

## Malala Yousafzai

Malala Yousafzai is a Woman and Child's Rights Activist, who heavily promotes the need for education, and how everyone (especially girls) has the right to have one. Already recognised in Pakistan for her advocacy<sup>1</sup>, Malala rose to international fame in 2012 following an attempt on her life by the Taliban.



Malala was born on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1997 in Mingora, Pakistan, to a Sunni Muslim family. Her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, is also an educational activist, and is well-known for founding a chain of schools within Pakistan, one of which Malala attended. From an early age, and heavily influenced by her father, Malala expressed a keen interest and passion for equal educational rights, and outwardly defied the Taliban, who believed that girls should not be allowed an education.

As the Taliban's hold in Pakistan began to grow stronger, and they started to attack girls' schools, Malala grew even bolder and began to publically speak out against them. This started with a talk in September 2008, which was titled: "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?"

***How would you feel if your basic right to an education was taken away?***

***What would your life be like?***

In early 2009, at just 11 years old, Malala started a blog for the BBC which centred on what it was like to live under the threat of the Taliban, and how they were trying to deny her an education. For her safety, Malala wrote under the pseudonym Gul Makai; however, she was eventually revealed as the writer in December of that year.

Her public platform growing, Malala continued to speak out about a woman's right to an education. As a result of her activism, in 2011 she was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize. That same year she won Pakistan's National Youth Peace Prize.

However, as a result of rising support and success in the promotion of girls' education, at 14 years old Malala learnt that the Taliban had issued a death threat against her. Despite this warning, and although she was frightened, this did nothing

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<sup>1</sup> **Advocacy** is a political process by an individual or group which aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions.

to deter Malala's campaign, stating "I raise up my voice – not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard."

***If your life was at risk, would you continue to stand up for your rights/for what you believe in?***

On 9<sup>th</sup> October 2012, the Taliban set out to kill Malala while she was on her way home from school. As she sat on her school bus, an armed man boarded it and demanded to know which girl Malala was. Her location was given away by her friends looking in her direction. The gunman fired at her and hit Malala in the left side of her head, the bullet travelling down her neck. Two other girls were also hurt.

***Was Malala right to put herself and her friends in danger for her beliefs?***

Malala was left in a critical condition, and was initially flown to a military hospital in Peshawar to be treated. She had severe swelling on her brain. A part of her skull had to be removed to help treat it.

Countries throughout the world offered Malala support and medical treatment. Once in a more stable condition, she was then transferred to Birmingham, England, where she received further care. Alongside the swelling, she had suffered severe brain damage, and also had to undergo multiple surgeries to help repair a nerve, which had left the left side of her face paralysed. Slowly but surely Malala began to make a miraculous recovery, and in March 2013 she even began to attend school again!

***What difficulties has Malala had to overcome so far in her life?***

***Do you know of other people who have had to overcome similar obstacles?***

Since the shooting, and despite the fact that the Taliban still perceive her as a target, Malala continues to campaign and raise awareness for women's rights in education, speaking all over the world. Such places include the United Nations, Harvard University and European Parliament. In October 2013, she released an autobiography called *I Am Malala*, which tells of her story and what life was like growing up with the Taliban.

Although nominated the previous year, in October 2014, and alongside Kailash Satyarthi, an Indian children's rights activist, Malala received the Nobel Peace Prize. At only 17 years old, Malala is the youngest person to ever receive this honour.

Considered to be "the pride of Pakistan" by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Malala's story is one of inspiration, determination and hope. Her willingness and selflessness illustrates what one person can achieve in the hopes of making a positive impression and impact throughout the world. Malala has shown that no one is too young to make a difference.

***What change would you like to see in the world?***