

Summer Binder

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Oxford Scholars Paper: Malala Yousafzai

Peace isn't always about stopping wars; it's fighting for normalcy in times of utter disaster in order to maintain basic human needs. When these needs are met, it allows communities that are struggling to have the opportunities that should be available to all people. One of the most fitting examples in modern times of this definition of peace is the Pakistani education activist, Malala Yousafzai, who spent her entire life fighting for her right to education. Her fight led her to become a world leader in the struggle to establish education rights worldwide. While her life has been filled with struggles most people cannot even begin to imagine, her courage and determination has inspired millions of people around the world to change their perspectives and value their right to education.

Malala was born on July 12, 1997, in the city of Mingora, situated in the Swat Valley of Pakistan. This area is known for its natural beauty, as well as unfortunately their complex political and social challenges. Welcoming a baby girl was not always a cause for celebration in Pakistan, but Malala's father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, was determined to give her the life she deserved. From an early age, Malala was taught about justice and education through her father, who was a teacher and outspoken advocate for learning. He founded a private school where Malala herself studied, and he encouraged her to believe that education was not merely a privilege, but a right.

In 2008, the Taliban took over the Swat Valley. The extremist group began banning many things, including owning a television and playing music. They enforced harsh punishments for those who defied their orders. At the beginning of 2009, they banned girls from attending school. When Malala was just 11 years old, she had to say goodbye to her classmates without knowing if she would ever see them again. Malala loved learning and saw education as the key to her future, and refused to give up easily. She began writing a blog for BBC, documenting her life under Taliban rule. She wrote about her and her classmate's experiences trying to continue their studies. Her writing revealed not only the dangers she and her classmates faced, but also her belief that educating girls was essential to breaking the past cycles of violence and oppression. In 2011, Archbishop Desmond Tutu nominated her for the International Children's Peace Prize. That same year, she met with the Prime Minister of Pakistan who awarded her the country's National Peace Award for Youth in recognition of her bravery.

Malala's activism made her a target. In October 2012, a Taliban gunman boarded her bus home from school and asked "Who is Malala?". When she replied, he shot her on the left side of her head. She survived thanks to extensive medical care, but the attack on her life sent shockwaves around the world and her story became a worldwide phenomenon. After the attack, her family moved to the UK. She was determined to keep fighting, and only would stop when every girl had the right to education. In interviews after her recovery, Malala repeated she had no hatred for the man who shot her, and she would never reach a state of peace if she chose to resolve this issue with more violence. Her respectful yet determined attitude created a large support system for her cause from people around the world.

On her 16th birthday, July 12th, 2013, Malala spoke at the United Nations, advocating for all children to have access to education. The UN even recognized July 12 as "Malala Day" in

honor of her courage and to emphasize the global struggle for education rights. Alongside her father, she established the Malala Fund, “an organization dedicated to giving every girl the opportunity to learn and choose her own future” (Malala). By focusing on countries where girls are most at risk of being excluded from schooling, (such as Pakistan, Nigeria, Afghanistan, India, and regions affected by conflict) the Malala Fund directly addresses the inequalities that contribute to vulnerability and violence. She received the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2014, becoming the youngest-ever Nobel laureate. This award had a tremendous effect on not only her life but also her message that young people, the very individuals often excluded from political decision-making, can play important roles in shaping peaceful societies.

Malala began working with leaders and activists fighting for girls’ right to education. She has advocated for those in refugee camps and conflict zones by delivering speeches in these places. In refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, she met with Syrian girls whose education had been disrupted by war. Rather than treating them like helpless victims, she listened to their stories and amplified their voices on the international stage. Her message was consistent: the world cannot achieve peace if millions of children, particularly girls, are denied the opportunity to learn, grow, and lead.

In the years since, Malala has continued to expand her efforts. She attended the University of Oxford, studying Philosophy, Politics, and Economics, and continued her activism even while navigating the life of a student. She graduated in 2020, and married Asser Malik in 2021. The Malala Fund has grown to support dozens of local activists and educators, particularly women, who are working to solve educational issues in their own communities. Malala’s belief that education is the most powerful tool we can use to reach a worldwide state of peace is what drives her mission to create equal opportunities for children in impoverished countries.

There are countless connections between women's education and their empowerment. When educated, women are more likely to resist forced marriage, advocate for their own rights, raise healthy families, have well-paying jobs, and have an overall better standard of living. Malala's approach highlights these benefits, and uses them to convince people of her argument.

While governments often look at the big picture when regarding peace, analyzing things such as military spending or crime rates, Malala focuses on the root cause of people's actions. She believes that the knowledge people are given is what they use to make decisions in the long run. Malala emphasizes that peace cannot only be debated in conference rooms, but must be built in classrooms and homes. She has influenced many people to change their perspectives on education rights, and has become a world leader in advocating for these rights. In one of her speeches, she said "Peace in every home, every street, every village, every country - this is my dream". This powerful statement summarizes the goal she has set with her activism, and what she hopes to achieve.

In conclusion,

Works Cited

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