“One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world.” So says Malala Yousafzai, who won the Nobel Peace Prize and donated the $1.1 million prize money to finance the creation of a secondary school for girls in Pakistan. Malala’s story gives one girl’s unique, multi-dimensional perspective on recent historical events. The description of her Swat River Valley community shows first-hand the religious, cultural, and political complexity of this region, its long history with Buddhism providing an almost ecumenical tradition within Islam, and its competing allegiances demonstrating the difficult tug-of-war ordinary people experience trying to shape their lives and have a voice in their religious identity.

As an introduction to Benedictine University and the kinds of academic conversations in which students can expect to engage, incoming students read a book over the summer and participate in an initial discussion with instructors as part of orientation. This year, we look forward to faculty and students talking about Malala Yousafzai’s *I Am Malala* both inside and outside of class.

Yousafzai is an eighteen-year-old Nobel Prize winner who survived being shot by the Taliban for her activism on behalf of education for all. You can learn more about Malala in this guide.

New students should answer one or more of the following questions by writing a two-page, double-spaced response paper, to be handed in at orientation for credit in WRIT 101, WRIT 104, or HNRS 190:

1. What surprised you most in reading *I Am Malala*, and how does that connect with your life?
2. Despite being a Nobel Peace Prize winner, Malala is still just a teenager; do you see her age in the way the book is written? She is making a strong argument about the right to education, particularly for women, but much of her fame comes from her dramatic life story. How much does biography matter compared to strength of argument, generally and in this particular instance?
3. Summarize Malala’s main arguments. What are the assumptions behind them? How much must we share common premises to come to similar conclusions, about the rights of women, the dignity of all human beings, and freedom of religion, for example?

Students with questions about the project or the assignment should feel free to contact Dr. Jean-Marie Kauth at jkauth@ben.edu.