Colorado student, scientist named Time's 'Kid of the Year'

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This undated photo provided by Time Magazine shows the cover of its Dec. 14, 2020 issue, featuring a 15-year-old Colorado high school student and young scientist who has been named the magazine's first-ever "Kid of the Year." Gitanjali Rao has used artificial intelligence and created apps to tackle contaminated drinking water, cyberbullying, opioid addiction and other social problems. Rao is a sophomore at STEM School Highlands Ranch in suburban Denver and was selected from more than 5,000 nominees. The process culminated with a finalists' committee of children, Time for Kids reporters and comedian Trevor Noah. Time says it wanted to recognize the rising leaders of America's youngest generation in announcing the award. (Sharif Hamza for

TIME via AP)

A 15-year-old Colorado high school student and young scientist who has used artificial intelligence and created apps to tackle contaminated drinking water, cyberbullying, opioid addiction and other social problems has been named Time Magazine's first-ever "Kid of the Year."

Gitanjali Rao, a sophomore at STEM School Highlands Ranch in suburban Denver who lives in the city of Lone Tree, was selected from more than 5,000 nominees in a process that culminated with a finalists' committee of children, drinking [water crisis](#) in Flint, Michigan, inspired her work to develop a way to detect contaminants and send those results to a mobile phone, she said.

"I was like 10 when I told my parents that I wanted to research carbon nanotube sensor technology at the Denver Water quality research lab, and my mom was like, "A what?" Rao told Jolie. She said that work "is going to be in our generation's hands pretty soon. So if no one else is gonna do it, I'm gonna do it."

The sensor technology involves molecules of carbon atoms that can detect chemical changes, including chemicals in [water](#).

Rao has partnered with rural schools; museums; [science](#), technology, engineering and mathematics organizations; and other institutions to run innovation workshops for thousands of other students.

In a world where science is increasingly questioned or challenged, Rao insisted that its pursuit is an essential act of kindness, the best way that a younger generation can better the world. Science and technology are being employed as never before to tackle the coronavirus pandemic,

global warming and a host of other issues, she noted.

"We have science in everything we're involved in, and I think that's the biggest thing to put out there, that science is cool, innovating is cool, and anybody can be an innovator," Rao said. "Anybody can do science."

Time was planning a [Kid of the Year broadcast special](#) at 7:30 p.m. EST (5:30 p.m. MST) on Nickelodeon.

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