“He Named Me Malala” is a 2015 documentary directed by Davis Guggenheim; the story explores the life of Malala Yousafzai, who was shot by the Taliban for championing girls’ education in Pakistan, and who subsequently became the youngest-ever Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

This videoclip from the documentary is the opening of the film, and it features an animated version of the story of the Afghani folk heroine Malalai of Maiwand, for whom Malala Yousafzai’s father named her. This animated opening provides a frame for the remainder of the documentary, which contains subsequent animated sections as well as interviews and recordings representing Yousafzai’s life.

Ask students why this animated story is chosen for the opening of a documentary film.

AHA! Malala Yousafzai’s name provides inspiration for her life and for the telling of her story.

Grade Level: 6-12

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in – or omitted from – this message?
Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values, lifestyles and points of view.
Materials: Screen, LCD projector, computer with high-speed Internet connection.

Activity: Use the videoclip* (2:15 minutes long) found at http://ow.ly/Z0nWM.

Before identifying the film that the videoclip is taken from, ask the students if the animated clip caught their attention. What did they like or dislike about the creative techniques used to tell the story? If time permits, show the clip again. Then have the students list out the values, lifestyles and points of view they identify in the clip. Be sure to have students address omissions, such as other points of view. Students may want to explore historical information about the opponents and the context surrounding the battle depicted, or typical customs regarding women at the time.

After analyzing and discussing the videoclip, provide students with the name of the documentary and ask students what their expectations may be of Malala Yousafzai, the contemporary girl whom the documentary features. What kind of girl might they expect to meet or see?

Extended Activities: A complete teaching guide, “He Named Me Malala,” is available free from Journeys in Film, http://journeysinfilm.org/films/he-named-me-malala/. Once students have had an opportunity to explore the framing of Malala’s story from the standpoint of the opening animation using a media literacy approach, it is illuminating to contrast and compare Malala Yousafzai’s own story with that of the ancient heroine.

Additionally, the book authored by Yousafzai, “I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban,” provides another media venue to explore Yousafzai’s story, allowing for a comparison between various approaches possible through different mediums.

* The videoclip is excerpted from the 2015 film “He Named Me Malala.” CML thanks Fox
Searchlight Pictures for permission to use this clip for educational purposes.

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