



PAGE A WRITER

FOR EVERY WORD AT STAKE

Brave Pages: Writing the Self Inspired by Malala Yousafzai

“One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world.” — *Malala Yousafzai*

Workshop Focus

Objective: To explore how reading memoirs can deepen our understanding of life stories and inspire our own writing.

Featured Text: *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai

Themes: Courage, voice, cultural context, memory, storytelling

Action Prompts

- Reflective reading
- Guided questions
- Writing prompts
- Memoir structure insights

Part I: Questions to Ponder When Reading a Memoir

Reading memoir is an engagement with a lived experience. Use these guiding questions when reading *I Am Malala*:

1. Whose Voice Is Speaking, and to Whom?

- Is the narrator speaking to a general audience? A specific person? Their future self?
- What tone and language choices do they use?

2. What Moments Are Chosen, and Why?

- Memoir is selective. What scenes carry emotional or thematic weight?
- What's emphasized—and what's omitted?

3. How Does Place Shape Identity?

- Think about how Swat Valley influenced Malala's identity.
- What places in your life have shaped *you*?

4. What Silences or Gaps Are Present?

- What is hinted at but not fully explained?
- How might cultural, personal, or safety concerns affect what's told?

5. What Is the Memoirist Seeking?





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- Is there a clear goal or desire?
- How does that quest evolve over time?

Part II: Writing Craft Lessons from *I Am Malala*

Malala's story isn't just compelling because of what happened to her—it's *how* she tells it. In your memoir writing, consider how you can develop:

Authenticity

- Be honest about fear, uncertainty, and joy.
- Vulnerability builds trust with your reader.

Context

- Help your reader understand your world—family, community, history—but don't overload.
- Use brief asides or stories to provide background (as Malala does with Pashtun culture).

Structure

- Malala begins with the day she was shot, then rewinds to her early life.
- Consider non-linear structures. Can your story benefit from starting in the middle?

Voice

- Stay true to your natural speaking rhythm and tone.
- Don't worry about sounding "literary." Aim for honest and clear.

Part III: Writing Exercise – Your Brave Moment

This can be big or small. What matters is what it meant to *you*. Use the following structure to guide your freewrite:

Scene Setup Where were you? Who was there? What was happening? **Stakes** What did you risk (emotionally, socially, physically)? **Sensory Details** What did you see, hear, feel, or smell? **Outcome** What happened afterward? Did something change? **Reflection** What did you learn about yourself? About others?

Time: 15–20 minutes

Goal: Write honestly and without editing. This is discovery work.

After Writing: Ask yourself— Could this be a chapter in a longer memoir? What context would a reader need to understand this fully? What themes are emerging?

Discussion Questions for Group or Solo Reflection

1. What surprised you most in Malala's memoir?





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2. How did she balance political context and personal emotion?
3. Have you experienced a moment where you were afraid but acted anyway?
4. What would be *your* “first chapter” if you were to write a memoir?

Mini Reading List for Memoir Inspiration

- *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai
- *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls
- *When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi
- *Educated* by Tara Westover
- *Heavy* by Kiese Laymon

Memoir writing is both an excavation and an offering. We dig into memory not to relive pain or victory, but to discover meaning. As we ask the hardest questions gently, we are shaping our rough edges into narrative, aware that our life is already rich with story.