

First Place Winner
Division I – 7-9th Grades
Malala Yousafzai
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Many people know Malala Yousafzai for her Nobel Peace Prize, but it is important to know her true story of moral courage. Malala was born on July 12, 1997, in Mingora, Pakistan. It was a beautiful town, but the Taliban, which is a predominately Pashtun Islamic fundamentalist group, were starting to take over. As a young child she became an advocate for girls' rights. She went to a school her father founded. She always thought that everyone should be allowed to get an education. One day in September of 2008, she even asked in a speech, "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right of education?" So no matter what anyone said, she was going to get an education.

Malala still kept exclaiming about women's rights and how women should be treated the same as men and boys. She was nominated for many awards and continued to advocate for women. In 2009 she began blogging about the Taliban and her life. Since she was known for being an advocate for girls going to school, the Taliban issued a death threat against her at 14 years old. One day she was coming home from school and a man stepped onto the same bus she was riding. The man asked who was Malala Yousafzai and everyone looked at her. The man shot the girl at point blank range, seriously injuring her head and neck. The shot also injured some of her surrounding classmates. She was then flown to the hospital in Peshawar and then to Birmingham, England, for more work. Her brain was in critical condition and was swelling a lot. Doctors even had to remove part of her skull to help relieve the swelling.

As time went on, after the attack, Malala became partially paralyzed on one half of her face. She received minor brain damage and was soon able to attend a school in England. Unfortunately, she is still a threat to the Taliban, but people now are sticking up for her as they now recognize what has happened.

Malala has shown incredible moral courage in many ways. She stands up for what is right for her and her people. She is the girl that stands out in a crowd and defies the law in a speech. Others would like to be like Malala, but some just do not have the courage. At her age it is amazing what she has done. She continues to give speeches that impact

the world. I cannot imagine living in a country remotely like hers. Every day I would worry if the Taliban was going to see me. Instead she decided to go to school and be proud of who she is and what she wanted to become.

When I heard on the news that she was shot in the head by the Taliban and was still alive, I could not help myself from being inspired. She makes me want to reach out to her family and people in her home country. Growing up as a woman living in Pakistan Malala had to cover her face and obey man's laws or be killed. If I were a woman, I would want to rebel against these rules, but at 13, I do not know if I would have the courage to do what Malala has done. Even though Pakistan is where Malala was shot, she says she will always love the country where she was born. Malala wants peace, and more than anything her goal is for peace around the world and no matter who you are, you should receive an education. Nothing will stop Malala Yousafzai.

I would love to help Malala Yousafzai on her quest for peace. One of the things I could do would be circulate a petition that would start here at my school. The petition would be for peace. I could start with just helping a teacher or friend in school. For example I can set aside just a little of my time to help someone with his or her homework. I could also say, "good morning" and smile to someone I do not talk to much. The more people I could get to sign the petition, the more people I could get to spread the message around the world. For people who have experienced hard times like Malala, we could get more and more knowledge about their story and their culture. As people broaden their knowledge about living peacefully, especially through hard times, we can grow as one community. More people will make more accomplishments and my hope is that more people will be provided with the opportunity for an education.

Malala Yousafzai said on October 9th this last year, "One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world."