



## 2017 BE INSPIRED Essay Contest | Age Group: Grades 6-7

1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner: Alina Zaidi  
Age: 7<sup>th</sup> Grade  
School: Marshall Middle School (North Allegheny)

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I have always been known to others as a perfectionist. In everything I did, I wanted to strive for the best, and do great things. I wanted to find the right answer, to figure myself out, know all the answers. In school one day, we were told to look for influential people throughout history who have changed the world. I started to look people up on the internet, without thinking about it myself. All I did was Google it. I feel strongly about feminist power, and I was determined on finding the one woman who I thought made the most powerful impact, being the perfectionist that I am. I looked through many, many women that day, and marveled at all that they accomplished. But I wanted to find someone who I could relate to, and someone who could actually change my life and I could admire.

That day at home, I was looking through my bookshelf to find a school book, and instead I stumbled upon a book titled *I Am Malala*. I suddenly remembered how my mom had bought this book for me a couple years back, but I had originally never had the time to read it, gradually lost the interest, and eventually forgot. I decided to give the book a try, just because I had free time.

Well, what can I say? This book has undoubtedly changed my life forever. This book, written by Malala Yousafzai herself, drew me to tears. I realized how much Malala did for her family, her town, her country, and her world.

Malala Yousafzai stood up for education rights for girls. She had a deep, yearning passion for learning, and she showed that by standing for herself. People usually know Malala for sticking up for herself when a gunman entered the bus, saving everyone else by confessing that she, indeed, was Malala, and then getting shot in the head just because she believed in a girl's right to education. That itself took much courage, but Malala was actually doing courageous acts before the incident as well. Both her and her father kept their school open even though the Taliban wanted them to close it. She also continued speaking out loud about education rights when everyone was telling her not to, and she even could have died! Thanks to her, so many people got to continue learning. This proved a lot to me.....it showed me just how strong Malala really was.

Maya Angelou was very similar to Malala. She spoke out, influenced others, and persevered. It isn't easy to say your mind when the world around them is only looking at how different they look, and not how different and unique their feelings are. Maya Angelou was African American in a time when it was very hard to be so. But she was not worried and did what she wanted; she wrote. She wrote numerous pieces of literature that have contributed tremendously to our world. Maya Angelou turned that little spark of interest into a fiery passion.

Now, Malala could have stopped anytime she wanted. It would save her a tremendous amount of effort. But Malala persevered. And why? Well, the answer is simple. Malala had a passion for learning. I hope to find my own passion, something I can put all my heart and time into, and truly make a difference.

Both Malala and Maya share many qualities. Though they stood up for very different areas, they both were hardworking, caring, determined, and most importantly...strong. Strength is a vital ingredient while cooking up success. Without strength, how can anyone persevere? In today's generation, it's all about race, religion, gender, and age....when those aren't the important things. Malala was a Pakistani Muslim young girl, and Maya was African American. They proved that no matter who everyone is, everyone can make a difference in their own way. I hope to be like Malala and make someone's life at least a little better. I learned that there are many people in the world who aren't as fortunate as me, and this allowed to glimpse into a place where daily life was very different than my own. I started to count my blessings, and I decided that I too would make a difference, whether it be big or small. Thanks to Malala, I volunteered in many charities over the last year, with hopes to make someone's better than it was before.

Could there be a better book? No, I think that this one, written by Malala Yousafzai herself, is what I was looking for. It is simply..... perfect.

Thank you,  
Alina Zaidi