

□ **READING CHALLENGE**

The Boy Who Made an App at Twelve

Thomas Suarez was only twelve years old when he built his own apps, gave a TED Talk, and started teaching other kids to code.

Level	A2 — Elementary
Age Group	Teens (11-16)
Topic	Science & Tech
Duration	~12-15 minutes
Skill	Reading
Vocabulary	15 words
Quiz	5 questions

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When Thomas Suarez was six years old, he got his first computer. Most children that age play games or watch videos on a computer. Thomas did that too, but he also wanted to know something else: how do people make these games? How does a computer know what to do? By the time he was nine, Thomas was already learning to write [code](#). By the age of twelve, he had built several apps, put them on the Apple App Store, and given a TED Talk that millions of people watched online. His story shows that you do not need to be an adult to create something amazing with technology.

A Kid Who Loved Computers

Thomas Suarez grew up in the Los Angeles area in California, USA. He was a normal kid who went to a normal school. He liked playing football, hanging out with friends, and playing video games. But he also had a strong [passion](#) for technology. While other children were happy just playing games on their phones, Thomas wanted to understand how those games worked.

When Apple released the iPhone in 2007, Thomas was fascinated. He loved the idea that anyone could make an [app](#) and share it with millions of people around the world. He thought, "If adults can make apps, why can't I?" So he started learning. He read books about [programming](#). He watched free tutorials on YouTube. He visited websites that taught coding to beginners. He used every [resource](#) he could find online. Nobody told him to do this. He did it because he was curious and excited.

His First Apps

Thomas started making apps using Python, a popular programming language that is good for beginners. Later, he learned other languages too. His first app was a simple game, and it was not very good. But he kept trying. He learned from his mistakes, read more, and practised every day after school.

His first real success was an app called "Earth Fortune." It was a fun, simple app that showed different colours of the Earth and told you your fortune, like a digital fortune cookie. He put it on the Apple App Store, and people started to [download](#) it. Then came his most famous app: "Bustin Jieber." It was a whack-a-mole style game where players had to hit pictures of the pop singer Justin Bieber. It was a joke, of course, but it became very popular. Thousands of people downloaded it, and suddenly Thomas was a twelve-year-old app [developer](#) with real users.

The TED Talk That Changed Everything

In October 2011, Thomas was invited to give a talk at a TEDx event in Manhattan Beach, California. TED Talks are short [presentations](#) where people share interesting ideas. The speakers are usually famous scientists, business leaders, or artists. Thomas was just twelve, but he walked onto the stage with confidence.

In his talk, Thomas spoke about how he had learned to make apps and why he thought more kids should learn to code. He was funny, relaxed, and surprisingly professional for someone so young. The **audience** laughed at his jokes and were clearly impressed. He explained that when he told adults he liked making apps, they would usually say, “Oh, that’s cool,” and then ask him for help with their phones. He compared his generation to earlier ones: in the past, kids who liked technology could take apart a radio or build a model rocket. Today, kids can build apps, create websites, and write **software**.

The video of his talk was uploaded to YouTube, and within a few months, millions of people had watched it. Thomas became one of the youngest people ever to give a TED Talk that went viral. News websites and TV channels started calling him a “kid genius” and a young **entrepreneur**.

Teaching Other Kids

After his TED Talk, Thomas could have just enjoyed his fame. But he wanted to do something more useful. He noticed that many kids at his school were interested in making apps and games, but they did not know how to start. There were no coding classes at his school, and most teachers did not know how to code either.

So Thomas asked his school for **permission** to start an app club. The school said yes. In the club, Thomas taught other students the basics of programming. He showed them how to use simple tools and free **platforms** to build their own apps. He was patient and enthusiastic, and the club quickly became one of the most popular activities at school. Kids who had never written a single line of code were suddenly making their own simple games and tools.

Thomas’s app club **inspired** other schools to start similar clubs. The idea spread across the United States and even to other countries. Thomas showed that kids do not just need to be consumers of technology — they can be creators too.

Why Coding Matters for Young People

Thomas’s story is part of a bigger movement. Around the world, more and more people believe that children should learn to code from a young age. Coding is not just about making apps or games. It teaches you how to think logically, solve problems step by step, and be creative. These skills are useful in every job, not just in technology.

Today, there are many free tools and websites that help young people learn to code. Scratch, made by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), lets children create animations and games by dragging and dropping colourful blocks. Code.org offers free lessons and games that teach the basics of programming. Swift Playgrounds, made by Apple, teaches the Swift programming language through fun puzzles. Python, the language Thomas started with, is free and has thousands of tutorials online for beginners.

Many famous technology companies were started by young people. Mark Zuckerberg **launched** Facebook when he was nineteen. Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak started Apple in a

garage when they were twenty-one and twenty-five. More recently, teenagers have created apps that have been downloaded millions of times. The tools are available to everyone — all you need is curiosity and the willingness to learn.

Where Is Thomas Now?

After his famous TED Talk, Thomas continued to work on technology projects. He kept learning new programming languages, worked on new apps, and became involved in educational technology. He has spoken at many events and conferences about the importance of teaching coding to children. He also became interested in other areas of technology, including virtual reality and artificial intelligence.

Thomas chose to keep a relatively quiet life as he grew older. He did not become a celebrity or start a huge company as a teenager. Instead, he focused on his education and continued to build things he was interested in. His story is not about becoming rich and famous at twelve. It is about showing that young people can do more than adults often expect. When a kid says, “I want to make an app,” the answer should not be, “Wait until you are older.” The answer should be, “Let me help you start.”

Thomas Suarez proved that age is just a number when it comes to technology. If a twelve-year-old boy from California can teach himself to code, build apps, give a TED Talk, and start a coding club, then anyone can. All you need is a computer, an internet connection, and the desire to try. The next great app might be built by someone who is reading this article right now.

Vocabulary

#	Word	Definition
1	app	a small program on a phone or tablet that does a specific job
2	code	instructions written in a special language that tell a computer what to do
3	develop	to create something new over a period of time, step by step
4	inspire	to make someone want to do something or give them a new idea
5	presentation	a talk or speech given to a group of people, often with slides
6	audience	the group of people who watch or listen to a performance or talk
7	software	the programs and instructions that make a computer or phone work
8	download	to copy a file, app, or program from the internet to your device
9	programming	the process of writing instructions (code) for a computer
10	platform	a system or service where people can share, buy, or use digital content
11	entrepreneur	a person who starts their own business and takes risks to make money
12	passion	a very strong feeling of love or excitement for something
13	permission	when someone says yes and allows you to do something
14	launch	to start or release something new, like a product or app, for the first time
15	resource	something useful that helps you do or learn something, like a book or website

Comprehension Quiz

1. How old was Thomas Suarez when he gave his TED Talk?
 - A) Ten years old
 - B) Twelve years old
 - C) Fourteen years old
 - D) Sixteen years old
2. What was the name of Thomas's first popular app?
 - A) Snake Game
 - B) Bustin Jieber
 - C) Kid Coder
 - D) App Builder
3. What did Thomas do at his school after making his apps?
 - A) He sold his apps to other students
 - B) He stopped going to school to work full-time
 - C) He started a club to teach other students how to make apps
 - D) He asked his school to add more computer classes
4. How did Thomas learn to write code?
 - A) His parents paid for expensive private lessons
 - B) He went to a special technology school
 - C) He taught himself using free online resources, books, and tutorials
 - D) A famous programmer visited his school and taught him
5. What is the main message of the article?
 - A) Only very clever children can learn to code
 - B) You need to be an adult to create a successful app
 - C) Young people can learn technology and create amazing things if they have passion and the right tools
 - D) Schools should stop teaching normal subjects and only teach coding

Answer Key

#	Answer	Question
1	B	How old was Thomas Suarez when he gave his TED Talk?
2	B	What was the name of Thomas's first popular app?
3	C	What did Thomas do at his school after making his apps?
4	C	How did Thomas learn to write code?
5	C	What is the main message of the article?