



He Named Me Malala Discussion Guide

Director: Davis Guggenheim

Year: 2015

Time: 88 min

You might know this director from:

From the Sky Down (2011)

Waiting for 'Superman' (2010)

It Might Get Loud (2008)

Gracie (2007)

An Inconvenient Truth (2006)

FILM SUMMARY

Malala Yousafzai's story, however it be told, is inspiring. Known across the world for her awe-inspiring work and infectious forgiving outlook, it would be difficult to walk away from a moment with her—either through her written word, spoken word, or just the sight of her timid laughter—without feeling moved and empowered to improve the world. We are captivated by Malala, and director Guggenheim grounds HE NAMED ME MALALA by focusing on the heart of the story surrounding this multi-dimensional young woman.

Like many of us across the world, Guggenheim watched with bated breath as news seeped out of Malala's recovery from a near-fatal gunshot wound to the face. Captivated by her will to survive and the outright courage that landed her in a hospital bed in the first place, he longed to get beneath the surface story the news was presenting of this incredible teenage activist. Over the course of 88 captivating minutes, he pulls back the curtain on the mystery of Malala by telling not only her tale but that of her father Ziauddin. For without his love, support, and encouragement, who would Malala have become?

In a non-linear format, skipping back and forth between the facts leading up to Malala's shooting, her family's arrival in England, the presence of the Taliban in her native Swat Valley, and her rise as a world-renowned figure in the fight for girls' education, HE NAMED ME MALALA presents an intimate portrayal of the making of one of contemporary society's most crucial human rights advocates. With a delicately sublime soundtrack and masterful animation as his tools, coupled with intimate access to the Yousafzai family, Guggenheim's HE NAMED ME MALALA is a genuine offering of a remarkable individual, whose legacy stretches far and wide wherever she directs her attention.

FILM THEMES

Even before a gunshot wound nearly took her life, young Malala was campaigning for girls' rights to education in her native Pakistan. HE NAMED ME MALALA addresses her rise to fame and the building blocks of her upbringing which enabled her life's current trajectory.

FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

Ziauddin Yousafzai ascribed to a world-view outside of the Pakistani norm, where every child was worthy of an education, a fair shot at an uplifting life, whether that child was a boy or girl. His love of education, passion for equality, and belief in standing up against wrongdoing are undeniably strong, best expressed in his words: "If you keep silent, you lose the right to exist to live." His only daughter absorbed his energy and beliefs from her birth. The relationship between the two is no small matter, and although Malala states that her decisions today are her own, her vision is certainly informed by her father's and the gravity of their relationship is undeniable. As her father reminds us, "We became dependent on each other, like one soul in two different bodies."

EDUCATION IS THE ANSWER

To Malala education is the path to empowerment and liberation. Without an education an individual is powerless, a malleable device left to society's whims. She goes so far as to describe her mother as "not independent nor free because she is not educated." An education is everything, the defining line between freedom and enslavement. If a society wishes to imprison a portion of its population, it need only withhold learning. By grasping onto the flame of education and spreading its light into the darkest corners of the globe, Malala stands for a greater world for all. She reminds us, "Education gives you the power to question things, to challenge things, to be independent."

ISLAM VS. TALIBAN

The Ziauddin family are devout Muslims, as are 97% of the Pakistani population. Subscribing to the Islam teachings of humanity, equality, and forgiveness, they shun the terrorist control that the Taliban enact under the name of Islam. "The Taliban are not about faith. They are about power," states Malala. As they continued to gain power in her hometown and planted fear into the spirits of her classmates and townfolk, Malala grew stronger in her will to spread the word of equality and educational access to all, for in her heart those are the teachings of Islam to be spread, not the subjugation preached by the Taliban.

I AM EVERY CHILD

Malala sees herself as a spokesperson for the silent, the millions of children that are undervalued and overlooked. Forgotten amongst the wreckage of war, as political leaders battle it out on the global stage, their rights are taken up by Malala. Apparently uncorrupted by the fame bestowed upon her, Malala repeats that she is an ordinary child, her story a common tale told across the globe each and every day. Her needs and struggles resound globally, and she wisely wields the power the international access her fame grants her.

"People argue about war and debate about politics, but who is thinking about the children."

Malala Yousafzai

"A person did not shoot Malala. An ideology did."

Ziauddin Yousafzai

"Let us pick up our books and our pens. They are our most powerful weapons."

Malala Yousafzai

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Have you read "I Am Malala," Malala's biography that was released in 2014? If so, how does the film compare? If not, are you now interested in reading it, having seen the film?
2. How much did you know about Malala and her life story before seeing the film? Did you think that the film left any gaps in information about Malala that you missed? Did it do a thorough job of representing her story?
3. Discuss girls' education in your community. Are girls offered an equal education to boys where you grew up? Beyond the education offered in the classroom, are girls in your society/community taught that they are equal to boys?
4. Malala's father plays an important role in her life. Discuss their relationship. Although they both claim that she has chosen the life she lives on her own, in what ways has he directed her? Would Malala be where she is today if her father had taken a more passive role in her upbringing?
5. Why do you think director Guggenheim chose to feature the Yousafzai family so prominently in the film, interviewing Malala's brothers and mother? What was conveyed by asking for their insight on Malala as a sister and daughter, not only as a world figure?
6. What is it about Malala's life and situation that appealed to so many people around the world when the story of her shooting first hit the news? What factors have contributed to her global fame?
7. Many Pakistanis—in particular those from Malala's home region—have been critical of her success, stating that she is nothing more than a cover girl with not much behind her. What fuels this critique? What would drive her countryfolk to speak against her seemingly good actions and efforts?
8. What's in a name? Was Malala's fate predestined when her father chose her name? Has your name, in any way, had an impact on your life?
9. Do you think that Malala will eventually return to the Swat Valley in Pakistan? Do you think it better for her to remain in England, where she can focus on global issues? Or is it her responsibility to return to her place of birth and campaign for her people?
10. Although the film only briefly addresses the subject, what affect does Malala's fame seem to have on her? Is she handling it well? Do you think that fame impedes on a child's personal development?

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- HE NAMED ME MALALA had its global premiere at the 2015 Toronto International Film Festival, and from there went on to sweep up a number of award nominations, including a BAFTA, the Political Film Award at the Hamburg Film Festival, and an American Cinema Editors Award, as well as winning awards including a Women Film Critics Circle Award and an Annie Award.
- Director Davis Guggenheim has two daughters himself and has said that Malala's journey alongside her father resounds within him. Many of the questions facing Malala—such as whether or not she feels equal in society or strong enough to speak out—are the very questions facing his own daughters.
- Malala began blogging for the BBC in 2009, at the age of 11.
- On Malala's 16th birthday in 2013, at her first public appearance since being shot, she spoke in front of the UN in New York, where she called for worldwide access to education. The UN dubbed the day, July 12th, "Malala Day." She celebrated her 18th birthday in Lebanon, opening a school for Syrian refugee girls, where she urged world leaders to "invest in books, not bullets."
- Malala's mother—Toor Pekai—inspired by her daughter's work, returned to school to learn to read and write. When she gets home from school each day, she throws her backpack to the side but is nagged by Malala to do her homework.
- A team of 15 people—including storyboard artists, painters, and designers—worked on the film's animation. Director Guggenheim wanted it to look like it was out of a storybook and not be too cartoonish, in order to portray the feeling of being a child growing up in Pakistan.
- Although more and more girls across the globe are attending school, in Africa and South Asia boys are still 1.55 times more likely to complete secondary education than girls.
- When Malala was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 at the age of 17, she became the youngest person ever to be granted a Nobel Prize of any kind. The next was Lawrence Bragg, who at the age of 25 in 1915 was co-awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics with his father.
- The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world, with close to 200 million inhabitants. Located in South Asia, it borders India, Afghanistan, Iran, and China, in addition to having coastline along the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea. Around 97% of the population is Muslim. Swat Valley, from where the Yousafzai family originates, is located in the north and is sometimes referred to as the Switzerland of Pakistan for its lush greenery.
- According to 2013 UNESCO statistics, 67% of the world's illiterate people are female. Pakistan is 1 of only 3 countries in the world with over one million girls not in school.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** this film. Give others the chance to be moved and affected by Malala and her story. A film experience is always better when shared. Watch HE NAMED ME MALALA with friends and family and discuss how you can make a difference together.
2. **Stand** #withMalala, in order to support the global campaign for girls' education. Visit the [Malala Fund](#) website for a variety of ways to take action, with many different levels of involvement.
3. **Read** "I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban," Malala's biography that was published in 2013.
4. **Learn** more about the many global organizations campaign for girls' education, like [CARE](#), [Plan International](#), [Camfed](#), the [United Nations Girls' Education Initiative](#) and Influence Film's own Cristina Ljungberg's [Giving Wings](#).

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Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.