



## 2017 BE INSPIRED Essay Contest | Age Group: Grades 10-12

1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner: Chloe Cropper  
Age: 10<sup>th</sup> Grade  
School: Avonworth High School (Avonworth)

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### Be Inspired

Throughout the history of humanity, the oppression of women can be clearly traced. From being denied the right to vote or get an education to being objectified as an entity whose sole purpose is to bear children, women have consistently been in an incessant battle against subjugation from the society that surrounds them. Yet, in the face of such suppression, women have not backed down. Instead, they fight for the rights that they are due. Through the courage of women's suffragists around the world, women have been able to gain many of the rights and privileges that are due to them. However, the issue of women's oppression is monumental and still ongoing to this day. In many countries, women still do not have the right to go to school, choose who they marry, or purchase land. Ultimately, women's oppression is an issue that requires the international community's full and avid attention, but until that happens, there are a few brave and selfless people that are fighting for women's equality. Specifically, there is one very special young woman who consistently makes a difference on a global scale. Her name is Malala Yousafzai.

Malala, a nineteen year old Pakistani human rights advocate, works with courage and passion to make a difference. She grew up in Mingora, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, located in the Swat Valley area of Pakistan. When she was just 11, inspired by strong female role models like Benazir Bhutto, she wrote a blog under a pseudonym for BBC that told of what life was like under Taliban occupation. Throughout her blogging, Malala kept persevering even as the things became difficult when the Taliban put a ban on girls going to school. Her blogging ended in 2009, but following her blogging peregrination, Malala began to rise in prominence, giving interviews on major television networks and popular newspapers and magazines to publicly fight for education rights. Her passionate championing led her to be nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize. Malala used her platform to advocate specifically for female education, because under the Taliban where she lived women were expected to keep house and have children, and that's all they were allowed to do. However, life changed drastically for Malala when, as she defied the Taliban and was en route to school, she was shot by a Taliban gunman on her school bus. The murder attempt landed Malala in critical condition at the Rawalpindi Institute of Cardiology, but she was somehow able to persevere through this difficult time and make an amazing recovery, with the entirety of the international community at her side following her story. Succeeding her recovery, Malala dove back into her fight for education rights even more passionately. Some benchmarks in her fight for social justice include when she founded the nonprofit, the Malala Fund, and coauthored *I Am Malala*, a book that is now an international bestseller. What is even more amazing about all that Malala has accomplished is the fact that she is still a teenager. In fact, Malala became the youngest Nobel Peace Prize recipient ever for her fight for the right of all children to an education, at the age of 17, which is absolutely mind-blowing.

Ultimately, all of Malala's courageous and passionate work to make a difference in the world shows that she shares many qualities with another famous activist, Maya Angelou. Like Angelou, Malala has qualities like character, courage, commitment, and selflessness. Both Malala and Maya lived out the quality of character, Malala through her usage of her platform to fight for social justice instead of for fame for herself, and Angelou through her usage of her writing and acting talents to convey messages about equal rights for African-Americans instead of just going with the flow and writing about easier, less controversial things. Additionally, both of these women exemplify the qualities of courage and commitment because both went through dangerous trials and tribulations but chose to keep fighting for the causes they believed in. Malala was almost murdered, but instead of giving up on her fight for education rights due to the extreme danger it caused,

as soon as she recovered she kept passionately fighting for it. This shows powerful courage but also shows her commitment to making the world a better place. And Maya went through a teen pregnancy and also faced a lot of discrimination due to her skin color, but instead of taking the easier and safer path and giving up on her civil rights advocacy, Angelou chose to keep striving to achieve her goals, exemplifying what a courageous and determined woman she was. Finally, the quality of selflessness manifests itself in both women, because both put the good of the entire world above their own safety and comfort. Essentially, both Maya Angelou and Malala Yousafzai demonstrate the qualities of a strong leader and have advocated for social justice.

There are a lot of lessons to be learned from women like Maya and Malala. Specifically, one must remember that no matter what the rest of society says, it is important to stand up for the causes that they believe in. Also, the work that these women and others do reiterates the importance of treating everyone with respect, no matter what their beliefs are. And perhaps most importantly, these activist's desire to find equality and justice for everyone is a reminder that the color of a person's skin, gender that they align with, or religion that they follow does not matter-because everyone on this planet is human. And everyone has the power to change the world. Whether it is through saying a kind word to a classmate, standing up to a bully, forming a club to fight for a certain belief, or just smiling to a random person on the street, everyone is capable of having a positive impact on this world. This should be our focus: how can we, no matter our age, gender, sexuality, religion, or race, leave a positive footprint as our legacy on Earth?