

Malala The Powerful

By Kristin Lewis

October 9, 2012 was an ordinary afternoon in the Swat Valley, an area of rugged mountains and sweeping green valleys in north Pakistan. Malala Yousafzai, 15, was sitting on a school bus with her classmates waiting to go home when two bearded gunmen appeared.

“Who is Malala?” one of the men demanded.

A feeling of terror filled the bus. Then the unthinkable happened: The gunmen opened fire. One bullet pierced Malala’s head near her left eye. Two of Malala’s friends were struck in their arms. Then the gunmen fled, leaving Malala to die.

It might be difficult to understand why anyone would try to murder an innocent girl on her way home from school, but some people in Pakistan do not view Malala for what she is: a bright and generous teenager. They see her as a deadly threat to their way of life, a person who deserves to be killed. These people – mainly young men from rural Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan- are members of a group called the Taliban. They believe in an extreme interpretation of Islam that most Muslim people do not agree with.

For years, the Taliban had been plotting to kill Malala. Why? Because she was not only a 15 year old girl; she was also a crusader for girls’ right to go to school. This work had made her famous throughout Pakistan and around the worlds. It had also made her a target of the Taliban.



Life is Brutal



Malala is from Mingora, a city in the Swat Valley. It’s a gorgeous place, known for its majestic green mountains, thick forests, and mighty rivers. It was once a popular vacation spot, attracting tourists from all over the world.

Starting in 2007, the Taliban began seizing control of Swat. When the Pakistani army tried to stop them, the Taliban responded with tremendous violence. They blew up government buildings and murdered police officers. At night, Malala was often awakened by the terrifying sounds of gunfire. During the day, she frequently walked by corpses of men and women executed by the Taliban and left on the street as a warning to those who would dare defy them.

The Taliban are not part of Pakistan’s government, but their forces are powerful. They operate mostly in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Those who live in areas under Taliban control are forced to follow oppressive religious rules. All music is banned. So are television and movies. Democracy is seen as an offense against Islam. For women and girls, life is particularly brutal: They are not allowed to go to school, have careers, or wear makeup or bright clothing. They are not allowed to go anywhere without a male relative. Breaking these rules brings severe punishment, which may include public beatings or even execution.

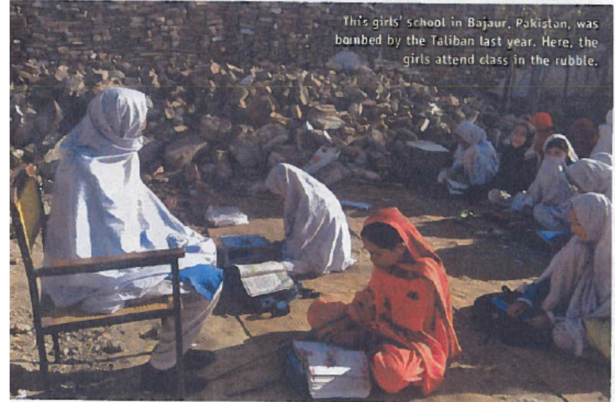
Like most Pakistanis, Malala and her family do not support the Taliban’s version of Islam. Malala’s family is in fact, deeply religious, but the Taliban do not tolerate any form of Islam that differs from its own.

School Ban

In January 2009, the Taliban ordered all girls' schools to close. That included Malala's school which her father had owned for more than a decade. It was devastating news. School was one of the most important parts of Malala's life – and a luxury she never took for granted. After all, fewer than half the girls in rural Pakistan had the opportunity to receive any education at all.

Despite the Taliban's order, Malala's father decided to keep his school open. This was incredibly dangerous, especially because the Taliban were gaining popularity in Swat. Some residents saw them as a welcome alternative to Pakistan's government and military, which have been plagued by corruption.

From then on, Malala and her family lived under constant threat. Across the region, hundreds of schools were being bombed. Teachers were being murdered. Malala and her classmates stopped wearing their school uniforms and began hiding their books under their clothing. Staying alive meant going to school had to be top secret. Even with these precautions, many parents felt the risk was too great. Attendance at Malala's school decreased by more than 60 percent.



But what could Malala do? What could one girl but watch helplessly as her freedoms were taken away?

A Powerful Weapon

It turns out, there was something she could do. Malala possessed a weapon of her own: her voice. She would risk everything to use it. Malala launched a full-scale attack of her own. She became even bolder in her crusade. Her identity as the famous blogger was revealed. She appeared in a New York Times documentary, went on television shows, and gave powerful speeches to Pakistani kids. Her message was always the same: All children deserve the right to an education.

Malala's fears of retaliation did not subside though. When asked on a Pakistani talk show about the dangers of speaking out, she eerily described how the Taliban might come for her one day: "I think of it often and imagine the scene clearly," she said. "Even if they come to kill me, I will tell them what they are trying to do is wrong. Education is our basic right."

Malala's crusade empowered her and other girls. Her courage gave hope to thousands. It also made her a star. In 2011, the President of Pakistan awarded her the first ever National Youth Peace Prize. It seemed that everyone knew her name. Including the Taliban.

Attacked

In 2010, notes began appearing under Malala's door, ordering her to give up her crusade or else. She refused to back down, and on October 9, 2012, Taliban gunmen shot her and two others on the school bus.



The hours following the shooting were a nightmare. Malala's friends were not critically injured, but Malala was in bad shape. The bullet had destroyed her left ear and sent fragments of her skull into her brain tissue. Miraculously, she clung to life. She was flown to a hospital in Birmingham, in the United Kingdom, that specializes in traumatic brain injuries. Her family soon joined her. The Taliban soon took credit for the assassination attempt, saying it was a warning to other girls not to follow Malala's example.

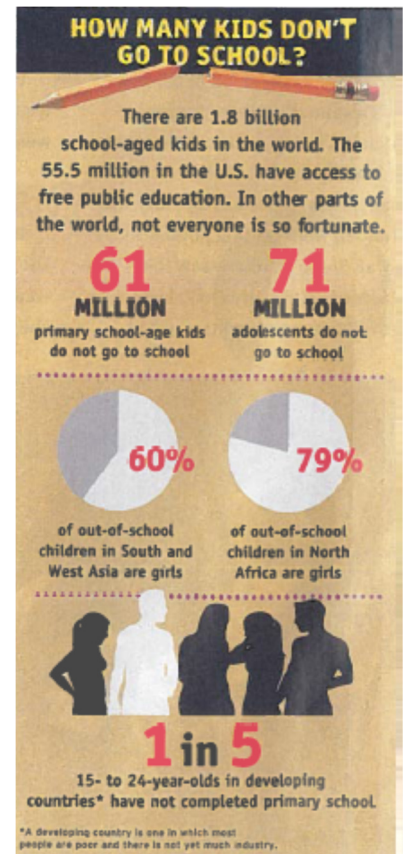
Meanwhile, the world waited, tense and furious. The United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education immediately started a petition, calling out the President of Pakistan to make a place in school for every girl. Soon 1 million people had signed. Cards flooded Malala's hospital room. In Pakistan, millions lifted up prayer for her. Candlelight vigils were held across the globe. Protesters marched, many of them kids carrying signs that read "I Am Malala." It seemed that by trying to silence her, the Taliban had unwittingly helped thousands more find a voice of their own.

To Serve Humanity

Malala's life has changed dramatically since the shooting. The bullet severely damaged her hearing and fractured her skull, causing her brain to swell dangerously. Fortunately, the physicians in Birmingham were able to control the swelling. Over many months she had several operations to repair her skull and improve her hearing. Malala's father has been given a job that enable the family to remain in the U.K., where, hopefully, they will be safe from the Taliban, who have vowed to come after Malala again.

Today, Malala has become a powerful symbol of the struggle so many kids face. Some 132 million children and teens around the world do not attend school, often because they must work to help support their families or because they have no school to go to. Malala hopes to change that. She envisions a world in which all children, and especially girls, can get the education they need to become whatever they want-from doctors and scientists to politicians and journalists.

In one of her first public statements after the shooting, Malala stated that she felt her life was to serve humanity." In fall of 2013, she published a memoir called "I Am Malala." The Malala Fund created in her name, is helping to send girls to school. Time magazine named her one of the most influential people in the world in 2013. In 2014 Time magazine named Malala one of the 25 most influential teenagers in the world. She became the youngest person ever to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014. She was awarded \$1.1 million dollars, which will be used to help educate children around the world. "This award is for all those children who are voiceless," she told reporters. "I speak for them. I stand up with them."



Name _____ HR _____

Malala The Powerful

1. Read the claim below and check 4 pieces of text evidence that supports the claim:

Claim: Malala is a crusader (fighter) for the right of all children to go to school.

Textual Evidence (check 4 boxes below that PROVE that Malala is a crusader for all children to go to school).

- Malala was “. . . not only a 15-year-old girl; she was also a crusader for girls’ right to go to school.”
- In 2009, Malala started blogging for the BBC. She wrote about “her fierce determination to get the education she needed, no matter what the Taliban did or how afraid she was.”
- Fewer than half the girls in rural Pakistan were able to receive any education.
- Malala gave “powerful speeches to Pakistani kids” about the right to an education.
- On a Pakistani talk show, Malala talked about the Taliban, saying, “Even if they come to kill me, I will tell them what they are trying to do is wrong, that education is our basic right.”
- Some 132 million children and teens around the world do not attend school.

2. Read the text evidence below and decide which of the claims listed is supported by the evidence.

Textual Evidence:

1. People around the world read Malala’s blog.
2. “Malala was helping to focus attention on what was happening in Swat. Outrage grew, and many in Pakistan and around the world criticized the Pakistani government for allowing the Taliban to become so powerful.”
3. “It seemed that by trying to silence her, the Taliban had unwittingly helped thousands more find a voice of their own.”

Possible Claims (check one that summarizes the 3 textual evidence sentences above).

- Many girls in Pakistan do not have the opportunity for an education.
- The Taliban is an oppressive organization.
- Malala has had an impact on the world.
- Malala wrote a blog about her experiences in Pakistan.

3. Read the claim below. Find and write 3 pieces of textual evidence to support the claim (prove that Taliban is an oppressive organization).

Claim: The Taliban is an oppressive (use fear and violence to take away your freedoms) organization.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

If you could meet Malala, what is one question you would ask her?