

Children

Difference Makers

January : Iqbal Masih



Masih was Pakistani boy who escaped child slavery at 10 years old and became a leader in the movement to put an end to it once and for all. He helped over 3,000 children escape bondage and traveled the globe speaking out against the issue. Masih was assassinated when he was 12 and roughly 800 people attended his funeral service. However, his legacy lives on well beyond his death. In 2009, Congress started an annual award in his name given to activists fighting to end child labor.

February : Ruby Bridges

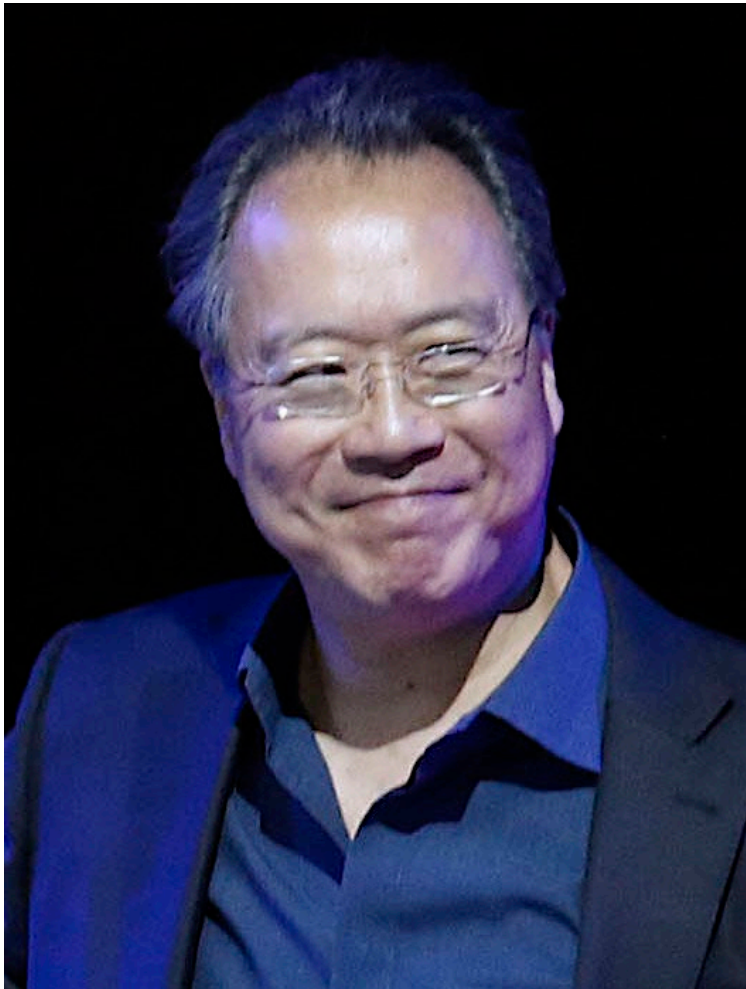


In 1960, she walked past hateful protesters to become the first Black child at a Louisiana school – and was then taught alone for a year. She discusses fear, forbearance and her fight for a better future

Looking at images of Bridges' first day at William Frantz elementary school in New Orleans, she is a study in vulnerability: a tiny girl in her smart new uniform, with white socks and white ribbons in her hair, flanked by four huge federal agents in suits. Awaiting her at the school gates was a phalanx of rabidly hostile protesters, mostly white parents and children, plus photographers and reporters. They yelled names and racial slurs, chanted, and waved placards. One sign read: "All I want for Christmas is a clean white school." One woman held up a miniature coffin with a black doll in it. It has become one of the defining images of the civil rights movement, popularised even further by Norman Rockwell's recreation of it in his 1964 painting [The Problem We All Live With](#).

The confrontation was expected. Three months before Bridges was born, the US supreme court had issued its landmark [Brown v Board of Education ruling](#), outlawing segregation in schools nationwide. Six years later, though, states in the south were stubbornly refusing to act upon it. When nine African American children enrolled at the [Little Rock school in Arkansas in 1957](#), it had caused an uproar. President Eisenhower had to call in federal troops to escort the children through a mob gathered outside the school. Three years later it was Louisiana's turn. Bridges was one of six Black children to pass a test to gain access to formerly all-white schools. But two of the children dropped out and three went, on the same day, to a different school. So Bridges was all on her own.

March : Yo Yo Ma



Yo-Yo Ma (*Chinese*: 馬友友 *Ma Yo Yo*; born October 7, 1955) is an American cellist.^[2] Born in Paris to Chinese^[3] parents and educated in New York City, he was a [child prodigy](#), performing from the age of four and a half. He graduated from the [Juilliard School](#) and [Harvard University](#) and attended [Columbia University](#) and has performed as a soloist with orchestras around the world. He has recorded more than 90 albums and received 19 [Grammy Awards](#). In addition to recordings of the standard [classical](#) repertoire, Ma has recorded a wide variety of folk music, such as American [bluegrass music](#), traditional Chinese melodies, the [tangos](#) of Argentine composer [Astor Piazzolla](#), and Brazilian music. He has collaborated with artists in diverse genres, including the singer [Bobby McFerrin](#), the guitarist [Carlos Santana](#), [Sérgio Assad](#) and his brother, Odair, and the singer-songwriter-guitarist [James Taylor](#). Ma's primary performance instrument is a 1733 [Montagnana](#) cello valued at US\$2.5 million. Ma has been a [United Nations Messenger of Peace](#) since 2006.^[4] He was awarded [The Glenn Gould Prize](#) in 1999, the [National Medal of Arts](#) in 2001,^[5] the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](#) in 2011, and the [Polar Music Prize](#) in 2012.^[6] Ma was named one of [Time's 100](#) Most Influential People of 2020.^[7]

Melati and Isabel Wijzen

April : Claudette Colvin



Claudette Colvin

Colvin was 15 when she became a major player in the Civil Rights Movement by refusing to give up her bus seat to a caucasian rider. This was nine months before Rosa Parks was arrested for the same thing. She was one of the four plaintiffs involved in the Supreme Court case that ultimately outlawed segregation on Alabama buses. Colvin has said about her experience, "I feel very, very proud of what I did. I do feel like what I did was a spark and it caught on."

May : Louis Braille



Louis Braille

Braille was only 12 when he learned of a communication system used by the French army, which laid the groundwork for his own system of reading and writing used by the blind. He completed his alphabet of raised dots by the time he was 15. It was first adapted by France's Royal Institute for Blind Youth until two years after his death at the age of 43. It has since spread throughout the world and is still in use today.

June : Ryan Hreljac



Ryan Hreljac

Hreljac has been working to make clean water accessible to people in poor areas since he was six and first learned about the issue. He began by doing chores to earn money to send to organizations building wells in poor countries before starting [Ryan's Well Foundation](#) when he was 10. The charity has brought drinkable water to over 800,000 people in 16 countries. Ryan's Well Foundation also partners with schools to educate children about the situation.

July : Bana al-Abed



Bana al-Abed

Young people using social media may not seem life-changing, but one look at Abed's Twitter page will change your mind. At just seven years old, she documented her life in war-torn Syria to call attention to the atrocities happening there. With some assistance from her mother, Abed has called upon world leaders to take action.

August : Kelvin Doe



One of Sierra Leone's most famous inventors got started when he began looking for ways to fix local problems with technology as an 11-year-old, just five years after the country's volatile civil war ended. By 13, he was powering neighborhood houses with batteries made out of acid, soda and metal in a tin cup. He went on to build a community radio station out of recycled parts that he powered with a generator also made out of reused material. David Sengeh, a PhD student at the MIT media lab and Kelvin's mentor, [said](#): "In Sierra Leone, other young people suddenly feel they can be like Kelvin."

September : Easton LaChappelle



Easton LaChappelle

Fourteen-year-old LaChappelle built a prototype for a robotic hand out of Legos and fishing wire in 2011, which earned him third place at the Colorado State Science Fair. As fate would have it, he met a seven-year-old girl at the science fair who had a prosthetic arm that cost \$80,000. It was then that Easton's mission became clear — to build a more affordable alternative. Now he runs a startup that uses 3D printing to build prosthetic arms and hands, bringing the price down to just \$350 to produce. He also made the design [accessible to download](#) by anyone at no cost.

October : Malala Yousafzai



At 17, Yousafzai became the youngest Nobel Prize laureate for her humanitarian efforts. She captured the world's attention after being shot by the Taliban in Pakistan on her way to school because she was an advocate for women pursuing education. She is currently working towards her bachelor's degree at Oxford's Lady Margaret Hall while continuing her charity work through her organization, [The Malala Fund](#).

November : Jean-Michel Basquiat



Jean-Michel Basquiat (French: [\[ʒɑ̃ miʃɛl baskja\]](#); December 22, 1960 – August 12, 1988) was an American artist who rose to success during the 1980s as part of the [Neo-expressionism](#) movement.

Basquiat first achieved fame as part of the [graffiti](#) duo [SAMO](#), alongside Al Diaz, writing enigmatic [epigrams](#) in the cultural hotbed of [Manhattan's Lower East Side](#) during the late 1970s, where [rap](#), [punk](#), and [street art](#) coalesced into early [hip-hop music](#) culture. By the early 1980s, his paintings were being exhibited in galleries and museums internationally. At 21, Basquiat became the youngest artist to ever take part in [documenta](#) in [Kassel](#). At 22, he was one of the youngest to exhibit at the [Whitney Biennial](#) in New York. The [Whitney Museum of American Art](#) held a retrospective of his artwork in 1992.

Basquiat's art focused on dichotomies such as wealth versus poverty, integration versus segregation, and inner versus outer experience. He [appropriated](#) poetry, drawing, and painting, and married text and image, [abstraction](#), [figuration](#), and historical information mixed with contemporary critique. He used [social commentary](#) in his paintings as a tool for introspection and for identifying with his experiences in the Black community, as well as attacks on [power structures](#) and systems of racism. His visual poetics were acutely [political](#) and direct in their criticism of [colonialism](#) and support for [class struggle](#).

Since Basquiat's death at the [age of 27](#) from a [heroin](#) overdose in 1988, his work has steadily increased in value. In 2017, [Untitled](#), a 1982 painting depicting a black skull with red and yellow rivulets, sold for a record-breaking \$110.5 million, becoming one of the [most expensive paintings](#) ever purchased.

December : Melati and Isabel Wijsen



Melati and Isabel Wijsen were only 10 and 12, respectively, when they started on a course of activism that has drastically decreased the global usage of single-use plastic. The young women were inspired by the country of Rwanda's ban of polyethylene bags in 2008, and decided to try to get their native Bali to do the same. Their homegrown initiative of beach cleanups and government petitions graduated to an organizations advocating for reduced plastic use in 15 different countries. Bali is officially plastic bag free, and Indonesia will be by 2021, with the Wijsen to thank.