

August Pullman, aka Auggie, was a 10-year-old boy from Manhattan. He was born with a deformed face. Even after 27 surgeries, people still looked away in horror upon seeing his face. Therefore, he was limited to homeschooling. This year, Auggie's parents decided to send him to a private school.

The first months of school were awful for Auggie. Some avoided him on purpose. Rude kids like Julian stared, whispered, and teased him. Auggie wondered if he'd ever fit in, but fortunately, it wasn't all bad. He had already made one friend, Jack, and Halloween was on the way. This was Auggie's favorite time of year because he could wear a mask to cover his face.

This year he chose a Bleeding Scream costume. He walked through the school halls, wearing his scary mask. He didn't care who saw him. His good mood, however, soon changed when he overheard Jack talking to Julian. "I'm only friends with Auggie because the principal asked me to be," said Jack. "If I looked like that, I would never go out in public." As soon as Auggie heard these words, he ran home in tears.

The incident was so heartbreaking that he hardly spoke to Jack for a month. When Jack realized Auggie had overheard him, he felt terrible. It was true that the principal had asked him to make friends with Auggie. He had only pretended to be his friend at first. But now, after learning how cool and smart Auggie was, he really wanted to hang out with him. Therefore, Jack apologized in order to make peace. This move saved their friendship.

Gradually, many of Auggie's classmates began treating him better. They started to realize how nice and funny he was. As summer approached, Auggie joined the class for a three-day camping trip. The trip was wonderful until the second night. One of the big kids from another school shone his flashlight on Auggie's face and started to make fun of him. Others joined in and called him hurtful names like "alien." Luckily, Jack came to his rescue, and even some of the mean kids in his class defended him. They couldn't fight the bigger kids, but at least everyone got away from those bullies.

When Auggie returned to school, he noticed that things had changed. Many kids in school started calling him "little dude" and knuckle-punching him in the hallways. It was wonderful that they were treating him like any other student. At the year-end ceremony, Auggie observed that no one minded being close to him, and for the first time in his life, he didn't mind taking pictures.

You may have heard of the delightful British custom of sipping hot tea in the late afternoon. But do you know who started this tea-drinking tradition? And are you aware that the British have both “low” and “high” tea?

In England, afternoon tea can typically be described as sitting down for a period of time between 3 and 6 p.m. to enjoy tea and some snacks. Some people believe that the English duchess Anna Russell might have started this custom in the mid-1800s. At that time, members of the upper class normally had a light lunch and late dinner. However, Lady Russell grew extremely hungry between meals and found it very difficult to wait so long until dinnertime. Her solution to this daily struggle was to ask for some snacks and tea at 4 p.m. She later started inviting friends over for these little tea parties, and because of this, her idea soon spread throughout British high society. Hosts at these events served high-quality teas and delicious snacks on luxurious low tables. This explains why we now call this custom “low tea.” Despite the word “low,” low tea clearly represents British high culture.

High tea, by comparison, functioned as one of the main meals during the day for the working class in northern England. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, people mostly worked in agriculture and ate their biggest meal at lunchtime. This was followed by a light supper in the evening. During the Industrial Revolution, however, laborers were working longer hours in factories. These long hours made it not so convenient to eat a big lunch. When they got off work, they were starving. Therefore, these workers had high tea immediately after work, usually between 5 and 7 p.m. This was an energy-packed meal with foods that were as filling as possible, such as meat, vegetables, fish, and pies. Strong black tea was served in ordinary teapots, and diners were seated on high-backed chairs at the dining table. This inspired the term “high tea.”

Research shows that, on average, each British person drinks 3.5 cups of tea a day. This indicates that teatime has become a fundamental part of British culture. While high tea remains restricted to northern England, afternoon tea is a way of life all across the country. In fact, people now enjoy it in just about every corner of the world.

Everyone has his or her own favorite way of spending free time. Some like to have fun by playing video games or surfing the Internet. Others choose to educate themselves by reading books or newspapers. Still others, however, seek fun as well as knowledge. For such people, the best choice may be to watch TED Talks, a series of short online videos.

TED, which stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design, is a nonprofit foundation that was established in 1984. With the slogan “ideas worth spreading,” it held its first conference that same year, giving each speaker eighteen minutes to present his or her ideas. As TED conferences became increasingly popular, their organizers decided to invite thinkers from a broader range of fields. These included science, business, and even medicine. The TED.com website was not created until 2007. After that, many of the speakers’ talks were uploaded for the public to watch for free. At present, the collection of TED Talk videos is growing week by week, and it has helped spread new ideas around the world.

Over the years, numerous celebrities have given TED Talks and shared interesting ideas with their audiences. One was chef Jamie Oliver, who presented his idea of starting a food revolution. Oliver wanted to improve people’s health by teaching everyone how to choose and prepare healthy meals. Another was James Cameron, the director of the movies *Aliens* and *Avatar*. Cameron talked about his childhood fascination with science fiction. He also spoke of how his interest in space, aliens, and robots eventually led him to make blockbuster films. Still another was Bill Gates, the co-founder of Microsoft. He, however, didn’t talk about computers. Instead, Gates suggested that the government do more to monitor and control the spread of deadly diseases in the future. These are just a few examples of the celebrity speakers who have inspired millions through their TED Talks. Listening to one of these TED Talks is like standing on the shoulders of a giant— you get to see farther and understand more. You won’t realize just how much you can learn in eighteen minutes until you give it a try. In fact, there is a good chance that it will broaden your horizons and even inspire you to try to change the world.