



## Who Is Temple Grandin?

Once again, the kids were tossing insults at Temple Grandin in the hallway of junior high school.

They picked on Temple because she didn't act like everybody else. She spoke in a loud, flat voice. She repeated sentences over and over, word for word. She clapped her hands over her ears at the sound of the school bell. She acted lost and afraid in the crowded school hall.

Kids couldn't understand what made Temple tick. And Temple couldn't understand them, either. That was because Temple's brain worked differently from theirs. She had been born with a developmental

disorder known as autism (say: AW--tiz--im). It showed up when she was a baby, making her behave in odd ways.

On this day, Temple's temper boiled over at the bullying. She hurled a book at a kid. Hours later, the principal expelled her from school. Probably no one was too surprised. Temple was flunking nearly all her subjects. They just didn't interest her.

Everyone back in 1961 would have been amazed to know that Temple would grow up to become a world-famous animal scientist. All through her career she has worked to improve the treatment of cows and other animals that are raised for food.

Every year, millions and millions of cattle are killed for beef. Until Temple came along, people thought of cattle as products to turn into hamburgers and steaks. But Temple paid attention to the fear and pain cattle felt at large meat plants.

As an autistic person, Temple often felt like a scared animal herself. Loud noises, unfamiliar objects, sudden movements—any of those might frighten her at any minute. Her fears helped Temple tune in to the way animals feel.

Little by little, she changed the meat industry. Thanks to Temple, people began to realize that cattle are creatures with feelings that deserve a good life to the end.

Does autism make Temple more aware of animals' feelings? Temple thinks so. It makes her accept herself just the way she is. She has said many times, "If I could snap my fingers and be non-autistic, I would not. Autism is part of who I am."

## Chapter 1: An Unusual Child

Mary Temple Grandin was born in Boston in 1947. Her family called her by her middle name, Temple. To this day, that's how everyone knows her. Her parents, Eustacia and Richard, were educated and well-to-do. Nothing unusual set the Grandins apart from other couples. But their firstborn child wasn't at all

like other children.

Other babies cuddled up to their mothers. But when Eustacia hugged Temple, her child clawed at her like a wild animal. Other babies smiled and cooed and laughed. Not Temple. Later, when Temple did laugh, her mother said, “It erupts out of her in uncontrollable spasms, along with spitting.”

Youngsters usually start talking around age two. Temple never spoke a word. Instead she screamed, hummed, and made peeping sounds while flapping her hands.

And she was destructive. Temple broke her toys and ripped wallpaper off the wall. She chewed puzzle pieces and spat out the mush. In wild temper tantrums, she yanked off her shoes and threw them—hard.

Of course other toddlers threw tantrums, too. But Temple’s were longer, louder, and more furious. There were days when Temple seemed fine. Then suddenly, she’d throw herself on the floor, kicking and screaming.

Eustacia was only nineteen when Temple was born. She worried that she was doing something wrong with her daughter. She wasn’t. A second daughter, Jean, born when Temple was almost two, behaved just fine. In all, the Grandins had four children—three daughters and a son. None of the other children acted like Temple.

Between fits, Temple spaced out, locked inside her own world. For hours on end, she rocked back and forth on the floor, gazing at the rug. She spun lids and coins endlessly. When Temple zoned out, she blocked all sounds, even her mother’s voice calling her name. It seemed as if headphones covered her ears.

Was Temple deaf, her mother wondered? Richard didn’t think so. He thought Temple belonged in a hospital for children with mental problems. Most people at that time agreed with him, even doctors. Very little was known about autism in the 1940s. Children like Temple usually spent their lives in hospitals, away from their families and the real world. Eustacia couldn’t bear the thought of that. Later, Temple became deeply grateful to her mother for not giving up on her.

In 1950, when Temple was three, Eustacia brought her to a neurologist, a brain doctor. Tests proved that Temple was not deaf. Her intelligence was normal, too. (Later tests showed Temple was extremely smart.) The doctor suggested speech therapy. Maybe Temple could be taught to talk.

Speech therapy became a huge breakthrough in Temple’s life. Until then, words had sounded like a jumble of unclear sounds to her. She heard only parts of words. For example, she heard “ba” instead of “ball.” The speech teacher pronounced every word very slowly so Temple could hear the missing sounds and say them herself.

Bit by bit, a light turned on in Temple’s brain. She was a bright child with a mind that longed to break free. After a while, she forced out single words. By the time she was five, Temple talked in sentences.

From then on, she turned into a jabber box. She talked nonstop.

A nanny also helped Temple behave in a group. Temple learned simple manners and how to take turns at games. By then, Temple didn't want to be shut out of family games, even if she wasn't sure how to play like the others.

Still, her terrible tantrums and zoning -out continued. So, when Temple was five, her mother brought her to a psychiatrist. For the first time, Eustacia learned the word that described what was happening: *autism*.

Because of autism, Temple's senses were supercharged. Ordinary sights, smells, and touches were a nightmare to Temple. The jangle of a ringing telephone hurt her ears. The strong smell of a rose drove her crazy. Starched dresses felt prickly against her skin. When her senses were overloaded, Temple lashed out in tantrums.

One time when she was three, Temple nearly caused a terrible car accident because of a scratchy hat. Eustacia was driving Temple to speech therapy down a busy highway. In the back seat, Temple tore off a hat that her mother had made her wear. It felt prickly and painful.

Leaning forward, Temple threw it out her mother's open window. Eustacia tried to grab the hat—and sideswiped a big truck! It was extremely fortunate that no one was hurt.

The real world was often a confusing place to Temple. But, at five, she was at the age to start school. Was Temple ready to take this big step?

## Chapter 2: Grade School Years

Luckily, Temple's grade school was right down the road from where they lived in a big house. If Temple exploded in a tantrum at school, Eustacia could get there fast and bring her home.

It was also lucky that Dedham Country Day School was small and private. There were only fourteen children in Temple's class. All the families knew one another. Every child was invited to every birthday party. No one was ever left out—and Temple wouldn't be, either.

When Temple walked into the classroom on the first day, the kids didn't see anything unusual—just a tall girl with short brown hair. But before long, Temple's unusual behavior showed up. She always called her classmates by their first *and* last names. Her voice was loud and flat, and her speech was slurred. Temple repeated the same questions over and over again, just to hear the same answers. And sometimes she completely lost it.

During one meltdown, Temple threw herself on the floor, kicking and screaming. When the teacher came over to calm her, Temple bit her on the leg! Her classmates looked on with shock.

No one could see inside Temple's brain to understand what made her explode. Children with autism need a steady routine. Maybe there had been too many changes in the schedule for Temple that day. Maybe the smell of the teacher's perfume was too strong for her to bear. Maybe the school bell rang one too many times. Temple has said that the clanging school bell felt like a dentist drill hitting a nerve.

Temple didn't know that she was different from other children. She thought the school bell hurt them, too. "I thought other people could withstand the noise because they were stronger than me," she later recalled.

Sure, Temple acted differently. But like every child, she wanted badly to fit in. Being left out or made fun of was another reason to explode.

One day in music class, Temple couldn't clap to the beat, although she didn't realize it. "Why are you acting this way?" the teacher asked her. "You're spoiling it for everyone." Temple was hurt. She had been trying with all her might. Furious, she jumped up, knocking over her chair.

Temple flinched like a scared animal at the slightest touch, even the teacher's tap on her shoulder. Secretly, though, Temple longed to be hugged. To comfort herself at home, Temple wrapped herself tightly in a blanket or wiggled under couch cushions. In class, she daydreamed about a magic box that could wrap her tightly in a hug. Who could imagine that one day Temple would invent her own "magic" hugging box?

For all her problems, Temple had amazing talents, too. In art class, she drew beautiful lifelike drawings of horses. And she could invent and build things herself. Her skilled hands made sailboats, tree houses, and kites shaped like animals that she flew with her sisters and brother. She sewed costumes for school plays on a little sewing machine her mother gave her.

At home, in her room, Temple rigged up webs of strings that dropped over "invaders"—that meant anyone who came in without being asked.

Curious neighborhood children trooped along with Temple on her after--school projects. One of her young pals said she liked being with Temple because she wasn't ever boring.

Sometimes Temple's active mind thought up mischief. It was fun for her, but dangerous for others. One day, she and a friend threw bottles out of the hayloft of an old barn. The teacher lived next door, and the bottles shattered all over the teacher's yard. The next day, Temple blamed the mess on two boys who sometimes made fun of her. Today, Temple knows that's wrong. But at the time, she thought it served the bullies right.

For the most part, grade school was a happy time for Temple. But, at the end of sixth grade, it was time for Temple to start junior high school. It would turn her world upside down.