

**First Place Winner**  
**Division I – 7-9th Grades**  
***The Girl Who Can't Be Silenced***  
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Moral Courage is to stand up for what you believe in, no matter what the rest of the world is doing or saying. It is to stand up, fight for, and believe in yourself and everyone around you. If you have true moral courage, it does not matter who you are, where you are, what others are doing, or the danger of the situation. In my opinion, a great example of someone with true moral courage is Malala Yousafzai.

Malala Yousafzai was born in Mingora, Pakistan on July 12, 1997. Her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai was the founder and headmaster of a chain of schools called the Khushal Public School. An activist for human rights himself, much of what Malala does today is after the model of her father. Malala's early childhood was spent happily. She attended her father's school as a top student and had two little brothers, full of mischief.

Soon after Malala's birth, a violent fundamentalist Islamic group called the Taliban started to gain momentum toward taking over Swat Valley, where Mingora is located. When members of the Taliban would find someone violating the Islamic Law, imprisonment, humiliation, torture, or even death would be the outcome. As this terrorizing group began to grow, people became increasingly scared. Women would avoid going outside, families would move from Swat Valley, and children quit going to school.

When Malala was eleven years old, she was chosen to write entries for the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) about what life was like with the Taliban tormenting her city. Several older girls from the Khushal Secondary School had been in the running, but Malala's courage and way with words won her the spot. She wrote truthfully, but in order to protect herself and her family, she used an alias name.

As the Taliban grew stronger, so did Malala, soon speaking publicly and without a cover. She inspired many people, especially women in their silent fight for freedom. Malala soon became a target, and on October 9, 2012, a masked man entered the bus she was riding home from school. He asked which of the girls was Malala, and unafraid, Malala answered. She was then shot in the head at point-blank range.

Malala spent several months in surgeries, intensive care units, and rehabilitation. Although confused and upset about what had happened to her, Malala took it all in stride. She endured severe pain, and several long, critical operations. Even with the left side of her body temporarily paralyzed, Malala was able to fully recover.

On her sixteenth birthday, only 9 months after being shot, Malala spoke to the United Nations. She said, "They thought that the bullet would silence us. But they failed... weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power, and courage was born." These words show that she

is undaunted by what could happen next. She is telling the world that she is ready to fight for girls' education; she is ready to fight for herself and everyone surrounding her.

In the year 2014, Malala was awarded The Nobel Peace Prize for her valiant work to ensure women the same rights as men. This is one of the greatest achievements that anyone could ever hope for, but Malala continues to work for peace, equal rights and education. Recently Malala has been helping the young women refugees in Syria stand up to the men on accounts of forced marriage. She has opened many schools in Pakistan, Lebanon, Yemen, India, and many other countries where girls aren't encouraged to go to school.

The most inspirational part of Malala's story is that when she was knocked down, she stood back up with greater resolve than ever before. She knew she was putting her own life at risk in order to fulfill the dreams of others. Right now, she is winning, not the Taliban. Even after a brush with death, Malala is continuing her fight for others. This is a true example of standing up for what you believe in no matter who you are, no matter where you are, and no matter what the rest of the world is doing or saying. Despite her own personal risk, Malala advocates for people that she doesn't even know. If what Malala Yousafzai demonstrates isn't true moral courage, I don't know what is.

To be the difference in my school and my community, I try to be a friend to everyone, to speak out and stand up for what I believe to be true and just. I recently read Malala Yousafzai's book: I am Malala. Her call to action really touches and inspires me. I shared her story with my middle school and asked my peers and teachers to write letters of encouragement to Malala. They responded with interest and enthusiasm. Education is very important in my life. As I have learned more about the struggles of other girls around the world, I have gained a greater appreciation for the many opportunities available to me as a young girl. My hope is for all girls to learn and grow in a safe environment, free from danger and discrimination.

We shouldn't target the differences of others. In Malala's story, women were discriminated against. During the Holocaust, Jews were killed because of their religion. Imagine what the world could be like if we exercised tolerance and embraced each other's differences. It is our moral responsibility to treat everyone with respect and kindness. Furthermore, we must be a voice for those who are prevented from speaking for themselves. When we, like Malala, have courage to stand up for what we believe in, nothing can silence us.

## **Bibliography**

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Malala's Story. The Malala Fund, <https://www.malala.org/malalas-story>. Accessed 27 February 2017.