

Name: _____ Class: _____

Malala Yousafzai: A Normal Yet Powerful Girl

By NPR Staff
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Malala Yousafzai (born 1997) is a Pakistani activist for female education and the youngest ever winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Malala is from the Swat Valley in northwest Pakistan, where the local Taliban has banned girls from attending school. Malala, whose family ran a chain of local schools, publicly stood against the Taliban's actions and launched an international movement. On October 9th, 2012, a gunman from the Taliban boarded a school bus and shot her in the head. Malala remained in critical condition in the days following the attack, but survived. Since then, she has continued to advocate internationally for women's education. As you read, consider what drove Malala to overcome tremendous adversity.

- [1] "I think Malala is an average girl," Ziauddin Yousafzai says about the 16-year-old Pakistani girl who captured the world's attention after being shot by the Taliban,¹ "but there's something extraordinary about her."

A teacher himself, Yousafzai inspired his daughter's fight to be educated. At a special event with Malala in Washington, D.C., he tells NPR's Michel Martin that he is often asked what training he gave to his daughter. "I usually tell people, 'You should not ask me what I have done. Rather you ask me, what I did not do,'" he says. "I did not clip her wings to fly. I did not stop her from flying."



"Education Advocate Malala Attends MDG Event" by United Nations Photo is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Yousafzai has this advice for parents of girls around the world: "Trust your daughters, they are faithful. Honor your daughters, they are honorable. And educate your daughters, they are amazing."

A year after being shot, Malala is clear about her goal. "I speak for education of every child, in every corner of the world," Malala says. "There has been a discrimination² in our society," which she believes must be defeated. "We women are going to bring change. We are speaking up for girls' rights, but we must not behave like men, like they have done in the past."

- [5] Perhaps she has learned from her father's experience. When asked what gave him a passion for girls' education, Yousafzai points out that he was "born in a society where girls are ignored." Living with five sisters, he was sensitive to discrimination from an early age. "In the morning, I was used to milk and cream, and my sisters were given only tea," he says.

1. The Taliban is an Islamic militant group based in Afghanistan and western Pakistan. They are known around the world for their cruel punishment of citizens, their harsh treatment of women, and for their involvement in acts of terrorism.

2. **Discrimination** (*noun*): the practice of treating one person or group of people less fairly or less well than other people or groups

Yousafzai felt the injustice³ even more when Malala was born. He later opened a school that Malala attended in the Swat Valley. At the time, the Taliban's influence was gaining power and both Yousafzais were firmly on their radar.⁴ "But we thought that even terrorists might have some ethics," Yousafzai says. "Because they destroyed some 1,500 schools but they never injured a child. And she was a child."

Malala says that the shooting has taken away her fear. "I have already seen death and I know that death is supporting me in my cause of education. Death does not want to kill me," she says. "Before this attack, I might have been a little bit afraid how death would be. Now I'm not, because I have experienced it."

When asked if she is having any fun now with all her campaigning,⁵ Malala laughs, "It's a very nice question. I miss those days." But she also says that there is another side to her than what is shown in the media. "Outside of my home, I look like a very obedient, very serious, very good kind of girl, but nobody knows what happens inside the house." There, she says, she's not naughty, but she has to stand up to her brothers. "It's good to fight with your brothers and it's good to tease them to give them advice."

She says her little brother doesn't really understand why his sister has so much attention. "He said, 'Malala ... I can't understand why people are giving you prizes, and everywhere you go people say, 'This is Malala' and they give you awards, what have you done?'" she says.

- [10] Malala knows the Taliban would still like to kill her, but she says she hopes to return to Pakistan one day. "First, I need to empower myself with knowledge, with education. I need to work hard," she says. "And when I [am] powerful, then I will go back to Pakistan, inshallah [God willing]."

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3. **Injustice (noun):** a lack of fairness or equality in a situation
4. To be "on the radar" is a common expression meaning to be noticed or aware of
5. **Campaign (verb):** to carry out a planned set of activities over a period of time in order to achieve a specific goal

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. According to Malala, how did the shooting affect her? Cite evidence in your answer. [RI.3]

2. Summarize Malala's character using specific evidence from this article. [RI.2]

3. PART A: What does the word "ethics" most closely mean as it is used in paragraph 6? [RI.4]

- A. an understanding between right and wrong
- B. ability to commit violent acts
- C. dishonesty
- D. a sense of cruelty or hatred

4. PART B: Which phrase from the text provides the best clue to the meaning of the word "ethics" as it is used in paragraph 6? [RI.1]

- A. "even terrorists"
- B. "destroyed some 1,500 schools"
- C. "they never injured a child"
- D. "she was a child"

5. What is the effect of Malala's father's account in this news article? [RI.5]
- A. It allows readers to see that Malala achieved so much due to her strict upbringing and disciplined education.
 - B. It implies that Malala should not be treated as a hero because she is just an ordinary girl with the same problems and concerns as other young women.
 - C. It suggests that Malala's father does not deserve much credit for raising her.
 - D. It provides the perspective of someone who knows her well, and emphasizes the importance of encouraging educational equality.

Discussion Questions

Directions: *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. Why do you think Malala captured international attention?
2. Do you think that Malala may have turned out differently had her father practiced different kind of parenting techniques? Explain your answer.
3. Do you agree that Malala is a “normal, yet powerful” girl? Why or why not?
4. In the context of this article, what does it mean to be brave? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
5. How do people overcome adversity? Use evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature or art in your answer.
6. In her acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, Malala said, “A girl has the power to go forward in her life. And she’s not only a mother, and she’s not only a sister, she’s not only a wife. But a girl has the—she should have an identity. She should be recognized, and she has equal rights as a boy.” Discuss this quote.
7. Malala was nearly killed for trying to pursue an education, and she continues to advocate for girls to receive educations in spite of threats of violence. What does Malala's story teach us about promoting peace? How can education be used as a tool of peace?