the UN), with 193 member countries, is the largest worldwide organization dedicated to promoting equal rights. The UN did something handy: it listed all the things people deserve to have to ensure they are treated equally. These “things” are called *fundamental human rights*.

Let’s break this down:

Fundamental→ something basic and important

Human→ hopefully what you see in a mirror

Rights→ what each person deserves, in order to be treated fairly

The UN list, called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (aka the UDHR), contains thirty articles that detail all human rights. Here’s a quick look at some of them:

- All people are born free and equal.
- Everyone deserves the same human rights, no matter their race, color, sex, language, religion, or political opinion.
- No one should be placed in slavery.
- No one should be forced to marry.
- Everyone has the right to own property.
- Laws should treat all people equally.
- All children have the right to attend school.
- Anyone charged with an offense should be considered innocent until proven guilty.

PRAISE FOR JOAN MARIE GALAT'S

Make Your Mark, Make a Difference

“Being the change we want to see in the world isn’t always easy. For parents and children alike, it can be challenging to start a conversation on how we can tackle the barriers to a better world. Joan Marie Galat’s book is an excellent guide for young readers to get curious and find inspiration as our next generation of difference makers. *Make Your Mark, Make a Difference* offers a step-by-step toolkit for anyone hoping to develop the skills to create positive change within their communities! Together we truly can make a difference!”

—**Rick Hansen**, founder Rick Hansen Foundation

“Informative, upbeat, empowering—Joan Marie Galat has created an antidote to despair in this guide to creating a kinder planet. Readers, teachers, thinkers, and community-builders will use this book as a starting point to a life of joyful action for positive change. Beautifully designed with well-researched information and terrific examples of youth activism, *Make Your Mark, Make a Difference* should be a staple in classrooms and will be a life-changing gift to kids who care. Great book!”

—**Deborah Ellis**, peace activist and author of *The Breadwinner* series

“Two of our world’s most desperate needs right now are hope and possibility. Luckily for us, Joan Marie Galat’s new book, *Make Your Mark, Make a Difference*, provides readers with both in spades! I’ll surely be reading it with my own four sons, and encouraging all my students and colleagues to share this inspiring book with others!”

—**Luke Reynolds**, PhD, professor of education at Endicott College, former public middle school teacher, author, and dad

“In a world like this, with so many issues where it can often feel like you can’t make a dent, we need more youth changemakers than ever. Books like this provide the necessary inspiration for youth to take that first or next step in their journey to make a difference! I can honestly say I wish I had this starting my activism when I was nine.”

—**Hannah Alper**, activist, blogger, and author of *Momentum: Small Acts, Big Change*

“Encourage kids to be the change! With profiles of young people that demonstrate hope and progress on some of today’s most crucial issues, *Make Your Mark, Make a Difference* is a fantastic tool for kids who want to change the world. And it’s the perfect book for librarians, teachers, and parents looking to inspire them.”

—**Michelle Roehm McCann**, author *Enough Is Enough*
and *Reading Together*

“Joan Marie Galat’s *Make Your Mark, Make a Difference* is an indispensable toolkit for young activists. It educates and inspires action, making it a critical resource for the next generation of changemakers. Including real-world initiatives like Protecting Our Students adds a layer of practicality that transforms activism from concept to achievable reality.”

—**Robert Jordan**, cofounder of Protecting Our Students
and the SITE|SAFETYNETSM app

“A marvelous book that sets out to inspire and inform, *Make Your Mark, Make A Difference* should be required social studies reading. Joan Marie Galat makes notions like activism and fundamental human rights straightforward, clear, and simple, empowering young readers to envision themselves in action, and then gives them the tools they need to put that vision into action. An inspiring read for children, adolescents, parents, and educators—should be on every library shelf!”

—**Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva**, PhD, educator and arts activist

“*Make Your Mark, Make a Difference* encourages kids to feel empowered to fight the injustices that exist in our world. It’s going to take all of us working together to create the future we want to have. This book helps kids understand how they can start that change.”

—**Jackson Apollo Mancini** (age eight), author of
Dr. Jon Jon Saves the Moon

“With a wide variety of potential causes to care about, loads of stories of others who’ve made a difference, and plenty of good advice along the way, *Make Your Mark, Make a Difference* is a wonderful way to introduce young readers to the idea that they can be changemakers—right now.”

—**Laurie Ann Thompson**, author of *Be a Changemaker* and *Emmanuel’s Dream*

“A thoroughly enjoyable read that is informative, insightful, and brilliant in its comprehensive review of all things that matter. This book will leave readers, young and old, feeling inspired and empowered with the knowledge that they too can make a difference!”

—**Nhung N. Tran-Davies**, author of *The Doll* and *Green Papayas* and cofounder of Children of Vietnam Benevolent Foundation

“A comprehensive look at how kids can be confident leaders while pursuing change within a variety of important worldly issues. Joan Marie Galat provides readers with an abundance of excellent ideas for activism along with positive and thoughtful steps to achieve their goals.”

—**Greg Pattridge**, PhD, teacher, writer, and creator of the *Always in the Middle* blog

“Encouraging, supportive, and motivating, this book will inspire anyone of any age to consider how they can contribute to making the world, or just their small corner of it, a better place for all. Through real-life examples of young activists, along with a plethora of contemplative exercises that promote self-confidence, decision-making, and goal setting, the author reveals how every young person can be an advocate for positive change, on their own, in a group, or through an organization. From the abundant tips, quizzes, insights, and resources, kids will discover what is most important to them and learn how to go from feeling helpless to helpful and powerless to empowered. After reading this book, kids will come away knowing that regardless of their schedule, locale, finances, or living situation, they can make a valuable difference and have fun in the process.”

—**Jo Stepaniak**, MSEd, author of *Low-FODMAP and Vegan* and *The Ultimate Uncheese Cookbook* and former community and victim-offender mediator