

A close-up, high-angle portrait of Malala Yousafzai. She is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a serious, determined expression. Her eyes are dark and focused. The lighting is soft, highlighting her facial features. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a white fabric, possibly a hospital gown or a blanket.

Malala

the Powerful

The amazing story of a girl who risked death in her fight to help girls go to school **BY KRISTIN LEWIS**



Making Connections Across Genres As you read this article and the poem that follows, think about the kind of person that each describes.

**LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S
8 WORDS IN BOLD**



October 9, 2012, was an ordinary afternoon in the Swat Valley, an area of rugged mountains and green valleys in the country of Pakistan. A smiling girl named Malala Yousafzai, 15, was sitting on a school bus with her classmates. She was on her way home when two men appeared.

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

A feeling of terror filled the bus. And then the unthinkable happened: The man aimed the gun at Malala and fired three shots.

Then the men fled.

How could this have happened? Why would anyone want to hurt an innocent girl?

Banned From School

The shooting was a horrific crime. But to many people around the world—including Malala herself—it was not a surprise.

That’s because Malala was not just a schoolgirl. She was also a courageous fighter in the struggle to help girls in Pakistan go to school. This fight made her a hero to many. It also put her in **grave** danger.

In the U.S., all children attend school until they are at least 16. Parents who refuse to educate their children can be arrested.

But around the world, more than 120 million kids do not go to school, and the majority of these children are girls.

In some cases, girls must miss school to help support their families. But often it is

extreme religious or **cultural** beliefs that force girls to stay home.

This is the case in parts of Pakistan. The men who shot Malala were part of a group called the Taliban. Members of the Taliban believe in an extreme version of Islam that most Muslim people do not agree with. For instance, they believe that all music should be banned, as well as television, movies, and games. They believe that girls should not be allowed to go to school and that even grown women should be forbidden to go anywhere in public—to work, to shop, or even to sit in a park—without a male relative.

The Taliban are not part of Pakistan’s government, but their forces are powerful. They control parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. And in areas under Taliban control, all people must follow their **forbidding** religious rules. Breaking these rules brings severe punishment, which may include public whipping, jail, or even death.

Defying the Ban

For most of Malala’s childhood, she did not have to worry about the Taliban. She was born in Pakistan’s Swat Valley, a gorgeous place, known for its green mountains, thick forests, and mighty rivers. It was once a popular vacation spot. Starting in 2007, the Taliban began seizing control of Swat. They blew up buildings and

threatened anyone who **defied** them.

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 their own.

In January 2009, the Taliban ordered all girls' schools to be closed. That included Malala's school, which her father had owned for more than a decade.

Despite the Taliban's order, Malala's father decided to keep his school open. From then on, Malala and her family lived under constant threat. Across the region, hundreds of schools were being bombed. Teachers risked their lives by going to school. Malala and her classmates stopped wearing their school uniforms and hid their books under their clothing. Even with these precautions, many parents felt the risk was too great. Attendance at Malala's school decreased by more than 60 percent.

At first, Malala felt helpless.

A Powerful Weapon

But Malala soon discovered that she had a powerful

weapon: her own voice.

In 2009, she began blogging for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) about what her life was like under the Taliban. She wrote about her dream of becoming a doctor and her fierce **determination** to get an education, no matter what the Taliban did.

The blog was an instant hit; soon, millions of people all over the world were reading it.

In May 2009, the Pakistani army launched a full-scale attack against the Taliban in Swat. By August, most of the Taliban had been pushed out of the cities and into the countryside.

After that, Malala launched an attack of her own. She went on television shows and gave powerful speeches to Pakistani kids. Her **crusade** gave hope to thousands. 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.

Her Fight Continues

In 2010, notes began appearing under Malala's door, ordering her to give up her crusade. But she refused to back down. It was two years later, on October 9, 2012, that Taliban gunmen shot her and two others on the bus.

The hours following the shooting were a nightmare. Malala's friends were not critically injured, but Malala was in bad shape. A bullet had destroyed her left ear and sent fragments of bone into her brain. She was flown to a hospital in Birmingham, in the United Kingdom. Her family soon joined her.

The Taliban boasted about the shooting,



Malala recovers in a hospital in England.

JIM MCMAHON/WAPMAN TM (MAP); PETER CORNIS/AP IMAGES (MALALA)



Pakistani students in the city of Karachi hold pictures of Malala during a protest against the attack on her.

saying it was a warning to other kids not to follow Malala's example.

Meanwhile, the world waited, tense and furious. In Pakistan, millions prayed for Malala. Protesters marched, many of them kids carrying signs that read "I Am Malala." It seemed that by trying to silence Malala, the Taliban had actually helped thousands more girls find voices of their own.

It's been more than three years since the shooting, and Malala has made a remarkable recovery. After several surgeries, she has regained some of her hearing. She has won major awards and met world leaders. Her book, *I Am Malala*, was an international best-seller. There is even an asteroid named after her.

As her fame has grown, so has her determination. And her goal remains the same: for girls like her to go to school.

WHAT'S THE CONNECTION?

What kind of person does the poem "In Darkest Hours" describe? How does this description fit Malala Yousafzai? Answer in a well-organized essay, using examples from "Malala the Powerful."

FIND AN
ACTIVITY
ONLINE!



POEM

In Darkest Hours

by Rebecca Kai Dotlich

There are those who find shelter
when the landscape is pounded by rain
and heavy clouds hover
over body and spirit;
and there are those who carry
mountains on their back
in the darkest night
and blaze
and blaze
and blaze with light.

