

Topic 4

Malala the Blogger

Have you ever read a blog on the Internet? Did it influence what you thought about something? Did it change your ideas? The Internet can be very powerful, a source for good and also a place where propaganda and lies are spread, sometimes with the purpose of making people think that a certain view or piece of information is right when it isn't.

Malala Yousafzai, the 16-year-old who was shot by the Taliban in Pakistan in 2012, speaks at United Nations headquarters in New York, USA, 12 July 2013.



Malala Yousafzai used the Internet for good, she wanted to make people understand that thousands (possibly millions) of girls across the globe struggle to get an education and to go to school, because of poverty, sexism and inequality. It all started with Malala's blog, an on line diary kept by this eleven year old Pakistani schoolgirl; as a result of this blog her name and the cause for which she campaigned is known world-wide. But the blog also put her in danger and made her a target for extremists.

In northern Pakistan and Afghanistan, there is a group of people known as the Taliban. They interpret the Muslim religion in a very extreme way and believe that terror and violence will get people to agree with their views. The Taliban's interpretation of Islam is that women are not equal to men. The Muslim prophet Muhammad stated that a woman (and a man) should seek education from the cradle to the grave. However the Taliban claim that women and girls should not be educated.

Malala comes from the Swat district of northern Pakistan where the Taliban are very active and have destroyed at least 150 schools in the area, in an attempt to stop girls from receiving an education, even though the Pakistani Government is pledged to protect the schools and the children who attend them. Free education is not available to all in Pakistan and boys are still more likely to be educated than girls. There are private schools for girls and in the more remote areas sometimes this is the only way girls can get an education.

Malala decided she wanted an education no matter what the Taliban thought or did and she continued to go to school even though it was dangerous. Malala's story is not unique lots of girls around the world who do not have easy access to education risk violence to get one. Malala made a choice though to do more than just seek an education. She decided to speak out (with the support of her father) about what her and

thousands of other young girls were experiencing. She began questioning publicly why some girls were not allowed to attend school and to speak out against the Taliban in her blog. The diary was published on the BBC website and Malala began to get noticed and listened to. Parts of the blog were re-produced in local newspapers in Pakistan and her campaign for education for girls was supported by the local community. She said

'I am not afraid of anyone!'

However the Taliban became increasingly afraid of Malala and the influence she was having on people and their views. She seemed to worry the Taliban extremists much more than Pakistani or American soldiers with guns and tanks did. They found the idea of a girl with a book the most frightening weapon of all.

In 2009 Malala became the president of the District Child Assembly in Swat; in 2011 she was nominated for the Children's Peace Prize and was awarded Pakistan's first National Youth Peace Prize two months later in December. She became the youngest person ever to be nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. As a result of all this, on the 9th October 2012, Malala now aged 14, was targeted and shot by a Taliban extremist while on a school bus. She had just finished an exam on the Holy Qur'an.

In the days immediately following the attack, she remained unconscious and was kept alive by a ventilator, but later her condition improved enough for her to be sent to a hospital in Britain for an operation.

What happened encouraged Muslim leaders to speak out against the Taliban and international politicians began to campaign for all children worldwide to be able to go to school. A United Nations petition was initiated, to support the right of all children to have an education and to attempt to make this a reality by 2015.

Sadly Malala is still not safe, the Taliban has reiterated its intent to kill both Malala and her father Ziauddin, they are both in constant danger, but both continue to campaign for the education of girls everywhere and to use the Internet to get their message to the world.

Key Questions

Why do you think Malala made the choice to keep a blog?

Is the Internet always a force for good?

How might it persuade people to hold certain views or take certain actions?

Did the Internet put Malala in danger?

What does this tell us about Internet safety?

How reliable is information posted on the Internet?

What would you feel strongly enough to campaign for?