Malala Yousafzai

Malala Yousafzai is a Pakistani school pupil and activist. In response to her campaign for children's education and her criticism of the Taliban, she was shot in the head. She survived, and went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 for her contributions to children's rights.

Malala was born (12 July 1997) in Mingora, the Swat District of north west Pakistan to a Sunni Muslim family. She was named Malala, which means ‘grief stricken’ after a famous female Pashtun* poet and warrior from Afghanistan.

Her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai is a poet, and runs a chain of public schools. He is a leading educational advocate* himself. In 2009, she began writing an anonymous blog for the BBC expressing her views on education and life under the threat of the Taliban* taking over her valley. It was her father who suggested his own daughter to the BBC. She wrote under the byline “Gul Makai”.

During this period, the Taliban's military hold on the area intensified. At times, Malala reported hearing artillery from the advancing Taliban forces. As the Taliban took control of the area they issued edicts* banning television, banning music, and banning women from going shopping and limiting women’s education. Many girls’ schools were blown up and as a consequence pupils stayed at home, scared of possible reprisals* from the Taliban. However, for a time, there was a brief respite when the Taliban stated girls could receive primary education, if they wore Burkhas*. But, a climate of fear prevailed and Malala and her father began to receive death threats for their outspoken views.

As a consequence, Malala and her father began to fear for their safety. Her father once considered moving Malala outside of Swat to a boarding school, but Malala didn’t want to move.

After the BBC blog ended, Malala featured in a documentary made by New York Times reporter Adam B. Ellick. She also received greater international coverage and her identity about writing the BBC blog was revealed. In 2011, she received Pakistan’s first National Youth Peace Prize and she was nominated by Archbishop Desmond Tutu for the International Children’s Peace Prize. Her increased profile and strident criticism of the Taliban caused Taliban leaders to meet, and in 2012, they voted to kill her.

On 9 October, 2012, a masked gunman entered her school bus and asked “Which one of you is Malala? Speak up, otherwise I will shoot at you all.”

Malala was identified and she was shot with a single bullet which went through her head, neck and shoulder.

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Glossary

Pashtun — a group of people from Pakistan and Afghanistan
advocate — someone who publicly supports a cause
edict — an official order
publicly supports a cause
reprisals — revenge
Burkha — a garment which covers the whole body

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1. Why do you think Malala remained anonymous when she blogged for the BBC?

2. Why do you think Malala refused to move away from Swat?

3. How do you think Malala might have felt when her identity was revealed and she became more well-known? Explain your answer.

4. What do you think the word "strident" (line 21) means?

5. Do you think Malala's father regrets asking Malala to write the BBC blog? Explain your answer.

6. Malala's name can be translated as “grief stricken”. Do you think “grief stricken” is an accurate description of her life so far? Explain your answer.

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Total out of 10