

the James & Madeleine *McMullan* FAMILY FOUNDATION

LettersAboutLiterature

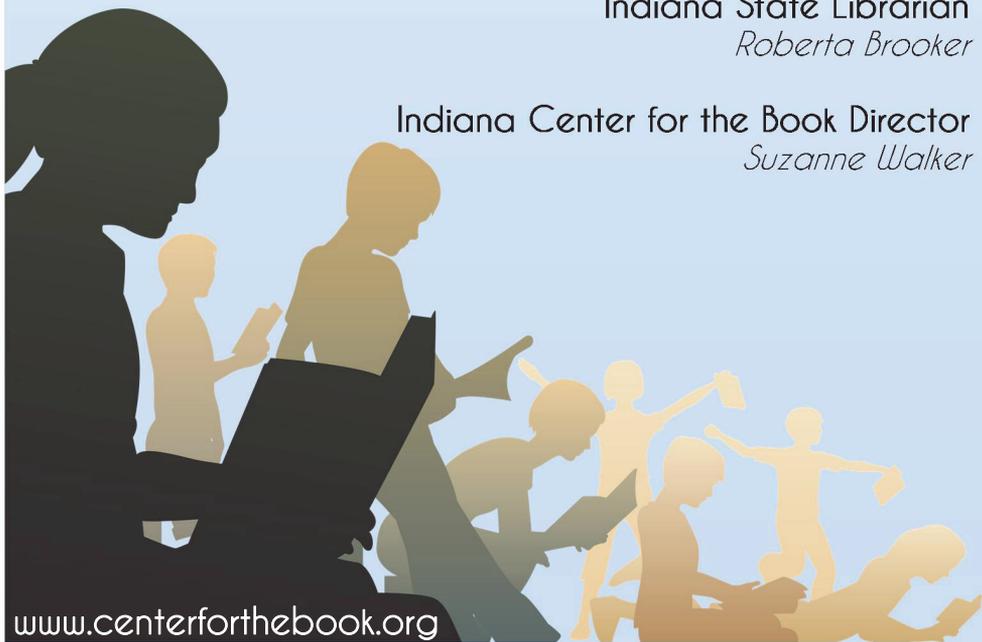
Indiana State Library & Indiana
Center for the Book present:

2013 LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE ANTHOLOGY

Winning Letters & Poems from Young Hoosier Writers

Indiana State Librarian
Roberta Brooker

Indiana Center for the Book Director
Suzanne Walker



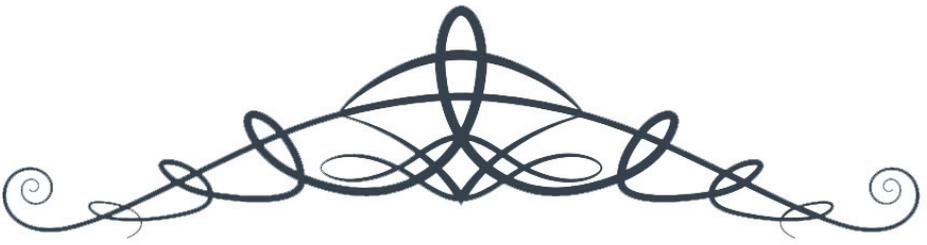


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SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Margaret McMullan, the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, and the Teachers, Librarians, and Parents who Encourage Young People to be Active Readers & Participate in the Letters About Literature Contest.

Funding for the 2013 Letters About Literature Anthology is courtesy of:



Congratulations to the
LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE 2013
Winning Indiana Students!

Letters About Literature is a national reading-writing contest that asks readers to write a personal letter to an author explaining how their book changed the student's way of thinking about the world or themselves. The program is sponsored by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, of which the Indiana Center for the Book has affiliate status, and, we are truly honored to also be supported for the first year ever by the James and Madeleine McMullan Family Foundation.

Letters About Literature is the most important program we have at the Indiana Center for the Book. It is part of a vast program held all over the nation bringing states, schools, teachers, authors, and of course, students together to have a national conversation about reading and how it affects our lives.

We at the Indiana Center for the Book want to offer our sincere thanks to all the people who worked together to make this program, and indeed this very book, possible. Thank you to the teachers, parents, students and schools for your participation in the competition. We are always so pleased with your submissions and this year was no different. Thank you to the judges who had the difficult task of mindfully reading hundreds of letters to arrive at those found here in this book.

We offer a very special thanks to the James and Madeleine McMullan Family Foundation for supporting our Youth Literary Day and Letters About Literature Award Ceremony that was held on April 27, 2013 at the Indiana State Library. It was a great day that included writing workshops, author signings, and the reading of the letters by our three 1st Place Winners.

We made the decision to keep the letters in this book true to what the child submitted. Sometimes there are grammatical errors, but we like to think that errors show humanity and also remind us of the youthfulness of our writers. Later in life, students will be able to look back at their young writings as a testament to how far they've come in their writing journeys. It should also be noted that several letters won prizes and are not included in this book due to lack of permission at the time of printing.

The letters in this collection are heartfelt interpretations from young readers that touch on a variety of difficult themes including bullying, feeling alone, injury, disease, death, racism, being the new kid, and other serious topics that our Indiana youth struggle with daily. How encouraging to know that the simple act of reading a book can offer support, escape, entertainment, and even an outlet for emotions in the lives of our young people. The letters are collected in age groups and it is not surprising that some of the more serious issues, issues that would challenge the most well adjusted adults, are at the end in the high school section.

Millions of writers create new worlds for us to explore every day. Sometimes those writers have the honor of touching a young life. These letters tell those stories. Enjoy these letters. They are a gift.

In addition to our Letters About Literature, we've made the decision to include all the **Indiana River of Words** poetry submissions for 2012-2013 in this book. This contest, which focuses on the importance of water, is small in Indiana, however each of our 13 poems were entered into the National River of Words competition and we congratulate our River of Words writers for their achievement. They provide cleansing breaths through this book. We'd like very much to see this contest grow in the future.

Suzanne Walker - Director, Indiana Center for the Book

The Silent Wind

The wind whispers in my ear
And a whole new world starts to appear.
Out of my fears it turns to leave
And disappears.

Unreachable Heights

The Tree's limbs grasping
For endless sky, only to
Barely scrape its cloak

My Mentor

The peaceful forest
Is my teacher, my love, my
Dreams, my hopes my life

Indiana State Library & Indiana Center for the Book

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE 2013

Winning Letters by Young Hoosier Writers

LEVEL ONE STATE WINNERS: GRADES 4 THROUGH 6

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The Storm

The sky became a dark gray color.
Then the thunder started;
it was the loudest thing in the world.
Lightning lit up the sky.

After the first strike of lightning,
the rain started falling.
Limbs broke off the trees.

The storm world was quiet.
As I walked out after the storm, the world smelled clean,
and it felt clean too.

Level One State Winner / First Place—Clara Voskuil
Letter to R. J. Palacio, Author of *Wonder*

R. J. Palacio,

You probably often hear people say, “Oh, that was a great book!” I would greatly agree when it comes to your novel *Wonder*, but that’s not what I’m going to say right now. I think *Wonder* deserves much more than a cheesy comment. Your book can be used as an example of what really happens in the fifth grade, and I should know because that’s exactly the position I’m in this year. As my teacher read *Wonder* aloud, I really started thinking of how I could use your book as a role model. *Wonder* truly changed the way I now look at bullying, diversity, and unfair relationships around the world.

When it comes to bullying, I’ve never considered myself the bully, and I haven’t really been the victim. In fact, I haven’t, or didn’t think I’d been in many bullying situations. But then, as I read your book, I realized everyone (in a way) is a part of the problem. In my case that only leaves two positions: an oblivious bystander, or the courageous ally who steps up to stop the bully. Even though everyone wants to be a “mighty superhero” (an ally,) that’s often not the case. As I delved deeper into the pages of *Wonder* I realized that I was (in spite of my fairy tale fantasies) only an oblivious bystander. At first I was disappointed, frightened even, that I was doing something bad for the world. I did realize, though, that it takes courage to be an ally.

It’s definitely not easy to stand up for someone against a bully or “the bad guy.” Your book, however, was a great help for me to develop the mind of the ally. One part of *Wonder* that really inspired me was when August first moved to Beecher Prep and at lunch no one would sit next to him. But then one courageous girl, Summer, took the brave action and sat next to him. However, the part that really struck me was that not only did she sit next to him, but also she actually made an effort to be friends with him, and it was her own decision. If you try to put yourself in August’s shoes, you can only imagine what that small moment meant to him. As a “bystander,” I felt really touched and inspired by that passage, and I still do. Only one part of me felt missing, though. The big question that I now ask myself is: “How can I be Summer?” If only everyone in the world would have the same question while reading your book, everyone may become allies. The book you created has helped me become more of an ally.

All across the world, we are diverse in a special way. However, sometimes diversity is seen as “different,” and differences are not appreciated. Someone with deformities is also most likely to be bullied than a person without. Before I read *Wonder* and I’m almost positive very few people can deny this, I couldn’t help but stare at a person with deformities. I know it’s rude, but a lot of the time, whatever decision my brain made, I would be drawn to him or her. As I explored *Wonder*, I started to realize that no matter appearances, everyone is the same. It’s not worth discovering more about a person’s outside, but more about their inside. I know that the world as a whole will never realize the things that I discovered in your story, but I’m sure if they got to know the sweet little boy by the name of August (or Auggie) there would be less staring. No matter what “August” I may come across, your inspiring words implanted in my brain will help stop my stares.

Lastly, I would like to thank you for writing such a heartfelt book. Some people I’ve heard say, “Books can’t be role models!” I am very glad that you proved them wrong. *Wonder* took my mind places I’ve never dared to enter before. I have already recommended this book to my mom, cousin, aunt, and sister. While I hope they all read and are impacted by your story, I know August will be a character for me to learn from now, and in the future. *Wonder* has taught me to accept everyone as they are, especially if it’s someone like August.

Sincerely,

Clara Voskuil
University Elementary School
Bloomington, IN

Level One State Winner / Second Place—Hannah Beaven
Letter to Melody Carlson, Author of *Dark Blue*

Dear Melody Carlson,

When I first picked up your book, *Dark Blue*, I couldn't put it down. I loved it! Yet, at the exact same time, I hated it. I abhorred the pain Kara was facing. It was so vivid, so real. Too vivid. Too real. As I dug deeper into the book, I realized why. Kara was just like me.

In the summer before I entered first grade, new neighbors moved in behind us. To welcome our new neighbors, we made homemade chocolate-chip cookies and delivered them to their house. Along the way, we stopped to introduce ourselves. As it turned out, they had a girl my age named Brooklyn. Not only was she my age, but she was also going to attend the same school and was enrolled in the same class as me. As a result, we found ourselves spending the majority of our time together, and we quickly became best friends. We spent all of our time together. Our families were like one big family. Brooklyn was my closest acquaintance; the one I confided in, or at least she was, up until the summer before fifth grade. Then, my world was rocked.

Around the start of fifth grade, Brooklyn began to change. When we were alone, Brooklyn remained my best friend, but when Brooklyn was around the "cool" crowd, I was nobody. It was as if suddenly I didn't matter. I was downgraded to a third wheel, and she didn't bother to hide that. On the bus, I overheard her talking behind my back. At school, I was never included in conversations. Brooklyn began to rule me. I became her puppet, even when we were alone. I came to fear her. If she wanted to be the smarter, prettier sister when we pretended we were sisters, I let her. We grew farther and farther apart. You would think eventually, I would just avoid her all together. Unfortunately, due to my insecurity at the time, I refused to let myself accept this. I refused to let myself accept the status of many relationships I didn't like, including my relationship with God. I had become dependent on Brooklyn. She was my life preserver. I drowned when she moved to Texas. Lonely and lost, my life dragged on. I was very busy at the time so for awhile I didn't have time to embrace the heartache, but there was still a hole in my heart. Then, *Dark Blue*, came into the picture.

It was an ordinary day at the Ohio Township Public Library. As I searched the teen Christian fiction section, I stumbled upon your book. I read the back cover and thought, "Hmm, this scenario sounds familiar." I decided to try the book. I read the first page and immediately became

absorbed. As I turned page after page, I found myself empathizing with Kara. I knew exactly what Kara meant when she said, "It's like I was the hand puppet and she was the puppeteer." It vexed me to watch Kara face my problem. I wanted to scream at her, "Get a life!" But as I examined the book and myself more closely, I began to realize I was screaming at myself to get a life. I just didn't want to admit that I was the puppet.

Your book helped me to realize that it hurt me more to watch others face my problem than it was to face it myself. When I saw how Kara's pain was controlling her life, I realized it was time to stop letting pain control my life. Slowly, I began to let go of my friendship with Brooklyn. I began to realize it was time to follow in Kara's footsteps and find better friends. Your book also helped me to realize I needed to be honest in my relationships, including my relationship with God. It was time for me to let go of my past, stop begin dependent on Brooklyn, and become my own person. It was time to heal. It was time to change.

It wasn't easy to let go of my past, and it certainly wasn't easy to change. Even now, though my heart has healed, there will always be a scar. In fact, I'm not sure if I'll ever completely get over my relationship with Brooklyn. I'm still working on becoming my own person, and I'm still working on becoming more independent. Yet, even though I haven't overcome my problem completely, I want to thank you *Dark Blue*. It has helped me let go of my past and fill the hole in my heart. Also, your writing has helped me reconstruct my relationships, including that with Christ. *Dark Blue* has helped me discover who I truly am, and that is more than I could ever thank you for. Thank you for giving me a pain eraser, a second change, a new life preserver, by writing *Dark Blue*.

Sincerely,

Hannah Beaven
Castle North Middle School
Newburgh, IN

Level One State Winner / Third Place—Maria Noller
Letter to Linda Sue Park, Author of *A Long Walk to Water*

Dear Linda Sue Park,

My name is Maria Noller; I'm 12-years-old and live in Indiana. Over the summer I read your book, *A Long Walk to Water*, and it became one of my favorite books. It made me think of how much we take for granted living here in America. The book, also, made me stop complaining. *A Long Walk to Water* changed my perspective on life.

One way this book changed my life was that I learned I never had a reason to complain. Before I read this book, I would grumble and whine to my mom about having to take the trash out. After I read *A Long Walk to Water*, I realized my life is pretty easy. What do I have to complain about? I have a sturdy house, food at my table every day, and I don't have to walk five miles to get water. Also, I learned I should NEVER complain about going to school. I may not like school all the time, but at least I have the chance to go to school and get a good education, unlike many kids in Africa. This book made me realize that I have no reason to complain about my life because in many other places in the world, people have it much worse than I.

Another way *A Long Walk to Water* changed my life is when I realize how much people in America take things for granted. I think that Americans sometimes just assume that everyone else in the world lives like us. They don't know how wrong they are. For example: I hate staying home alone for over an hour while kids in countries like Sudan have to flee their county; leaving their families behind and possibly never seeing them again. Also, Americans fill their toilets with clean water. In Sudan, girls, like Nya, have to walk miles just to get *dirty* water for their families to drink. This is difficult for me to imagine as an American. One more thing we take for granted, is how lucky we are not to live in a war-torn country. I don't live in fear of soldiers coming into my town. I feel safe in America.

It makes me sad to think that what Nya and Salva had to go through happens to a lot of other kids in this world. I was so moved by your story that I went to Salva's website and read more about how we can help the people of Southern Sudan get clean water more easily. Now, I really want to help Salva out with his mission for clean water. If it wasn't for your book I wouldn't have know about it at all. Once again, *A Long Walk to Water* has changed my perspective on life, and I thank you for writing it.

Sincerely,

Maria Noller
Hamilton Heights Middle School
Arcadia, IN

Level One State Winner / Honorable Mention—Connor Bryan
Letter to Rick Riordan, Author of *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*

Dear Rick Riordan,

Your book is one of those books. I don't know how to describe it. Most books have small flashes of insight but your book, for me, was a display of fireworks. Most characters are different and don't enjoy being it either, but not Percy. Percy didn't care that he wasn't as smart as the other kids or that he had ADD. He accepted it-just kept on going and didn't give it a second thought. He taught me to be myself and to change my definition of normal.

I first read your book when I was eight. Back then I had read hundreds of book and genres but my favorite was the Greek and Roman myths and legends. I couldn't relate to the characters, which is to be expected since they're all either gods or half gods. I just wanted a book that combined my love for myths with something I also cared about. Anyway, I got *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* one night as an award for good grades. While browsing the bookstore, I eventually came to the front of the store where they keep the used books and came across yours. I thought the cover looked interesting so I bought it and took it home. Right before bed I started to read and couldn't stop. Your book was probably the best book I had ever read.

I loved getting to know Percy and the problems he faced. The things he worried about were so relative to mine – like school and friends. Suddenly he gets whisked away to Camp-Half Blood and is normal compared to the other kids. There everyone is like him, demi-god with ADHD and dyslexia. I thought how I was the only one in my class who loved to read, I had thought about changing pretending to do things like sports or video games, but I just don't like them. I had just moved to Indiana from Iowa because of my Dad's job and everyone was different. They liked different things different sports, different books. Everywhere you looked someone was wearing a Colts jersey and football is the most boring thing to me. After reading about that I decided to start trying to make friends like me. It turns there are a lot of kids who like to read if I look hard enough. I started to try to be friends with them.

We started to hang out and soon I had started to make Indiana feel more like home. I also started to play some sports. I played wrestling and made some friends there too. Soon, Iowa was just a distant memory and Indiana was my new home. Sometimes I visit my old friends but it just isn't the same, now we're all a lot different than in second grade. *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* helped me get through the pressure of school and friends. Now in sixth grade, I can read two years above my grade level, and I read hundreds of books a year. Without your help I think I would just be that no name kid sitting in the corner that nobody knows about.

Sincerely yours,

Connor Bryan
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Level One State Winner / Honorable Mention—Madison Lane
Letter to Kate DiCamillo, Author of *The Tale of Despereaux*

Dear Kate DiCamillo,

I have always loved books. I love to sink myself into fantasy, just for a moment. A precious moment. Some books bring me pleasure, others entertainment, a few a dose of love. But your book, *The Tale of Despereaux* gave me hope.

Despereaux is unwanted in his world. He is different, attentive, hungry for something he can not have. I am, in several ways, the same. I love. I dream. I care. I see the world in a way others can not. And I am disrespected for it. Bullies pick on my flaws. People scoff at my 'silly' statements. My life whirls around me like a tornado, trapping me inside its roaring, debris-strewn walls. I probably shouldn't complain, considering I am perfectly healthy. I am mentally and physically sound. I've never broken a bone before! But my heart breaks easily.

I am conscious of every single one of my flaws, every single imperfection in my life. My contentedness is as delicate as a spider web; even the slightest change in the wind can tear it to pieces. The smallest things can scare me, hurt me, upset me. Maybe that's why I love to trap myself between the pages of a book. Sometimes I feel like stories are the only condolences in the world for me. When I try to tell my family about my problems, they just say, "There are starving kids in Africa who would *love* to have the life you have." When I try to tell my friends, they just tell me about how hard *their* life is. They think their words help, but they only make me feel selfish. They only make me hate myself more. The only comfort I ever got was with my grandfather, who I called Poppy. Poppy had gotten prostate cancer from a chemical called Agent Orange when he was in the Vietnam War. I always used to read to him at night as he was falling asleep, sometimes from a book I was *reading*, sometimes from a book I was *writing*. I loved reading to him. It made me feel special. It made me feel loved. I read him many books, especially the books about Poppy and Rye. And then I found *The Tale of Despereaux*.

I used to go to an after-school program called Enrichment every Friday. Enrichment was for academically advanced students. Sometimes, the teacher would read to us. Of course we would read to ourselves, but we enjoyed having her read to us, too. One day she began reading *The Tale of Despereaux*. I enjoyed every step of it. “Despereaux is just like me,” I thought. “If *he* got a happy ending, *I* will too.” Despereaux didn’t marry Princess Pea, but he still got a happy ending. Maybe my happy ending will be different than what I expect, too. I won’t know until I get there.

I found new possibilities in *The Tale of Despereaux*. I found closure. I decided that I wanted Poppy to find that, too, so I read your book to him. I read it over and over, whenever I was scared or unhappy. And, for a while, everything was right with the world.

Poppy died about a year ago, roughly the same time that I moved up north to Indiana. As you can image, these events broke my fragile heart in two. I read *The Tale of Despereaux* several times during this period, looking for something to mend my broken heart. It was Despereaux’s happy ending that saved me.

I still like to read your story, but I don’t need the book. I can flip through the pages in my mind, beginning in a small classroom on a Friday afternoon and ending with a new life, far away from home.

Sincerely,

Madison Lane
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Level One State Winner / Honorable Mention—Chendi Liu
Letter to Natalie Babbitt, Author of *Tuck Everlasting*

Dear Mrs. Babbitt,

I recently turned eleven years old and ever since I can remember, I have always been afraid of the thought of dying. You're touching book, *Tuck Everlasting*, just happened to be a novel in our classroom and I decided to read it. Reading this book showed me how fortunate I was. It made me realize how lucky I am and it made me realize how much we should be thankful for what we have. I even surprised myself when I was talking to a friend the other day about how I would rather have a normal life versus living forever.

One thing I noticed that I have never noticed before reading this book was that I am surrounded by people and the Tucks are not. If something happened to me or my family, other people would know. If something really did happen to the Tuck family, no one would be there for them because there would be no one to lean on. I feel very lucky to have a lot of friends.

"Life. Moving, growing, changing, never the same two minutes together. This water, you look out at it every morning, and it looks the same, but it ain't."-Angus Tuck. When reading this, I thought of my family. My Mom, Dad and sister always look the same but they aren't. Just like Tuck said, they are growing. My sister is growing, becoming more mature. My parents are growing, too. Even I am growing. Although some people hate going through new experiences, we shouldn't. This is the experience the Tuck family never got to experience that we should feel appreciative about. We get to feel older and different every day because we are growing.

Tuck Everlasting showed me that my life is special for what it is. Winnie was always wishing for a sibling so she wouldn't be the center of attention reminding me that I was the exact opposite. After reading this book I realized that one of the reasons I am special is because I have a sister and I should be happy for what I have. I will always be there for my sister and my sister will always be there for me. In the past I have always thought of her as a nuisance or a pest. Angus reminded me we live in a circular world with people dying every day and having a sister should be valued.

When I read this book, I realized that love is everything. I love my family. I felt very special when Jesse asked Winnie to drink from the spring at the time she turned seventeen. I felt special because it means that Winnie is loved and every person on this universe is loved by someone. When I am loved I am never alone in this world no matter how alone I feel. There are times when I feel very lonely but after reading this book I know that I will never be alone.

I surprised myself a lot while reading this book. The biggest thing I felt surprised about was when I caught myself telling a friend that I would choose leading a normal life instead of being in the Tucks' situation. I surprised myself because I have always loved the thought of never dying. However, I never thought about being stuck in one age and having no friends. In my opinion, that wouldn't even be living. That would just be staying in one place forever. Just like Angus said, "I would just be a rock."

After reading your book, I have found myself being a lot more optimistic. The secret I believe is that I take value and happiness for what I have because this is my life. I am also not afraid of death anymore because although I have always understood that it is a natural thing, I have never acknowledged it and accepted it before. Now I accept it into my life cycle. Somewhere in these years, it is going to happen. Just because some certain events happen in life and they are events we cannot change we don't have to focus on those things all day. I choose to focus on the more important things in life and live as positive as I can.

Sincerely,

Chendi Liu
College Wood Elementary School
Carmel, IN

Level One State Winner / Honorable Mention—Julia Moore
Letter to Dr. Seuss, Author of *Horton Hears a Who*

Dear Dr. Seuss,

“... a person’s a person no matter how small.” Although this is the main point of your book *Horton Hears a Who*, and a very good one at that, I found so much more hidden meaning to it as well. I realize that this book is way under my age level, but I also realize that is a timeless classic and you can never really read it too many times. And just like you can’t have too much sugar, you can never have enough of this sweet tale.

I got this book as a gift when I was younger and immediately wanted to learn how to read it. After reading the book for the first time, at once my imagination sparked. The creativity gears in my head finally started to turn. I read the book countless of times over and over again. Every time I read the book I became more and more livid with the kangaroos of Nool. When I was little I couldn’t figure out why I was angry at them, yet now I do. When I was younger I was an outcast. I would sit in the grass and collect flowers for my teacher at recess, I rarely spoke up in class, I kept all my ideas inside. I felt just like Horton being bullied, caged in, feeling unwanted, and restricted to use my imagination or share my ideas. But somewhere in my heart I knew that the story always had a happy ending.

Sometimes I feel like Horton in the sense that someone has stolen the only thing that makes me happy (which I might not even know what that is) and take it far away out of my reach. I end up searching endlessly like a lost fool wandering around. I know that no one is going to help me so I keep looking on my own. It may take me months, years even to bring back that same happiness. But even when I find it, it is never the same. In one way or another one part of the facetious happiness, has crumbled. Though I have no hope of retrieving the exact same part, I can rebuild it. Sometimes the rebuilt happiness is better than the original. I get this feeling when I think of my real home, Nova Scotia Canada. I was born there, raised there, that’s where I learned to read your book! But nevertheless, after six years of living in that safe haven, my parents gave me that profound hole in my heart that will never really go away. The news that we were moving. I was torn. My parents said it would be a great adventure, but I did not believe them. The moving day came yet I kept myself from crying. After a three day trip we arrived. As my school years progressed I found living in Indiana more enjoyable. I had more friends than I ever did in my so called “safe haven.” Now that I’m in sixth grade, I realize that I would never want to

leave Indiana. I have so many friends and I don't know what I would do if I had to leave them.

There will always be people like the kangaroos of Nool. People who will try to put you down, take away your joy, and downright embarrass you, but we can't do anything about it. Although these bullies may seem powerful they would be nothing without their acquaintances. Just like the Wickersham family, bullies will have backups to do their work for them. The Wickershams followed the crowd and believed what everyone else did so they wouldn't be different or stand out. But in the end the crowd was wrong! The crowd is not always right! You must be proud in what you think is true. In math I always follow the crowd (my classmates) and believe others to be right, when that's not always the case. I'm too scared my answer will be wrong and people will think badly of me. But sometimes my answer is correct when the crowd's is not and that is an encouraging and uplifting occurrence. I feel great inside just like Horton did when the animals of Nool finally heard those Whos.

Even the smallest person can make a difference. Yes this is true in your book with Jo-Jo, but it is also true in life. If your school is having a fund raiser, a meager dollar could help. If your Mom is cleaning the house, I'm sure you could lift a finger. If someone falls down, simply help them up. There are so many things us kids could do to help someone, quite possibly help save the world.

So whether you see this book as a book of one lesson, or like I do with many, it is still a beautiful book that has taught me so much. I can relate to so many ideas from this book and find the fact almost magical that I can connect to such a little kid book. Yet every book is magical and a gift to people no matter how you view it. So in conclusion, thank you for *your* creative gift to the world, *Horton Hears a Who*.

Your #1 fan,

Julia Moore
Riverside Intermediate School
Fishers, IN

Level One State Winner / Honorable Mention—Mary Rozembajgier
Letter to Natalie Babbitt, Author of *Tuck Everlasting*

Dear Mrs. Babbitt,

I have read your book, *Tuck Everlasting*, two times and not only because this book is written very nicely with many descriptive details and a great plot. This book changed my perspective of how it would be to live forever. Before I read your persuasive book, I thought that living forever would be amazing, just like Jesse thinks. You can have all the time in the world to do whatever you want. Never running out of time seems so perfect. But, of course, for characters not in a novel, everlasting life is a dream far out of reach. Magical springs full of magical water don't exist. Perhaps this is for the better.

Tuck's words truly changed me. His analogy of the wheel of life turning with dying right next to being born was so powerful to me especially after reading it for the second time, being able to understand it more. He is so right about the wheel continuing to turn while the Tucks are just lying beside the road; never to die, just living until the sun is blown out.

I think that a fast response "Well of course!" would be shouted if you asked someone if they wanted eternal life. The shouter may not think that living forever would mean endless days on the Earth. *Tuck Everlasting* has changed the way I think I would answer this question. We all know that we are going to die someday. I don't think I would take the chance to live forever. Staying on this Earth forever sounds amazing but I fear I would get tired of it and lose connection to people, like the Tucks do. Dying is a good thing in some ways. Dying means that you have finished your life, accomplished all you were supposed to do, and it was just time to move on. After you die, there may be a whole new life waiting for you. The Tucks will never know what that secretive next step is after death.

After I finished reading your book for the second time, my older sister, Grace, and I were making a Christmas gift for our grandparents. We made them a CD of poems. One of the poems we read together was Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 from King James Version of the Holy Bible. This centuries-old psalm reminded me of your book – especially the part, "a time to be born and a time to die." It is natural for all things to die. Everything has a season in this world, and a reason for it. I have included a copy of this passage at the end of my letter. As I read it again and again I find more connections between it and your book. I hope you enjoy it.

This passage also reminds me of your book because I am just beginning my life and I was reading the poems for my grandparents who are in their 80s. If I were to drink the water in your book, I would never be able to live the rest of my life at different stages. There is some beauty in being able to live your whole life and not stop at one age forever. Jesse, Mae, Miles, and Tuck, never know

the beauties of the stages of life. I look at my grandparents and can see in them lives well lived full of challenges, sorrows, joys, and blessings. And they are better people because of their journey.

If people would think long and hard after being asked if they wanted to live forever, then maybe they would say no. Everyone thinks it would be so wonderful to live forever but would you ever get tired of just living?

This book also brought about mixed emotions. I felt so bad for Tuck who regrets living forever. I wish Tuck could climb back on the wheel. I was glad when Winnie and Jesse were enjoying themselves together. I wish that Winnie would have found Jesse just one more time in her life, but I was glad that she did not drink the water, for she would never be able to enjoy and finish her life and all its stages. Like Winnie, I would not cut short all that my life could be in exchange for one tiny sip of eternal life.

Thank you for considering my thoughts and ideas about your book.
Enjoy the seasons of life!

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
A time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant,
and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
A time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
A time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep and a time to cast away;
A time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
A time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

Holy Bible, King James Version

Sincerely,

Mary Rozembajgier
College Wood Elementary
Carmel, IN

Level One State Winner / Honorable Mention—Debbie Shera
Letter to Wendelin Van Draanen, Author of *The Running Dream*

Dear Mrs. Van Draanen,

You know those things that just make you think-why the sky is blue, what the meaning of life is, or even why leaves change colors. All these things make you wonder how or why they came to be. These things do not make sense, so human instinct is to go find out what they really are. Your book *The Running Dream* is one of those things.

After losing her leg, Jessica was mad and felt like she was being punished for a crime she didn't commit. I, for one, would be in that same situation; trapped in my own thoughts and feelings. How she came out of that fog I cannot even comprehend. This reached out to me in way I never could have imagined.

She lost a leg, almost a fourth of somebody's body. She worked and worked, and *never gave up*. This inspired me to work harder for things I love just because I can. I am given the gift of 2 arms and legs, and I will always use them to work, help, and give.

I love it when she offered to race Rosa. I have some friends that *terrible* things have happened to them – even worse than losing a leg. How Jessica reached out to a person she could have simply forgotten made me remember how generous and kind my friends really are. People – even with hard shells of sadness around them – can still give someone the gift of caring.

“I want people to see me, not my condition.” At my school, we have special needs kids come to music, art, and gym with my class every day. Before this, kids have just assumed that since they cannot do a few basic things – like walking or talking – that they can't do anything like us. Now we know that they are really not that different from us. All Rosa wanted was to be “normal,” but really she was already the best person she could be.

“It's a pipe dream. I won't be able to walk, let alone run!” This is what Jessica believed before she saw the videos of the prostheses for running. How she was so unbelieving and then she became an even *better* runner amazes me! This shows that anything can happen if you set your heart and mind to it.

No pain, no gain; training, racing, working 24/7. Determination was how Jessica stood on her foot again. Day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, step by step. This is how people get through life, through the good, and through the bad. I never realized this about the world before; we count our steps to get through them.

While reading this book, I felt strange. I felt like I was reading about the mind of myself in the body of a stranger. I'm really no different than Jessica. She had a problem, she faced it. I thought about this and found that I do the same thing. When I see a problem, I have to fix it or I feel incomplete or broken.

I have thought and wondered so much about this book that my head almost burst. I could not find the theme or moral of this story. I read and reread every page, every paragraph, every sentence, and every word. I dissected this book; I tore into it. I took it step by step, trying to find the meaning.

Then it hit me. The theme of this book is simple. When people get hurt, and fight, and feel pain, and then finally come to rest, that's not the finish line.

It's only the beginning.

Your reader,

Debbie Shera
Riverside Intermediate School
Fishers, IN

P.S. Please write more books!

Level One State Winner / Honorable Mention—Victoria Sills
Letter to Gail Carson Levine, Author of *The Wish*

Dear Gail Carson Levine,

I have read many of your books and loved each one of them. That's not why I'm writing to you though. I'm not going to write to you about what happened in your books or how amazing they are. You already know what happened though. I'm writing to tell you how your book *The Wish* changed me.

I've never been the popular girl in school. I'm not the prettiest either. So, when I read *The Wish* I felt like Wilma. This is my first year in middle school so there's some adapting to do with all of the cliques and all of the classes. When I read Wilma was in middle school as well, I was put in her shoes.

I was confused when Wilma made her wish. I was also excited at the same time. Confused because I thought, "Why would some old lady ask her what she wished for?" I was excited because I felt Wilma would be happy and be popular like I wanted to be. Wilma was like another me, an unpopular middle schooler, who is not the best looking person in the world and is very smart. Wilma also has a love for animals, but who doesn't!

As I was reading about Arius, I felt sorry for her. I felt this way because I just found out she was made fun of at her old school. I'm very tall like her, but people made fun of me for a different reason, but I will not put that in this letter. I realized then popularity for her was being the best or the coolest. Popularity was just being nice.

Jared isn't one of the most popular people either, but you already know that. Anyway, Jared thinks Wilma isn't like the other popular people, which is true. Jared seems to like Wilma for who she really is, but it takes her a while to realize it. It's kind of like trying to find friends. You aren't sure who likes you for you or who likes you for your talent, money, smarts, or anything else like that.

When Wilma tried to trick the spell, I was hopeful. I thought she could fool the wish. I wasn't quite sure though. I thought Wilma's plan was ingenious, but when it didn't work I was discouraged. I really thought she would be happy and keep her wish. That obviously wasn't the case.

In the end, when she invites Bee Bee, Arius, Nina, and Jared to her house and the old lady takes back the spell, I felt dismal. Later, when they agree they can still try to be friends, I rejoiced because I thought Wilma would again be without friends. This is how your book changed me. I realized then it doesn't matter if you're popular or not. You just need to surround yourself with people who love and care about you. So that's just what I'll do.

Sincerely,

Victoria Sills
Castle North Middle School
Newburgh, IN

Level One State Winner / Honorable Mention—An-Ping Yu
Letter to Alyson Noël, Author of *Shimmer*

Dear Alyson Noël,

Many people have had a hard past. I'm assuming you already know that. I personally have experienced being teased and have had the pain of losing someone special. Those memories appear little by little whenever something I see or hear relates to a memory. When I read *Shimmer*, all my terrible memories rose up out of the grave. You would think that remembering childhood pain would be extremely painful and haunting. It was. Though my agony increased as I read, I didn't stop reading. I would tell myself to stop when I was engulfed with terror at my history, but I didn't stop reading. I often asked myself, "Why won't you quit reading and find a book that triggers happiness?" Finishing *Shimmer* told me why.

Since kindergarten, I've felt as if my life was overwhelmed with pain. I had a close friend whose mother died from a car accident. My friend and I were in shock for months. I felt as if I lost a friend since she kind of went into hysteria denying that her mother ever died. For a long time, I was lonely at school. My face was glum, and I rarely even lifted the corners of my mouth. Years later, kids at school started teasing me about my eyes, what I wore to school, how I pronounced words, and especially what I brought for lunch.

When I read *Shimmer*, my life started fitting onto the pages. The scenes of my past made the book into a three-dimensional movie titled *My Life*. I finished *Shimmer* because I found that it was a true source of comfort. The characters Rebecca trapped in her world of fury and hate were similar to me. All of us had experienced pain that could never be forgotten. *Shimmer* has helped me understand how to release my hatred and pain and cross the bridge to the future. When I finished the last page of *Shimmer*, I sat on the couch and thought about what decision I should make with my past. I started thinking of whether I should be Rebecca and keep my anger or be Riley and free my deep aggravation. I chose to be like Riley and not completely lose memory of my past, but remember my anger as a lesson essential for the future.

Ever since finishing *Shimmer*, I have recognized how to control my outrage whenever the horrible memories return. Whenever I feel angry, I try to reflect back to Rebecca and what happened to her because she refused to release her venom. *Shimmer* has helped me through tough times. Now, I refer back to your book to assist me to get over being just plain disappointed. While I continue on life's torturous road, I'll never fail to remember how to "forgive and forget" like Rebecca did after Riley freed her soul.

Sincerely,

An-Ping Yu
Castle North Middle School
Newburgh, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Bailey Baker

Letter to Jeff Kinney, Author of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules*

Dear Jeff Kinney,

Your book *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules* made me realize that my big brother is awesome compared to Rodrick. So the next time I saw my brother I gave him a big hug because some people like Greg don't have a big brother that cares about them like mine does.

It also taught me to get outside more because after Greg plays video games for a while he gets a little crazy! And now that I've been getting outside and off of the computer, my grades have improved. Greg and the Heffley Family have taught me a big lesson.

Thank you,

Bailey Baker
Blair Pointe Upper Elementary School
Peru, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Michelle Black

Letter to Robert Schwaninger, Author of *Isabel and the Christmas Crow*

Dear Robert Schwaninger,

Hi I am Michelle Black. I read your book *Isabel and the Christmas Crow* and on the first page I was hooked. I love how I can kind of relate to the crow how he is trying to make someone like him but he does not know how. I love how you used a lot of adjectives in your book, how you describe the setting, and how the characters were feeling emotionally. Thank you for taking the time to write such a brilliant and thoughtful book.

Sincerely yours,

Michelle Black
Park Tudor School
Indianapolis, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Adam Brookman
Letter to John Feinstein, Author of *The Rivalry*

Dear John Feinstein,

In third grade your book *The Rivalry* came out, *The Rivalry* made me think about cheating. Before I read your book cheating was what I did most. After I read your book there was a change in my life. I realized that cheating got you nowhere in life.

The Rivalry changed my whole life. I went from a kid that got in trouble a lot to a kid that got in no trouble. *The Rivalry* was the most influential book I've ever read. And that's why it's so important to me.

The main character Steve and I share a few strengths. One strength is we both never give up. When Stevie has started something he rarely stops. I relate to that because when I start something I hate stopping early. Once I was in a soccer game and I was down by one with one minute left, I never gave up and my team ended up winning!

Before I read *The Rivalry* I was really mean. I would talk a lot and make fun of kids. I thought when you did that it made you look cooler so I kept on doing it. When I found your book in a nearby store I thought it would be a good book to read because I like sports and I wanted to change my life. Sure enough that book changed the way I lived life. I stopped cheating and instead of making fun of kids I tried to make friends with them. Thank you John, for writing such an amazing book.

Next time somebody wants to change their life I am going to recommend they read *The Rivalry* and tell them the story on how my life was changed. Thank you one more time John for making me re think my life and then changing it.

Sincerely,

Adam Brookman
Castle North Middle School
Newburgh, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Mallori Clark
Letter to Lois Lowry, Author of *The Giver*

Dear Lois Lowry,

Your book, *The Giver*, is a truly amazing book. This story has affected/moved me in many ways. Your novel is interesting, different, and clever. I adore the way you teach people lessons.

One way that your story affected me: It taught me to appreciate what I have. After reading his book, I realized that I have many small things that some people lack. I have the advantage of seeing color. There are many people who are color-blind and cannot enjoy a lot of things in life. They can't see the beauty of red roses. I am very lucky to have what I have. Also, I realized that our rules, or laws, are so much better than some peoples. We don't have to kill babies to control our population. We don't have to make everything perfect. If people make a mistake, they usually get another chance; they are not punished right away. This is how we learn lessons (doing bad things).

This novel also inspired me to always follow my heart. Jonas runs away to be where he wants to be. This made me think very hard. At first I didn't understand why he ran away. After a while I understood. If I was not happy in life, I would want to change that. It isn't always about other people. You have to take care of yourself too. If you aren't happy, it begins to get hard to make other people happy. Also, if you are not pleased where you are, you can make it difficult for other people to make you laugh and have a good time. So, you should follow your heart at all times.

As you can see, your book has done many things to my life. I thank you for writing it and teaching me many things. This book is an unbelievably inspirational part of my life. I will never forget about these lessons or this story.

Sincerely,

Mallori Clark
Hamilton Heights Middle School
Cicero, Indiana

Level One State Semifinalist—Kara Connelly

Letter to Heather Vogel Fredrick, Author of *The Mother Daughter Book Club Series*

Dear Heather Vogel Fredrick,

I love your series, *The Mother Daughter Book Club*, but my favorite book in the series is *The Mother Daughter Book Club: Pies and Prejudice*. I show many connections to Jess, since she is somewhat similar to me. My connection when my best friend/neighbor moved away, after she lived next to me for six year. When I read it, I just started feeling like I could feel the emotions, since the same thing happened to me. I especially love, yet envy, that Emma and Jess still talked and kept in touch. What I really enjoyed was when the book club stayed as strong as possible, and started selling pies to raise money for Emma to come and visit. I also love baking, but I make cupcakes. I also love to read like Emma. You, and Emma, got me to start reading classics, and I love them.

I love how each of your characters are so rich and so real like, that if you put them in the real world they would fit in. They have real problems and real friendships. (Not to mention real bullies.) They still stick together no matter what. Though the road gets bumpy in a few cases, they get right back on track even if they have to take a detour.

When I started reading the book, I had already loved the other books, so I was sure this was going to be the same way. With the other books, all I had was an imaginative mind, but no real connections, with this I feel the emotion and tears the girls shed. The plot felt like it wasn't just written for all the readers. I felt like you interviewed me and girls with the same feelings and experiences and wrote the book. Your plots aren't fake and I love that a girl could be going through the same things. I cried so hard when I said goodbye to my best friend, who was moving to Texas, and I can't imagine how Jess felt about her best friend moving across a whole ocean. Emma must have hated it even more, since she left everyone who she knew, and moved to a place she knew nothing of. I can definitely feel a sense of protection and safeness in the book.

So, thank you for making a masterpiece.

Thank you so much,

Kara Connelly
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Alexis Dickman
Letter to Peg Kehret, Author of *Five Pages a Day*

Dear Peg Kehret,

Your book, *Five Pages a Day: a Writers Journey*, gave me “wings.” I can’t see them, you can’t see them, and others can’t see them, but I know they are there. For me, these wings are used to understand the world around me and to overcome problems. I also use my wings to have pride, confidence, and happiness in being myself. This book has helped me through thick and thin. Every time I use it to help me, my wings grow.

When you had polio it made me think, “What would happen if I had the same thing happen to me as it did to you?” I probably wouldn’t be as strong as you. That made me realize that I need to be more grateful for what I have and grateful for the life that I have. I have tried to live to the fullest because if I never did anything and suddenly I caught a virus and became paralyzed, I would have never done anything in life. I wouldn’t have any memories. Most importantly, I wouldn’t have had much a life at all.

I know your dad had Alzheimer’s disease. When he had it, it made me feel sorry for you, but it also made me glad it wasn’t my dad. If my dad died, I would have never learned how to play sports. My dad is a big part of my athlete side. He taught me how to play softball, basketball, soccer, and more. Without him, I wouldn’t be the person I am now.

As soon as I finished reading your book, it made me believe that anybody could do anything if they set their hearts to it. Before you became an author, you were just a normal girl with a dream. You tried everything, and that makes me think that I can do anything if I try hard enough. Before I read your book, I didn’t think I could do anything to make a difference. Now, I believe I can do anything I put my mind and heart into if I try hard enough. All I need to do now is spread my wings and fly.

Sincerely,

Alexis Dickman
Castle North Middle School
Newburgh, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Chloe Divens

Letter to Rick Riordan, Author of *The Throne of Fire*

Dear Rick Riordan,

The book, *The Throne of Fire*, had showed me many things about the world that I had not taken into-account before. For instance, I am now noticing and making more observations about my surroundings, and how everything in nature all fits and works together to make the world we have today. It also makes me realize how enormous the world really is. In class, we would always talk about the seven continents, their people and their culture. Although, I have just now realized from your book, how much things are going on in so many places at the same time with people who are trying to make our earth a better place. This has encouraged me to work harder in school, get a degree, and get a job that will make our nation a better place to live in. Your book has certainly made me look differently at the world.

During the book, I realized myself starting to care more about natural disasters, and wondering how people around the world are doing, and how fortunate I am for living in America. I am also starting to question things more, like the earth. Why it's here, how we are here, if we are actually meant to do something, and if so, what? Your book has also made me come to notice how my culture ties in with different myths, superstitions, and legends that come from all over the world. Knowing this about my culture makes me feel proud to be me, and to know and read about mythology. This book has definitely made me realize things about myself, and my tradition that were not as clear to me before.

This book surprised me because when I read my first book by you, I didn't expect to like it. But I gobbled it up in less than a month. Now every time I see a book by you I don't have to think twice to know if it's a good book or not. They really speak to me though because the kids are nearer to my age, and I can sort-of relate to their problems and lifestyle better. You also show, not tell. Sometimes I will be reading, look up to talk, and then look at the TV screen and wonder where the movie went. Until I finally realize that I had just been reading my book. I appreciate the time and effort you took to write this book. It has radically changed my life, and how I read.

Sincerely,

Chloe Divens
Park Tudor School
Westfield, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Jack Farley

Letter to Carol Anne Lee, Author of *Anne Frank and the Children of the Holocaust*

Dear Carol Anne Lee,

In *Anne Frank and the Children of the Holocaust* lots of people are tortured and treated so badly. I haven't been treated like they were. But think of how scared those people were. They knew that one day or one night they could be taken away and killed in an instant. Just because they were different. It doesn't make sense. When my sister was in the hospital it was one of the scariest experiences of my life. I was at home sick with pneumonia. She had a condition called Trisomy 18. It meant she had holes in her heart. It restrained her from doing anything that a regular person could do. She couldn't walk, talk, or eat. So when she was in the hospital with H1N1 it was scary because I couldn't go to the hospital because I was sick too.

When you read this book you can feel how scared they were. I can connect with that because I was really scared too. It's like you were there right next to the family and in the middle of all the action. Even though the action could get a little bit intense or scare it was so interesting. In the concentration camps there are people dying every day. But when one of those people who die is someone who is part of your family and is someone you love. It is one of the most traumatic experiences of your life. You can never forget what happened on that day and how. It is engraved in your memory forever. But once you realize you are supposed to be celebrating their lives not mourning over them.

After reading this book you get a feel for how terrifying it is to have someone die in your life. The people who were harmed in the holocaust show us a good lesson. Never give up. They were killed day by day but they kept fighting for their religion. Even though most of them knew they would end up being killed. They still fought. If you love something that much never give up fighting. Even though I couldn't do anything about my sister passing away. It will never go away. Like the holocaust will never be forgotten. Because its book like these that keep people remembering the events that happened. This is a great book and it is for a great purpose. I thank you for writing this book.

Sincerely,

Jack Farley
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Lydia Ferguson

Letter to Tricia Rayburn, Author of *Ruby's Slippers*

Dear Tricia Rayburn,

I read your book, *Ruby's Slippers*, and it really inspired me. It changed my perspective in life. When I started reading this book, I felt sure that I wasn't the only one in the world who had to move. I felt different each word, page, and chapter I read, I thought that as each wonderful word went by, I was lacing up my very own ruby slippers!

I can connect to Ruby's life in many ways. Ruby had to leave her small life in Curly Creek, and travel to the unknown place of Coconut Grove, Florida. Ruby moved there because her grandmother had to be cared for. I really felt like I was Ruby at that moment, when she had to move. I had to move from my small town on the east coast of Canada, to a completely different town in the state of Indiana. When Ruby was telling about her last moments with her best friend, it reminded me of my last moment with my best friend. It helped me remember that even though your friends might not be there personally, you can still remember those small, but amazing moments.

I can also connect with Ruby her first day of school at Sweet Citrus. When I think of the first day of school, it was a day where you would find your friends and go to your new classes with them. In this case, it was nothing like that. Ruby's first day of school was a tragedy. She managed to make a scene with the metal detector and become worst enemies with the most popular girl in school. My first day at a new school wasn't as bad. I made a friend who is now my best friend. I met plenty of new people, who were very nice. And, I sat with someone who happened to have the same name as me! I think that Ruby and I had close, yet very different experiences, in our lives.

Ruby also taught me a lesson that I thought everybody should know, and keep forever. It is that there is never only one place to call home. When Ruby moved from Curly Creek, she never thought she would be happy again. But, with the help of her family and some friends, she managed to bring a little of her old life, into her new. In my way, I thought nothing was going to be the same in my new home. Although, I managed to make myself feel like I was in my old home, (except for the fact it was at least 100⁰ warmer!)

Now I know that nothing will ever stay the same, even if you want it to. Things will change and sometimes it will be good, and sometimes you won't like it. I also learned that not everybody will have that perfect, fairy tale life. And I especially know that you do not need to click those ruby slippers to be happy.

From,

Lydia Ferguson
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Amanda Goldman

Letter to Jordan Sonnenblick, Author of *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie*

Dear Mr. Sonnenblick,

Hope. It is something very scarce at moments in someone's life but a little bit of it could flip their world upside-down. Many books can be that little bit of hope that someone needs. Your book, *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie*, was my hope. It gave me my wings.

I connected with your book in many ways one of them was all of the terms that had to do with cancer. My grandfather Albert Joseph Caro suffered greatly from stage five kidney cancer that quickly spread throughout his body. Your book showed me to be grateful for the little joys in life and the big ones. My grandpa passed away on July 31, 2012. I treasured the years we had and special moments we shared.

I was in a bad cycle a few months after my grandpa passed away. I was always thinking about what he used to do or say. But somehow even from eating dinner my thought cycle came back to him and his memory. It was normal reaction other than the fact that he was gone. Steven showed me that. He was treasuring that Jeffery was still doing and wasn't only thinking about what Jeffery couldn't do.

As soon as I started reading your book I was lifted higher and higher out of the hole I was in. Jeffery and Steven kept fighting and they won. Your book gave me wings so now I can always fly.

Amanda Goldman

Fall Creek Intermediate School

Fishers, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Caleb Grabarz

Letter to Dennis Ashton, Author of *Stars and Planets*

Dear Dennis Ashton,

I am so happy you made the book *Stars and Planets*. In your book, you talked about a possible mission to Mars and that helped me think of my future. I loved your book all the way through, and I even read it twice, but it was that one section about Mars that inspired me: to become an astronaut when I grow up. I know it seems far-fetched, but I have already started to plan.

There are many things I have planned for, like college and what subjects I need to hit the hardest, and how I need to react to situations. I've considered how I need to act in school (getting things done and turning papers in), etc. I'm either going to Harvard or Purdue, even though I am an IU fan. I chose Harvard because I have heard it is an "advanced" college. Purdue, on the other hand, is where a lot of astronauts have gone. The subjects I need to hit now and later will be advanced math and science; later on in school, physics and calculus. I would have to go to English classes, spelling classes, and learn a new language for a core forty. I wouldn't have thought about these things if I hadn't read that section.

Currently, I don't have any problems on how to react to situations, and how I need to act in school. I am only in middle school and still have high school and college ahead of me. I work very hard to get homework done and to get papers turned in on time. I am very, rarely (and I mean **RARELY**) late/tardy. In school, I am so hard on myself. If I get a B, I am ok, but anything lower than a B, I am unhappy with myself. I am always hearing from my peers: "How are you so smart" or "You're a smarty pants."

So, because of your amazing writing, it inspired me to become an astronaut. I now know what I want to do as a job in the future. If you make or have any more books, I would like to know so that I can read them too. I hope you know you have changed my life. I will forever thank you for your amazing book *Stars and Planets*.

From yours truly,

Caleb Grabarz
Hamilton Heights Middle School
Cicero, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Mary Griffin

Letter to Elizabeth Atkinson, Author of *I, Emma Freke*

Dear Elizabeth Atkinson,

Covers hide things. On books they hide the content and the story you want to read. On people they hide what a person is really like. It hides their happiness, sadness, regret, and pride. Why do people even bother with their covers? Emma doesn't.

Your book, *I, Emma Freke*, helped me realize that I cannot see myself living in an apartment with a mom that could care less and a grandfather who is more like a mom. The further I got into this book the more I realized how blessed I am. I live under a roof with a father and a mother. I have no problems at school. I have plenty of friends. I have a mother cooks and cleans for me. I have a family that cares.

Although I love reading I can't imagine having to spend all day in a library doing work. Not being with my friends, having to be quiet, having nothing to laugh about. When she became friends with the librarian I smiled to myself.

I have never been to a family reunion. All my family is too close. Reading about Emma's family I'm not sure I ever want to! Her Aunt Pat is quite the crazy one. I'm lucky not to have any family like her. Although sometimes my family is a little crazy. I don't think that I could spend more than a couple of days sleeping in a tent outdoors. It would give me the creeps. I definitely wouldn't be up for all of the physical activities that she does while at the reunion. Eating out in the open would scare me. I would be afraid that the animals would come eat my food. I'm that kind of person, just ask my friends. When Emma stands up to her crazy Aunt Pat I kind of went into shock. I couldn't believe that she had done that. I would never have been that brave.

The part that is the most different from me is her dad. She has no idea who he is. She has lived her whole life with a mom who has no interest in her whatsoever. When she finally meets her dad I was so happy for her. She finally met the one person she had dreamed about her whole life. I could never even begin to imagine what it's like to have that feeling.

Reading this book has made me look through a different set of eyes. I learned that it's okay to be Emma. It's okay to be a Freke.

Sincerely,

Mary Griffin
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Andrew Hendricks

Letter to J. K. Rowling, Author of *The Harry Potter Series*

Dear Ms. Rowling,

MAGIC. Something unreal, something you can only find in a book or a movie, maybe in your imagination. When you get into it, there is no escape it is a part of you and your mind. You will think about it constantly and wish you could stay and live the adventure, the one thing that can have all elements to real life and still be unrealistic. This is something I became a part of and attached instantly.

You know it is quite rare that you come across a book, in this case a series that the whole adventure and story can make you laugh, cry, smile, jump up and down, and truly feel for the characters. I still remember that day six years ago when my dad was telling me about Harry Potter, his first word mentioned was *wizard* and I was intrigued instantly. The idea of a boy wizard who was an orphan was so fascinating that I had to start reading. Within two months I had easily read through the first six books because I felt like I was there with Harry, Ron, and Hermione on their journeys through Hogwarts. It was one of the only books at the time that I felt for the characters as much as I did, and one of the only books that I could get lost in for hours. The key idea here is that your novels changed me in a way because I felt like I personally knew and was friends with your characters.

It also kind of changed me by showing me (and about all my friends that read this) that everybody is different and everybody has different lives but you can still be you and stand out strong, you can fight those battles that you thought you never could, you could have lots of friends when you even personally hated yourself, and most of all overcoming fear and standing up for yourself and others, your books have so many lessons that there are too many to mention.

It made me feel mostly out of all your beloved characters for Harry because he was an orphan that had to live with his aunt and uncle who hated him 100 percent through their whole hearts. And he knew only great things about his dead parents but he didn't get to even see what they looked like until the Mirror of Erised in book one, then for a quick second in book five when Sirius was killed, and lastly in book seven when he went to the forbidden forest to have Voldemort kill him. All of this bad stuff in his life made me feel for him and truly love the character, which is one reason I became so into the series is because the books had something that not many books could, they could almost attach to you.

I have always realized that these books were hardcore fantasy and people say how do those have heart? But they easily do because when you add the evil magic and connection between the protagonist and antagonist it gives heart because you have life or death decisions to make, and friends with you along the way to give you that push up of confidence, and to be there for you along the whole crazy adventure.

And it really says something about your books when I almost cried when Dumbledore died in book six, and when I was able to just yell “NO!” when Harry went to the forbidden forest to meet lord Voldemort in book seven.

So to wrap this up I would like to say thank you because your books were my characters were my friends away from my real friends, they were the thing that I always was talking about or being a part of in my free time, they gave me and my friends even more of a connection then we already had, they were the thing I always tried to sneak after bedtime, and they were a part of me. Thank you for writing these books and creating the whole Harry Potter universe not just for me but for the world.

Your biggest fan/reader,

Andrew Michael Hendricks
Riverside Intermediate
Indianapolis, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Jane Hirschman

Letter to Rick Riordan, Author of *The Mark of Athena*

Dear Rick Riordan,

My name is Jane and I have read all of your books. I am ten years old. I have one sister and a mom and dad. One of my favorite books is *The Mark of Athena*. I read it in a couple of days and I knew that it was one of the books that would teach me a lot of things. I will tell you about how it has affected me and my life.

The Mark of Athena showed me a different perspective of the world by showing that everybody has their own talents that you might not have. A character that I relate with is Annabeth. I relate with Annabeth because I like architecture and I really like to read. I learned that standing up for what you believe in will help you do things that have seemed impossible before. A thing that surprised me about myself was that if you try hard enough on something you can achieve amazing things, because this year I tried my hardest on one of my cross country races and I got a personal record. I also learned that trusting people is important if you want to do great things and friendship is important to be able to achieve your dreams.

These things have taught me a lot and I hope they have taught other people a lot too. It was a really inspiring book to read. I hope you write more books just like it!

Sincerely,

Jane Hirschman
St. Richard's Episcopal School
Indianapolis, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Justin Holmes
Letter to Peg Kehret, Author of *The Night of Fear*

Dear Peg Kehret,

The Night of Fear was like a school bell that rings to start a new class. Your book was packed with so much feeling and emotion; it started a whole new me. I was scared and nervous for T.J., and by the end I was crying.

T.J. feels embarrassed when Grandma Ruth counts her play money in front of all of his friends. T.J. knows that his Grandma has Alzheimer's, but he is not ready to let go of old Grandma Ruth. When I didn't make my school basketball team, I was bewildered, unhappy, and just not fun to be around. I kept the fact that I hadn't made the team a secret. I knew that doing nothing was not going to help, but that was exactly what I did.

At the end of the story, T.J. finds Grandma Ruth in the woods being made fun of by some boys that bully him at school! T.J. stands up to the boys. He tells them that his grandmother has Alzheimer's, and she can do nothing about her illness. T.J. finally accepted his grandma.

This helped me to accept the fact that I had not made the team. It also convinced me to go join a recreational basketball team to improve my skills so I could make the school team next year. To my delight, all of the other boys on my recreation team did not make the school team either. We talked about how we should have made the team, but that did nothing to improve our skills.

Before T.J.'s grandma got sick, she told him that he could not hide from his problems. She said that he must go out and achieve his goals. This influenced me to work extra hard in practice to increase my chance of making my school team next year.

I have learned to not hide from my problems. *The Night of Fear* did not just help me get over not making the school team. It helped me learn to face my problems knowing that I will be happier in the long run. I have improved my skills, and I now have a much better chance of making the school team next year. As for now, go Castle North Squires!

Your loyal reader,

Justin Holmes
Castle North Middle School
Newburgh, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Madelyn Honig

Letter to Grace Lin, Author of *The Year of the Dog* and *The Year of the Rat*

Dear Grace Lin,

I really enjoyed your books *Year of the Dog* and *Year of the Rat*. My mother is a history and language arts teacher and she suggested that I read your books. I really thought about about my own life when I was reading these books.

Pacy's friend Melody and I are alike. I too made a major move. A few years ago, I moved from California to Indiana and left my best friend. We eventually lost contact then I discovered she moved to Arizona. I wonder how she is doing, if she is ok. I still think about her and remember how much fun we had together. It can be difficult to move away from friends.

My Uncle lived in Taiwan for 25 years. His wife is from Taiwan and they have two children. Recently, they moved back to the United States. I know my aunt really misses her family in Taiwan. I enjoy visiting my Uncle and Aunt and cousins. My cousins try to teach me Chinese. On Chinese New Year I send my cousins red envelopes and my aunt will send me an envelope. Now my brother is learning to speak Mandarin Chinese and he will visit China in April. I share with my family the Chinese customs and traditions I learned about in your books.

I also love Chinese food. I like to cook with my Aunt and she teaches me about the Chinese food she is making. She makes many delicious dishes for the meals we are able to share when I visit her. Cooking together reminds me of when Mrs. Pan and Pacy prepare meals together. When Pacy describes the ingredients of Chinese food, I think about how much I like to put soy sauce on my food. I will put it on everything!

I appreciate Melody and Pacy and I can relate to them. My adventures in life will always be new and change, but my family traditions will not change.

Sincerely,

Madelyn Honig
Park Tudor School
Westfield, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Erica Huffine

Letter to Shel Silverstein, Author of *The Giving Tree*

Dear Mr. Silverstein,

Your book *The Giving Tree* used to be my bedtime story every night. My Mom used to read it to me every single night. I loved that book so much so I read it over and over and over again, never getting tired of it.

At the time when I was three and four and maybe even five I didn't understand sharing and giving, they were just words in the dictionary to me. Your book told me that they are good things and that they make someone happy. Your book made me happy and it made me realize that there are people in this world that are as kind and giving as the giving tree. Recently I was looking through old books of mine and I was going to give them to my elementary school or my neighbor who was just learning how to read and when I came across *The Giving Tree* I stopped and read it and that's when I realized what that story is all about. I kept that book and I still have it but now that I know how to share and give, I will someday pass that book to somebody else for them to read that book and love it just as much as I do. Hopefully that person who I will give this book to will cherish it and understand the importance of giving and sharing and will pass this book down for new people to enjoy.

Sincerely,

Erica Huffine
Fall Creek Intermediate
Fishers, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Andrew Irick

Letter to Chris Van Allsburg, Author of *The Wretched Stone*

Dear Mr. Van Allsburg,

I've always been into reading but not picture books. When I read your book *The Wretched Stone* I was inspired to read all of your stories. When I came to the last one *Just a Dream* I was inspired way more.

I always threw my trash on the ground and never helped my dad plant trees. When I read your book I was changed. I felt like I could make a change so I started picking up paper towels plant trees and much more. When I finished your book I wanted more. I read this book a long time ago and I still remember every detail. I loved that I was making a change.

I was just upset that was the last story I read from you. The book was like a tree. It was growing in my heart so I knew it was right. To clean up for myself and love nature. I ate apples and always planted the seed after. I saw the people cut down the trees and I was so mad. So much technology not enough nature. Your book couldn't have changed me more.

I planted seeds all the time. Your book was the reason for that. I was inspired from begging to the end. I loved your book. Thank you for the gift of knowledge.

Sincerely,

Andrew Irick
Fall Creek Intermediate
Fishers, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Kara Jenkins

Letter to Sharon Draper, Author of *Out of My Mind*

Dear Sharon Draper,

Hello Ms. Draper my name is Kara Jenkins. I am ten years old and in the 5th grade at St. Richards Episcopal School. I have THREE sisters their names are Aminah, Azania, and Maya.

When I read your book, *Out of My Mind* I not only realized that those who are physically impaired do have something to say even if they can't say anything. I also realized that even if we are not physically impaired we all are in a way unable to speak and say what we want to. Now I look at everything differently. I realize how lucky I am, even when I don't think so. Melody took her life even with all her challenges she faces. I refuse to call her disabled because it made her a stronger and better person. I know that most people, including myself, that had her disease would crack.

I now have more respect for people who have those challenges. You have enlightened me along with thousands if not millions of people. So thank you Ms. Draper for making me a more appreciative person and a better one I hope.

Sincerely,

Kara Jenkins
St. Richard's Episcopal School
Indianapolis, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Ian Krull

Letter to Tim Green, Author of *Unstoppable*

Dear Mr. Tim Green:

I bought your book *Unstoppable* the day it came out and read it in two days! It is my favorite book. I really liked it because I play baseball, basketball and tackle football.

Unstoppable is really cool because a boy named Harrison has never played football before and he becomes unstoppable even though he loses a leg to cancer.

Luckily, I don't have cancer, but the situation in the book *Unstoppable* reminded me of what happened to me when I was playing baseball this past summer. I was at Butler baseball camp and accidentally got hit in the nose with a baseball when I was turning to run to second base. My nose got broken. There was a lot of blood and I went to the emergency room, and I had to get my nose operated on.

When I first met the doctor, he told me that I was done, done, done with baseball for the season. I was really sad and mad. In *Unstoppable*, Harrison has to miss the rest of the season because of his leg and bone cancer. Luckily I wasn't like Harrison, but I was impressed how Harrison came back and played football on special teams.

When my nose got broken, things were pretty unlucky for my baseball team. One of my teammates had broken his hand and we were down some players and the coaches really needed me to play. No one was sure if anything was going to work out. My team, which was the youngest in the league, was close to clinching first place in the tournament.

Then my mom and I were in a sporting goods store and we spotted a batting helmet with a mask. We took it to my next doctor's appointment and asked if I could play baseball with the new helmet. The doctor made me put on the helmet with the face guard and told me if I wore it I could play baseball. I was so surprised by what he said and happy. He said that the mask was really protective and that if I wore it I wasn't going to re-injure my nose.

My coaches were really happy, too. One of my coaches got me a fielding mask so I could play out in the field. The coaches even got the championship game changed until after my operation so I could play. My team ended up winning the championship.

The book *Unstoppable* taught me that even this boy who had cancer didn't quit and it taught me about never quitting. If I'd quit, my baseball team wouldn't have gotten as far as it did. We were lucky and unstoppable and we won the championship.

Ian Krull
Park Tudor School
Indianapolis, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Annika Larson

Letter to Peggy Rathman, Author of *Ruby the Copycat*

Dear Peggy Rathman,

Your book, *Ruby the Copycat*, inspired me to be my own person. While reading this book, you learn that no one likes a copycat. I think my parents made a good choice by reading this book to me when I was little because now I always try my hardest to be the person my heart wants me to be, and not the person my mind wants me to be. In *Ruby the Copycat*, you don't like Ruby throughout the book because she always copies. When Ruby decides to be herself, you see her potential and start to like her.

Even though this book inspired me to be my own person, it has also helped me pick the right friends throughout my childhood. I have met some really inspiring people that aren't afraid to be their own person, and we have become better friends because I like them for their individuality.

I have read many books for kids in my life, and this book was really one of my favorites. I connect to the message of this book, and it means a lot to me. I'm sure many other kids have felt connections to this book too. I think every kid should read this book because it holds a message that we all need a little reminder of sometimes. This book taught me not to be afraid of what other people think. It taught me to do what I want to do, not what other people do. Thank you for writing this book. It's inspired me in life and helped me to be what I really want to be, not what I think I want to be.

Sincerely,

Annika Larson
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Kennedy Lewis
Letter to Shel Silverstein, Author of *The Giving Tree*

Dear Mr. Shel Silverstein,

Your book, *The Giving Tree*, has made my life so much better in many ways. It has taught me not to be greedy and not to take advantage of things. It has also taught me that if a friend is a real, true friend, they will always be there to support you; even though they're there, don't use they're support and gifts greedily. These lessons have made me so much of a better person than what I would've been if I hadn't read *The Giving Tree*.

I think the boy in this book is an example of what *not* to be. He is gluttonous and doesn't come back to the tree because he loves her: just because he wants to take advantage of her. I most definitely was encouraged to not be like the boy, I wanted to be like the tree. The tree has been a role model throughout my entire life; it's inspired me to start an organization to buy school supplies for autistic students so they can flourish. I feel that that organization has made me a better person, and that organization would have never been possible if I had wanted to be like the boy. My wish to be the tree makes me stop and think "Would the tree do this?" or, "Would the tree want to do this for the boy?" As small as those questions are, they've had a major impact on my life.

Your book, Mr. Silverstein, has had a great impression on my life. I would have *never* been where I am now without *The Giving Tree*. I would probably be an awful person, so full of myself and greedy. Everyone needs to learn lessons from this book, I know I did.

Sincerely,

Kennedy Lewis
Hamilton Heights Middle School
Cicero, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Madeleine Loewen

Letter to J. K. Rowling, Author of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

Dear J.K. Rowling,

When I first picked up your book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, I didn't know if I'd like it. For one thing, it was darker than the books I usually read, and it was about boys, and I am a girl. I was used to reading stories about happy things, like fairies, and ice skating and I was not sure about your book. So, when my mom said that we should try reading it, I was very surprised.

However, I ended up loving the book, and soon became obsessed with it. Once I read the first book, I read the second, and so on. I loved Hermione, for my grades are very similar, and my sister Hannah, liked Ginny, though it took some time for her to finally decide who she liked better. I wouldn't like it when my mom would say that we are going to read another book in between the *Harry Potter* books, and I would say she was stalling, because she thought it was too scary. She definitely did that for *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, but when I finally read it, I loved it. I would hop into bed shivering each night, because I knew something scary was going to happen. I could also look forward to reading the books all day, every day. Each day it was happy, funny, sad or scary. The sad parts broke my heart, like when people would die, like in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, when people are always dying. When one of my friends told me that Fred was going to die, I didn't want to believe it. The happy parts can also be too happy in a way. When Harry's parents, Sirius, and Lupin came back, I was crying.

The series also changed the way I looked at the world as well as my life. Whenever my sister and I would see someone who reminded us of one of your characters, we'd point them out to each other. We also made games about *Harry Potter*, and we love to talk about it. Once we were even Hermione and Ginny for Halloween. My sister had a red wig to go with her costume, and while we were trick-or-treating, one lady thought my sister's wig was real! The book showed me that there was magic all around us, and whenever something strange would happen, I would think of your book, but then again, I'm always thinking about it.

While reading your book, I was surprised to learn that I could actually enjoy books that were so different from the other books I was used to, and when people were talking about *Harry Potter*, I actually knew what they were talking about. I could relate to Hermione, because I felt a little more confident to stand up to unfriendly people, and I started to feel a special connection. I loved all the exciting parts of your book, for they would inspire me. Now, I am writing a book about three girls who have to escape from their evil aunt's house, but I don't think I ever would have dared to write a scary and dangerous book if I hadn't read the *Harry Potter* series. I am also an organized person, so I am always trying to keep up with what the characters have done, and what they need to do, but *Harry Potter* was easy enough to follow. I think if I were to pick a house to be in, it would be Ravenclaw, or maybe Gryffindor, because I would want to be with intelligent people. I didn't like the parts where people would die, but I suppose that's just part of reading good books. *Harry Potter* also brought me together with a girl I met at camp, and now we email each other. I love emailing her, and I always include, "Keep in touch" in our letters.

I loved the series, and I am done with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. It is very sad that I finished, but I enjoyed it so much, and the series gave me the liberty to expand the kind of books that I like to read and write. And as I always say to my sister, "The whole series began with the word 'Mister', and ended with the word 'Well.'"

Sincerely,

Madeleine Loewen
Park Tudor School
Indianapolis, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Emily Lothamer

Letter to Wendy Mass, Author of *A Mango-Shaped Space*

Dear Wendy Mass,

From the very beginning of your book, *A Mango-Shaped Space*, I could tell it was unique. The format of most books is problem-solution, but not yours. Reading *A Mango-Shaped Space* was like riding a roller coaster – up and down, up and down. Then after the final drop, there was yet another peak. After Mia was diagnosed with Synesthesia, it seemed like the book should be over. I had already read what I was used to – problem-solution, and wondered what the rest of the book could hold.

Because of your book, *my* writing changed. I can now write with different kinds of structure. I learned a valuable lesson – the same thing gets boring after a while. Those completely problem-solution books seem much more boring now. I plan on reading more books that have a “roller coaster” structure.

The way I write wasn't the only thing that changed in me. I used to avoid people with mental illnesses or disabilities. They made me kind of nervous. If I saw someone in a wheelchair, I would quickly (and unnoticeably as possible) slip away. Seeing the world from Mia's point of view changed something inside of me. It changed my point of view.

All I had needed was to read your book. I was allowed to view what the people I had previously avoided could see, except I could only see it through Mia. The people I steered clear of saw it every day. I made this realization, and from then on, I tried my best to communicate with disabled people. It is difficult, but so is being different.

I wish everyone could read *A Mango-Shaped Space*. I feel as if a point that you were trying to make is that changing can be difficult. Mia changing from having Mango to not having Mango was just as painful for me as it was for Mia. Your book changed two things for me. First, my writing format changed considerably. I no longer felt as if my best was good enough, So, I tried even harder to create a style that lived up to yours. The second thing you changed in me was my ability to communicate with disabled people. I try to respect them and understand their differences because I had support from you, and the fictional Mia.

Your book is one of those books that would make someone say, "Wow, now that was a good book." Then they would ponder the fact that the world existed outside of themselves.

Sincerely,

Emily Lothamer
Castle North Middle School
Newburgh, Indiana

Level One State Semifinalist—Kendall Mann

Letter to Laura Ingalls Wilder, Author of *The Little House Books*

Dear Laura Ingalls Wilder,

Hi. My name is Kendall Mann. I am ten years old and in the fourth grade. I am writing to you today about your *Little House on the Prairie* books. I first started reading these books in the second grade and still love them today.

I love that your books are based on what happened to you as a little girl. You were friendly, adventurous, and a caring girl.

The books made me notice that even though you may be small, you can do very big things in your life.

I realized that you and I lived about 150 years apart, but we have similar personalities. Also I realize that if you work together as a family, you get things done faster and it is fun. It surprised me to figure out what it was like to be a pioneer girl and how hard it was. Even with all the hard work, you showed you were still a happy little girl.

Little House on the Prairie also taught me to take chances make mistakes, and have fun!

But the book was especially meaningful to me because I went to De Smet, South Dakota to see the house you lived in when you were little. I went with my family and my aunt's family. This was special because it was the last place that I ever saw my Aunt Julie before she died of cancer.

So that's why your books are so meaningful to me. They taught me a lot, but they bring back memories of Aunt Julie because she loved your books too.

And those are just some of the reasons I wrote about you, the great Laura Ingalls Wilder.

Love,

Kendall Mann
New Palestine Elementary School
New Palestine, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Molly Mayo

Letter to Margaret Wise Brown, Author of *Goodnight Moon*

Dear Margret Wise Brown,

I read your book *Goodnight Moon* when I was 2 until I was 6. I used to be scared of sleeping the dark, but of course I am over it now. My Grandma read this book to my mom and it helped her go to sleep. So, she started reading it to me. It helped me a lot because it tells you about a little bunny that would not want to sleep either. But, that changed after the bunny's grandma would sing a song it would put him to sleep. So, I found out that sleeping is fun. My mom read this to me every night before I fell asleep. Sometimes she would even read it twice, it was all until I fell asleep!

Whenever it was time to go to bed I would get ready as fast as I could. Then I would jump in bed right away. Every time she read this story to me I felt safe. I loved the way she said your words. It made me feel great and it was a very soothing story. All of my bad dreams went away from my mind. Right after my mom would read the part of the bunny going to sleep, I would always go to sleep at the same time.

If my mom forgot to read it to me I would go get her to read it to me. I could not sleep without it. I had lots of interests and similarities to the main character. I would not sleep without something that made me feel better. The little bunny had to be sung to, and I had to be read to. My mom felt better with me sleeping every night. I slept very well, I actually did not want to wake up. I finally got over my fear of sleeping. It made my parents and I feel much better and safe. This book helped me realize that nothing was holding me back from things I do, and that included sleeping.

Your Reader,

Molly M. Mayo
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Connie McCarthy
Letter to Jerry Spinelli, Author of *Loser*

Dear Mr. Spinelli,

I've never really been one of those people who cry. It just isn't me. I watch doleful movies, read sad books, but no matter how melancholy I feel, tears don't even prick the corners of my eye. Your book changed that.

It was really the end of *Loser* that brought on the emotional side of me. I remember laying bed past midnight, which was exceeding my 5th grade bedtime. The book had already pulled me in like a time machine, and the Zinkoff goes out looking for Claudia, in the obfuscous, frigid night. Any chances of me putting the book down were extinguished. It was impossible for me to turn off my flashlight and come out from under the covers. So I thought, "why argue?" and I kept on reading.

Then I finally reached the last chapter, the last page. I was thinking two thoughts to myself at the time. One of them was that I was hoping my mom didn't catch me reading this late. The second was much more important, though. I wanted Bonce to choose Zinkoff to be on his team. When he did, the tears finally came. They weren't those loud, tissue-calling tears that make your face red and your eyes puffy. No, they were the diminutive, content kind. At the time, I didn't think that one fictional character choosing another fictional character to be on a fictional team would effect my life one way or another, but it did, and would forever.

I always thought of those truly mean people are just a story, just characters meant to make a movie more interesting. But after reading *Loser*, I started to pay attention to how cruel some of us really are. And most people don't even try to be mean, but we are because we are not even attempting at comforting "the weird kids." We made excuses and say that they are bullies and that they are stupid when really, they can be the nicest, smartest people there are.

I had a situation similar to Zinkoff's, but in this story, I wasn't the "Zinkoff," I was just one of the people in the hallway. There was a girl at my school who looked constantly lonely. She was one of those people who ate lunch alone and never had anyone to share secrets with. I wouldn't want to ruin my reputation by sitting with her, then people might think I was weird, too. I was also afraid of committing myself to another best friend. I went on pondering this thought for a while, even though I always knew that the right thing to do would be to be a good person and be nice to her.

Then I began to understand that all the little things can add up. By sitting with her just once a week, I could be a genial person and friend, but not a best friend, and it turned out that she was actually really nice and funny. So by reading a book, I made a new friend.

Zinkoff wasn't a real person. You made him up, but there still are and always will be people just like him, and it's up to us to change their lives. We have to be their friends, invite them to lunch, talk to them at recess and it that's too hard, a smile can make somebody's day.

Sincerely,

Connie McCarthy
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, Indiana

Level One State Semifinalist—Gabriel Neise

Letter to Andrew Clements, Author of *About Average*

Dear Mr. Andrew Clements,

People are talented in different ways. Some people are good at acting, while other people are good at visual arts. Some people are good at music, while others are good at academics.

These people don't choose their talents, but they choose what to do with them. I learned this from your latest book: *About Average*.

Before I read *Above Average*, this is what happened. Every day, my mom told me the same thing-be a Leader! I never told her, but I hated it when she said that.

"I'm not a leader. I'm a screw up" I thought to myself.

I had felt weird; average; normal back then.

I also thought "How can I be a leader anyway? There is nothing I can lead or fix", which wasn't exactly true, because there was this little cyber bullying incident at our school I hadn't heard about. I never did fix the incident, but I did notice your new book in our recommendation section in our library. I checked it out and read it during SLT (Student Learning Time). All through the book I could make these connections-I knew a girl like Marlea (no names); I could recall times I felt like Jordan; and the book reminded me of lots of things, or "memories".

The book taught me how I could become a leader. For example, I helped place our spell bowl team in first place out of the district (55 points), and started helping my sister with her homework rather than telling her all the answers (like I used to).

I still screw up, but a lot less than I used to.

This also helped get over my intense fear of tornadoes, and it told me what to do when one might come. (This book has changed me, to make me a better kid, and you get my thanks.) Thought you might like a little haiku there. Ha ha.

Sincerely,

Gabriel A. Neise
Fall Creek Intermediate School
Fishers, Indiana

Letter to Sharon Draper, Author of *Out of My Mind*

Dear Sharon M. Draper,

The majority of books in the world have a meaning to someone. They are stories that fill a readers mind with important thoughts and feelings. A book can be special to one but not significant to another. But, there is at least one book in the world that shows you something the world doesn't. In the book *Out of My Mind*, I think it taught me the most. I did not only love this book but learned many things throughout it. People like Melody, who had cerebral palsy, should not be judged in cruel ways because of their disabilities. I could read *Out of My Mind* 100 more times; it's enjoyable, warm and it taught me a very important life lesson.

Millions and millions of people are born with disabilities; that is the main reason people get made fun of. To have a disability isn't bad it's just you are different. Being different isn't wrong or weird it just means you're special! It's nobody's fault if you're born with a disability and you should never feel unloved. Melody had cerebral palsy which meant she couldn't walk, talk, or use her hands. Kids made fun of Melody and they weren't very kind to her. It's not Melody's fault she has cerebral palsy and with disabilities and when I was a little girl, about first grade, I made fun of them. I never thought what how they fell? Do they care? Can they understand what I am doing? After reading *Out of My Mind* my questions were answered. I felt terrible after making fun of them. Throughout the book, Melody make friends, I was happy when she did, but there is one part of the book I hated. Well I didn't "hate it" but I was so sad and mad I didn't want to finish the book. I love the story and it's my favorite book; but when her quiz team left her behind I was so sad. Her quiz team thought Melody was too dumb and they didn't want her in their team because she is disabled. After a while I got over it and realized some of stuff happens in real life. I didn't like that part because it was so cruel but it could actually happen.

Melody's words and thoughts poured into my heart as sweet, and fresh as a lemonade. Melody was always thinking and I could always understand what she meant. I had never read a book with the main character having a disability and I really liked how you made it clear, fun and easy to understand. In our school at gym class sometimes the disability kids join us. It can be really fun sometimes. I like having gym with them but I like it more because it makes our class different. We always play with them but they aren't all capable of playing all the games. It's unique because I really love hanging out with and playing. Sometimes their

teachers have to be around because they can get out of control. One of them pushed me and punched me really hard but I knew they didn't mean to. I see that everyone no matter what disabled or not can live a happy life make friends and be their own self.

Melody and I have some strengths and flaws. The strengths we share are we both like learning and going to school. Melody loves school she is really bright and loves learning. We both liked to be challenged. Some flaws we don't share are Melody isn't shy. She is an outgoing person trying to speak to the world but I'm just too shy. I love how in the book Melody gets a little sister and her little sister can see what Melody is going through so she can feel the pain too. I look at how many good details this book has and I remember all the details I read through and think to myself this is a special book.

Nobody's perfect and everyone is special in their own ways. I know there are people out there in the world that wish they weren't alive because of the bullying and how harsh they are treated. If you make friends that have disabilities make them feel better and make them glad to be on earth. *Out of My Mind* really changed the view of how I treat others and I'm glad the point of view that book gave me.

Sincerely,

Faria Oviedo
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Abby Parker

Letter to Loretta Ellsworth, Author of *In a Heartbeat*

Dear Loretta Ellsworth,

I absolutely loved your book *In a Heartbeat*. It made me think about how precious life is and how thankful I am to be healthy.

I heard about how good this book is and how everyone who suggested it said it reminded them of me because of how much I, as Eagan loves to skate. It's amazing how good you feel when you step foot on the ice and I just adore the outfits and how they shimmer and sparkle. Eagan and I both are outgoing and love to have fun. I don't care what people think of me when I'm doing something silly. I just want to have fun with friends. I feel that if I knew Eagan for real, she would be the perfect best friend.

Amelia loves to sketch and there isn't a hobby I love more. I may not draw horses to calm me down but I do draw different designs such as paisley and anything else that comes to mind. I've never been in Amelia's shoes but I've been close. I know how she feels. I used to have heart problems when I was younger too. I would have to carry around an inhaler. I'd have shortness of breath, and an irregular heartbeat. Sometimes it would go too fast or too slow. Nights were atrocious when I'd wake up at 2 in the morning with chest pains hurting so bad it took my breath away and I could barely breath. I was way younger then so I didn't know what was happening and I honestly thought I was going to die. I would be kicking the recliner so hard I think I actually broke it. The one thing that calmed Amelia down was sketching, mine was being pressed up against my dad when carried me around. Trust me I'd never want to go back ever again!

This novel is very important to me because it showed me that family is the best bond of all. One of the most important things this book taught me was to live life to the fullest because you never know when it will be taken from you. Always do your best, forgive and forget so you or anyone else doesn't feel guilty. Another thing is love one another, to tell those you love that you love them before it's too late.

Even though this story educated me with all of those lessons, there is one big one that makes my heart want to do it over and over again just to know that you're helping someone "Have a new chance at life." Organ donation isn't just giving some random person an organ after you pass, it's much more than that. It's helping someone fight and conquer a disease. This may be a little cheesy, but it's the truth. This book really opened my eyes to the things that aren't just important now but the things that will always be. Life, giving, But most importantly, LOVE!

Sincerely,

Abigail Parker
Castle North Middle School
Newburgh, IN.

Level One State Semifinalist—Isha Ponugoti

Letter to Karen Hesse, Author of *Letters from Rifka*

Dear Karen Hesse,

When I started reading your book, *Letters from Rifka*, I thought it would be no different than any other, a pleasure to read because of its fascinating historical facts and its mysterious storyline. Every day before I went to bed, I would be dying to read it. It wasn't like any other historical fiction book I have read. By the time I closed the book after reading the last page, I knew I had changed.

I had this odd sensation climbing up to my brain, coming from my hands that were clutching the book. It was a feeling of luckiness. I had never felt so lucky in my whole entire life. I have the necessities of life and much more. I don't have to worry about finding shelter, water, or food. I don't have to worry about being separated from my beloved family. I don't have to worry about hiding from soldiers to make sure my siblings aren't killed for running away from the army. I also realized none of my direct family has passed away yet. How lucky is that! I even have a phenomenal education. I'm safe and sound without a single worry.

I never would've thought a book would, or even could do this to me! It made me think about the modern day homeless people and people with disabilities. I never realized there were so many people without a home, food or even without a family. I started to feel very sorry and thought about how I could help.

Caring. Caring is another way I've changed because I opened my heart out to it at least a tidbit more. Usually, I like to be as caring as possible and not brag about my lucky life. This step has made me more caring. Sometimes I feel like it made me look even harder for an easy way to donate to charity. For example, I hate candy, but this Halloween I got 8.1 pounds of candy! I was thinking of donating to charity somehow, but then I thought about disabled people. My mom and dad are both doctors, so I decided to donate a lot of my candy to my mom's office so she could give it to sick or disabled adults and their children.

The fascinating story of Rifka and her family will stay in my heart forever. It has made me feel so lucky and realize the world around me. It made me think of the many people in the state and world who were poor, homeless, orphaned, or without education. It feels like I am really starting to look out to the world. *Letters From Rifka* will be in my heart and head for the rest of my life.

Sincerely,

Isha Ponugoti
Park Tudor School
Indianapolis

Level One State Semifinalist—Nermeen Rahman

Letter to Rick Riordan, Author of *The Percy Jackson Series*

Dear Rick Riordan,

Your books changed my life. I learned how it feels to have lost a friend or family member. The loss gives you the feeling of sorrow and melancholy. Even though the main character's heart is heavy but he does fantastic and exciting things, like saving people from dangerous monsters, that help him forget about the loss. Most kids don't know how it feels to lose someone. Once it happens, a lot of people feel discouraged and helpless. The kids in your books try to forget about the loss and try to have fun. Although it's hard at times but we should try to stop thinking too much about sorrows and move on in life.

The books you wrote also show how to team up and cooperate with others. Teamwork is very important and a virtue sometimes. Even in school, teamwork can help you get better grades and help make many wonderful new friends. Everyone should work together to make this planet a joyful place. All kids and adults should try to cooperate with people even if they don't like them. After reading your book I now use more teamwork.

In addition to this, your books make my imagination go wild. I've been thinking of more exciting games and drawings. Many people don't use imagination these days. They should use imagination because it can make you an inventor, an artist or an explorer. In school you can use your imagination for crafts and create something fantastic. My science teacher encourages us to be more creative and to think of smart ideas.

Sincerely,

Nermeen Rahman
Park Tudor School
Carmel, Indiana

Level One State Semifinalist—Ben Redar

Letter to Cornelia Funke, Author of *The Thief Lord*

Dear Mrs. Funke,

People aren't always happy in life; some never have anything or anyone to turn their life around. Those who are happy should be always grateful they have, and never take it for granted. I (after reading your book, *The Thief Lord*) have started to live life to the fullest, and have begun to live with the knowledge that I have a life many people would do anything for.

Many of the child characters, and even an adult, have no parents, and have been forced to live with uncaring relatives, in an orphanage, or have been fending for themselves. But these children, even while living in an abandoned theater, have made the most of it, and have very positive attitudes as a family. That got me thinking; what is family, and what does it mean to me? When I thought of family, I thought of someone who shares blood. But after reading this book, I realized that family isn't necessarily someone who is related to you, it's anyone who cares for you, and understands you. Someone who teases you, scolds you, but will always be there for you. Someone who laughs with you in good times, and cries with you in the bad. And someone who you would do the same for, in good times or bad.

These children have such good attitudes, even though they have almost nothing to be positive about. Their attitudes have made me think about my attitude, and what I can do to improve it. People get angry over things that are dwarfed by the things that others are going through right now, somewhere in the world. Hunger, war, and poverty are major problems, and we get frustrated with having to clean their rooms. Your book has opened my eyes and heart, to many things to be aware of, to think about, and to be thankful for. Thank you.

Your biggest fan,

Ben Redar
Riverside Intermediate
Fishers, Indiana

Level One State Semifinalist—Samuel Reshad

Letter to Ellen Emerson White, Author of *Into No Man's Land*

Dear Ellen Emerson White,

In 1968 my grandpa was shipped off to Vietnam. Almost a year before he enlisted in the marines. Two months after he went through basic training. A month before he left he got married to my grandma. He always tells me stories about his time there. This book reminded me about his stories.

When I read *Into No Man's Land* I couldn't help but think about what my grandpa went through, and that made me ask him more about his experiences. For example when my grandpa was in Vietnam he was repelling some Viet Cong soldiers and his partner got hit in the upper calf and had to come back to the states. And now his partner is one of his best friends and he is in a wheelchair from that experience.

One thing Patrick and I are weak with is we are both brave. For example when I was playing air soft I almost went toe to toe with a stick that had snapped. A strength we share is we both have a high respect for our country. For example when I say the pledge I say it loud and proud. Also we have a strong respect for veterans especially marines.

One thing that I realized is how much chaos the country was in and how hard it was in Vietnam for the soldiers there at the time. After I showed my grandpa this letter he told me a story about what it was like when he came back. How the people would spit on him and be so rude and disrespectful to him when he helped keep our country safe and protected the South Vietnamese from the North.

Sincerely,

Samuel Reshad
Castle North Middle School
Newburgh, Indiana

Level One State Semifinalist—Rachel Sanquetti
Letter to Veronica Roth, Author of *Divergent*

Dear Mrs. Roth,

Your book, *Divergent*, changed the way I think about life. I always thought that until I lived on my own I wouldn't have very many freedoms. *Divergent* showed me that we really do have a lot of choices. Although they did get to choose what faction they lived in, there were only five to choose from. In the real world we can do whatever we want. We also don't have to choose one way to live. Without the freedoms we have today, life would be a lot harder.

Not only do we get to choose our job, we get to choose how we live. The children had to act like they belonged in their faction even if they weren't. They had to wait until they were sixteen to have any choices. Even though there were some choices for the sixteen year olds in *Divergent*, once they chose their faction, they still had to live and think a certain way. We can choose how we do our work. I never thought about what it would be like if we couldn't do small things like looking in the mirror or being afraid of things. Now I realize that our life is much better than it could be because we don't have to pretend to think a certain way. We can be whoever we want to be.

I am glad that you wrote this book and helped me realize how many freedoms we really have. I hope other people can change the way they think like I did by reading this book. I am pleased that I read your book and had the opportunity to think about life in a new way.

Sincerely,

Rachel Sanquetti
Hamilton Heights Middle School
Cicero, Indiana

Level One State Semifinalist—Sophie Serpas
Letter to Suzanne LeFleur, Author of *Eight Keys*

Dear Ms. LaFleur,

Your book *Eight Keys* inspired me. It made me notice that lots of people get bullied. I also learned that if you fight fire with fire you're just going to get a bigger fire. It helped me feel better and be more comfortable about school next year. I'll be in 6th grade just starting middle school. I'm really nervous about this change. I think most people are going to think I'm silly. On Grandparents' Day and Special Peoples Day, I bring in my sister. She's disabled and has Cri Du Chat and scoliosis. She just had a spine surgery and isn't doing very well. I love my sister, and I don't care what anybody thinks, but I don't like it when people stare. I also sometimes feel like my friends are being bullied. That's why I'm going to try to get one of my best friends to read this book to try to help her. This book made me realize that I, just one person, can make a difference.

I realized that you sometimes need to reach out and help your friends when they feel bullied, just like how Franklin helped Elise. Even if they didn't tell you and you found out on your own. One of my friends really seems to be having trouble this year, and I really want to help her and hopefully get her to stand up for herself on her own. Another one of my friends feels like she is being bullied and has told me, but she knows to just ignore them and that the people are just bullying her because they are insecure about themselves.

This book is probably going to help me through life, and help anyone else who reads it. When I was looking through one of my Scholastic book orders, I saw your book. I, at first, just wanted your book because the key necklace came with it, but as I read the book, it really spoke to me. I now feel like I can do anything and nobody will tell me that I'm being silly. It means a lot to me that someone actually wrote a book about bullying and about kids my age. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Sophie Serpas
Park Tudor School
Carmel, Indiana

Level One State Semifinalist—Heather Shrote

Letter to John Grogan, Author of *Marley: A Dog Like No Other*

Dear John Grogan,

I am 11 and in 6th grade. My favorite subjects are math and band. I am like most people, but the one thing I do most is reading. Most of the time I will pick up random books and read them, so I didn't really object when my mom bought *Marley: A Dog Like No Other* for me to read.

I was only six when my mom read your book to me for the first time. At that time in my life I didn't truly understand some of the things in that book, but now I do. As I grow older I can reflect on parts of my life that seem similar to some of the ones in your book. Even though there are different characters, some aspects of the story are not much different from some of my experiences.

I have two brothers, one older and one younger. They annoy me so much at times, but still I love them, just like you and Jenny loved Marley even though he caused a lot of trouble. In some ways Marley is a lot like my younger brother, always getting into trouble and trying to get attention even if it is negative.

When my mom read me your book she started to cry at the end. Being six I didn't really understand why the ending made her cry except that the ending was sad at the part when Marley died. Years later, during a cold but snowless December, my mom got the call telling her that my aunt in New Mexico was dead. That day my mom cried like she did when reading the end of your book. Only this time it was worse for her because she had lost someone close to her.

In a way your book has lots of experience from life that might happen to anyone, but some of them have already happened to me. Your book showed me that life in the real world is hard. You not only have to earn your living but deal with the death of loved ones. Every kid wants to live forever but at some point even the best die.

If you hadn't written *Marley: A Dog Like No Other* I probably would never find the connections to my life in other books. I mostly read fantasy but I made room for your book on my shelf so that I can read it one day to my children. I will probably never forget your book as long as I live. Even after years of not reading it I would probably remember it as the book that changed my understanding of the world so I thank you.

Your reader,

Heather Shrote
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Camryn Sighting
Letter to Patricia Reilly Giff, Author of *December Secrets*

Dear Patricia Reilly Giff,

I chose to write my letter to an author to you. I chose your book *December Secrets* was the first chapter book I ever read. I loved it so much because of the lesson it taught.

Your book changed my point of view of things. It told me that if you tell yourself that you won't like something, then you probably won't. That usually means you will try to avoid it, then you will never know if you do truly like it or not. It encouraged me to do different things.

I loved it so much I encouraged my best friend to read it. Thank you for your beautiful literature. It helped me see the world in a different, but good, way.

Sincerely,

Camryn Sighting
St. Richard's Episcopal School
Indianapolis, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Jedryn Siemon

Letter to Rick Riordan, Author of *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*

Dear Mr. Riordan,

When I read your book, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, something sparked. I realized a couple of things simply from reading and thinking. I realized that it's possible to make friends from enemies, as well as enemies from supposed friends. Before this book I was walking cluelessly, simply doing as I'd been told. Now I know what's going on around me.

I was surprised when Annabeth and Percy became friends, because their parents were rivals. From this I have realized that I can become great friends with whomever I want, even if they don't like me or I don't like them.

Your book has also shown me that I need to know who I trust. Some people will pretend to be your friend so that they can have your personal information. For instance, when Percy trusted Luke as a good friend, he learned about Percy's quest and tried to get him killed. Luckily, Percy found out Luke was the enemy, and knew-for the most part-who was against him.

In the end I learned a lot of great things from your book, which I'm sure will help me later on in life. I'm very glad I read your book for the lessons and enjoyment I have now experienced.

Sincerely,

Jedryn Siemon
Riverside Intermediate
Fishers, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Tanner Simoneaux
Letter to Todd Burpo, Author of *Heaven is for Real*

Dear Todd Burpo,

When I was slowly going away from Christ and not keeping the Ten Commandments in mind I was a wreck. Then I started hearing about *Heaven is for Real*. Later that summer my fifteen year old brother told me about your book, and not only did it bring me back to Christ, but it also brought me as a newcomer to the tender-hearted in the world.

Heaven is for Real made me think about how Colton was at such a young age and he had been struck with a horrendous disease. It just makes me think... wow! Colton had been through so much and sometimes during the story I would have to stop reading and get a tissue, because I was weeping inconsolably.

Colton and I genuinely have one big thing in common though. When I was little I had a rare disease called meningitis, which is a brain and spinal cord infection. I nearly died. I imagine it was most likely a horrid time for my parents, as the same for you with Colton. I'd guarantee you that I would've always remember that amazing moment when one of God's angels came down and saved me.

This book was important to me, because it made me become a meaningful person with an open-mind. It was meaningful to me, because when I read the first chapter I knew that I was going to be a miraculous circumstance of God's might powers. I have noticed that every day I honestly wake up and think of *Heaven is for Real*, because when I look at my Kindle Fire and the only thing that matters to me is your story that's on there.

Before I read *heaven is for Real* I truthfully felt like a jerk to those around me.

In the Holy Bible NIV John 3:17 it states "For God did not send His son in the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."

Once I truly identified what this verse meant it went through my mind and I knew that it meant that God sacrificed his one and only son and what a sacrifice that was that He made. Once I started reading, it made me realize that you should do unto others as you would have them do to you. That immediate moment came when I realized I'm not living up to my expectations.

After I read your book I was a cleansed soul. I felt like the sharpest knife in the drawer. I had finally been touched by a miraculous one of God's glorifying events taken place in His creation.

God bless you!

Tanner Simoneaux
Castle North Middle School
Newburgh, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Amanda Smith

Letter to Shel Silverstein, Author of *The Giving Tree*

Dear Shel Silverstein,

I think your book, *The Giving Tree*, has so much meaning, but it's in simple words for everyone to understand. To me the meaning is made up of all the life lessons and reasons that you wrote the book. I'm sure there are all kinds of life lessons that can be found in your short children's book, but I found two that are probably most important. People can give away everything they have and still be happy, and the other is that someone can forget what they were given and become careless and unthankful. Other people might find other life lessons, but overall I think you were trying to say that we should always be thankful. You might have also been trying to say that you don't need to be rich and famous to be happy, all you need is someone to keep you company.

Every since I read *The Giving Tree* when I was little, and every time I reread it now I remember to be more aware of my surroundings and to tell people "thank you". Now I probably understand the meaning of the book more than I did when I was younger. I also just enjoy reading the book because it makes me happy. I've always tried to do my best and be polite and kind to everyone, but when I read *The Giving Tree* it makes me more thankful. I just want to thank you for writing a book that everyone can understand with one of the most important life lessons in the world. It might sound silly to thank someone for writing a children's book about a tree that loves a little boy and gives him everything, but I think a lot of people think lots of good things and have good thoughts about your book *The Giving Tree*.

Your book will always remind people not to be selfish. In my opinion your book makes people want to share and help others even more. I think that at fundraisers for hungry or homeless people that *The Giving Tree* should be on display just to remind people that not everyone is as fortunate. Also, it might remind or teach people that they can easily help by donating food or money to charities for the hungry and homeless. Also, since it's a children's book people can learn at a young age that they need to help people and be thankful. Thank you for writing *The Giving Tree* and I think you have inspired other people with lots of ideas.

Sincerely,

Amanda Smith
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Bennett Snipes

Letter to Suzanne Collins, Author of *Gregor and the Code of Claw*

Dear Suzanne Collins,

There comes a time in your life, when you're responsible for something so big it takes priority over everything else. It's very frustrating when you need to do one thing, but another job takes priority over the other need. In that case you might have to hand the job to somebody else to do, while you do the other more important job. For example, in your book *Gregor and the Code of Claw*, Gregor has the responsibility of taking care of his sisters and keeping them safe, but he also has the responsibility of preventing people from dying in the Underland by killing the Bane. He has to choose either his duty or his sisters. Gregor ends up doing his duty and hands the job of keeping his sisters safe to Ripred. In this section Gregor had to rely on someone else to help him.

In times of need, you should have someone you can rely on to help you. But sometimes friends can't help you and you have to do something alone, or face the consequences. I'm not telling you that you can give all of your work to your friends and make them do it, but what I am telling you is that if you need help with something, or if someone gives you a job that they think you can do but you can't on your own, if you have a problem that you can't solve, or even if you are really upset about something, good friends are almost always there to comfort and help you. When I was in second grade I had a really good friend whose pet died and he couldn't get over it, so I helped him through that tough time. It just goes to show that 90% of the time, a friend can help you get over something whether it's an addiction or a really tough time.

Sometimes if a friend helps you, you might feel the need to thank them by doing something in return. Sometimes those opportunities arrive quickly, but sometimes they just seem to not happen. When you have a really good friend or just someone you know who needs help, you should always at least try your best to help them when you think they need help, and comfort them when they need comfort. For example, when Gregor saw the star-nosed moles, he tried to make them go away so that they wouldn't get hurt. He thought that they needed help recognizing the danger and getting away from it before they got hurt. But sadly Gregor didn't realize the mole's intentions while he was trying to shoo them away and accidentally upset them which made them attack. I was sad that the moles got killed because I personally love moles and think that they are cute. But

then I remembered the circle of life that specifically had to do with the Underland; kill or be killed

If you're a responsible person, you tend to get more responsibilities and more important jobs that you might not be able to handle on your own. In those cases you can call a friend to help. Like my Dad always says "admitting that you need help is the first step to solving your problem." But the thing to remember is if you're having trouble with something, you first need to take a step back and analyze the situation before you do something about it because your problem might not be as bad as you think.

What I've learned from your book is to not be afraid to ask for help, and to stop and look at your problem overall before you do something that might make that problem worse. I've also learned that good literature has the power to influence your emotions; it can make you happy, it can make you sad or angry, heck, it could even make the mighty Roman army fall to their knees. All that matters if you want to do that is in the way that you form the words and where you place them. I've really learned a lot from your books and I've gained a love for literature that I didn't have until I read your books. I've read all of the books in the *Gregor the Overlander* series at least 48 times, and they make more sense to me every time I reread them, and they connect to my emotions in a way that makes want to pour everything out. I really like your books and my only advice to you is for you to continue writing fiction series.

Your #1 fan,

Bennett Snipes
Riverside Intermediate
Fishers, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Annie Swanson

Letter to Suzanne Collins, Author of *The Hunger Games*

Dear Suzanne Collins,

Your book *The Hunger Games* has changed my life. When I read it it made me want to read more. I loved it. It was the best book I had ever read. I found Panem fascinating and terrible at the same time. I wanted more.

When I was little I loved to read. I read all the time. I would go through book after book and I loved them all. When I was around third grade, I started to lose my interest in reading. I would start a book and never finish it. I couldn't get into any of the books I read. I felt like there were no more good books for me to read. The only time I read was for school assignments or if I had to. It was a horrible thing. Now I wish that this had not happened. I was missing out on so much. I didn't read a single book over the summers. It was really something I regret.

In fifth grade I was trying to read more. But it wasn't working. All of my classmates would tell me how much they loved a book or how it sucked them in. I barely got through some books taking a few months to read them. I felt like I was a terrible reader.

Then I found your book. A lot of people were reading *The Hunger Games*. I decided to give it a try. I loved it. It sucked me in like no other book had before. I felt like I was there. I sped through it in about a day. I read the rest of the series within a week. I read it over and over again. I realized that I couldn't read the same book forever so I moved on and found new books that I loved.

The Hunger Games has brought me closer to my family. Just to know how much Katniss loved Prim and how much she sacrificed for her makes me a stronger person. I love my little sisters so much more than I could imagine before I read your book. If one of my sisters was in that situation I can only hope that I would be like Katniss and step forward for my sister.

I truly want to thank you for giving me such a great book that encouraged me to become a better reader, a better student, and most importantly a better sister. You have lit the way for my love of reading and reminded me how important it is to love to read.

Sincerely,

Annie Swanson
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Level One State Semifinalist—Grace Tucker
Letter to Kathryn Stockett, Author of *The Help*

Dear Mrs. Stockett,

Several people have numerous occurrences that change the way they think about their life and others, the accomplishments they want to succeed in the future, and even their actions they perform towards a peers, friends, or even themselves. In your award winning book, *The Help*, you cover the perplexing topic of segregation. One could have accepted the book in countless ways. In my case, I figured that everyone has an Abilene, whom they pick on to express feelings. Everyone has a Miss Hilly, who refuses to accept them due to a physical, emotional, political, or even religious-related factor. One could accept this book as a simple example of segregation, and the fact that the plot only relates to that situation, downgrading someone because of the color of his/her skin. In my opinion, I feel there are several more causes of such disapproval, in my case, their appearance.

Throughout my life I would always look at the girls that surround me in school and activities and had no choice but to despise myself when it comes to my figure, athletic ability, weight, likes and dislikes. I feel different constantly because rather than wearing skinny jeans and buns in my hair, I would be much more pleased to wear a big bow in my hair and a fluffy skirt – a normal 11 year old girl’s nightmare! My single nightmare is being noticed for not having an “ugg” tag on the back of my ten dollar pair of boots that I got at CVS. I feel sad and lonely looking around and seeing all my friends who wear such tight clothes, and I feel the only solution is to cover myself so no one can see my true figure, literally and metaphorically. Your book related to this story prodigiously, that I thought I had no choice but to write to you.

In your book it constantly shows that Abilene and all the other black people in Jackson, Mississippi, are judged and disliked because they are different. In the story, the main theme is how black people in Jackson, and all over America, are downgraded, but if you look deeper, there are several more cases of disapproval. Such as, Ms. Skeeter has always sensed disapproval when it comes to her mother not accepting her career choice. Similar to the fact that Mae Mobley is judged by her own mother on her weight. Lastly, Ms. Celia is judged by her appearance and history, and that is why she is never invited to the league meetings in town.

Though, in your book it directly shows what words Mrs. Leeloft said to her daughter, Mae Mobley. In my case, words were said, and glares were made, and the anxiousness of these happenings definitely makes me feel..almost..unsure about what the “normal” is. Similar to your characters in your book, Abilene and Mae Mobley, are judged by “their cover,” and I think that relates to my thoughts on my situation.

Thanks to your book I have now stood up for what I believe in, and have taken a first step to accepting that I’m different, no matter the loudness of my clothing or how possibly skinny my legs can be. I have found new girls to look up to, and new friends that don’t tease me for being unique. I have stood up against the status quo, and doing so, I had your book in mind filled with characters that stand up for what they believe in such as Ms. Skeeter, Minny, and Abilene. I figured...if an author can make such a story come to life on a page, it won’t be that hard to make it a reality for me.

All I can say is Thank You for giving me a first step for liking who I am, and giving me examples, chapter by chapter, of how to do it.

Sincerely,

Grace Tucker
Zionsville Middle School
Zionsville, IN

Rainy Day

Rain, Depressing day.
The rain ends. Rainbows appear.
Everything is well.

River of Words Entry
Lindsey Powers
Pinnacle School

Reincarnation

Winds whistle between the trees as
Thunder and lightning wrestle
In a contest of strength.
Hail rips the woods apart
Leaving only ghostly trunks of evergreens.

The forest is gone.
The creatures that played
In and out of the twisting
Tree paths are now a
Scattered memory of days ago.

Death fills the air in this
Place of destruction.
Roots of the fallen guardians
Gasp fresh air for the first time.

Rocks, the only victors against the winds,
Now become home for the
Carpet of lush green moss
That carries the first seeds of new life.

River of Words Entry
Gabriella Eck
Jasper, Indiana

Indiana State Library & Indiana Center for the Book

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE 2013

Winning Letters by Young Hoosier Writers

LEVEL TWO STATE WINNERS: GRADES 7 & 8

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Hibernation

Creatures of shadow
Scurry to their dens, waiting
To see next Spring's light

Snowflakes

Brittle water falls
From the heavens, each one a
Unique masterpiece

Level Two State Winner / First Place—Nicole Hentrup
Letter to Alex Haley, Author of *Roots*

Dear Alex Haley,

My mother consistently told me to read your extensive novel, *Roots*. Being the over-achiever I am, I decided to accept the challenge and give it a shot. Instantaneously, I lost myself in the pages of your book. I would read and read and read until I fell asleep with your book still in hand. Only a few stories have ever done that to me, and *Roots* was the first.

Roots has educated me on the history of slavery surpassing what any social studies book ever has or will. Brief statements are made in the textbooks about the trade routes or how plantations effected economic growth. On the other hand, your book gave me insight on the entire horrifying, violent terror the slaves encountered. With every mention of the times of slave trade, my memory flashes back to the details of your book. *Roots* informed me on African and American history that I would not be exposed to normally.

Racism has never been approached head-on throughout my years of school. Students make racist jokes in a humorous way that causes everyone to laugh, except the one being discriminated against. I'll admit to making silly comments about a person's ethnicity along with my peers, but reading your book opened my eyes tremendously. The ancestors of these students were forced here in conditions most people could not begin to fathom. So who are we to crack jokes about someone's skin color, family history, or living conditions? With reading your novel, I began to see the larger picture. Immediately after finishing *Roots*, I vowed to never make a joking comment about someone's ethnicity again.

As Kunta Kinte's family unraveled throughout your book, I began to think back to my line of ancestors. After reflecting, I realized how oblivious I was to the generations of my family before me. A few days following the hefty task of completing your book, I set out to discover the past of my relatives. My grandpa's eyes lit up like fireworks when I asked him about our family history. My grandfather has made a hobby of tracking genealogy, so he was thrilled with the chance to show off his records. Because of your book, I formed a closer bond with my grandfather and spent the time engulfing myself on the generations before me.

Up to the point of reading your book, I had never been brought to tears by a story. *Roots* exposed to me emotions I had never previously felt. The mistreatment, separation, and hardships that faced Kunta Kinte's family connected me to the book. The details of your book transported me

to a different decade. Your novel was the first to prove that a book is filled with more than just words on a page.

The contents of your book crammed me with information some people take a life time to learn, achieve, or discover. Not only has *Roots* educated me a great deal on slavery, but it has assisted me in forming a close-knit bond with my grandfather. From giving me an indescribable connection with a book, to helping me realize the pain inflicted by racist words, I can never begin to thank you enough for writing such a marvelous novel.

Sincerely,

Nicole Hentrup
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Winner / Second Place—Jadrian Woods
Letter to Andrew Clements, Author of *Things Not Seen*

Dear Andrew Clements,

What if a fictional novel was reality? So far, *Things Not Seen* cannot be a reality, but even though this novel cannot happen in reality lots of people feel like what has happened to Bobby has already happened to them.

I am not in love with reading, but I do like to read a decent book every once in a while. On an ordinary day in my fourth grade year, our class needed to find a book to read; as I was looking for a good book I brushed upon a novel that was engraved with a boy's face on it that looked kind of transparent. It was titled *Things Not Seen* by Andrew Clements. My teacher said the Andrew Clements books are probably the best books that she has ever read, she said that they really give great stories and that they are really easy to relate to. Trusting my teacher, I picked the book and looked through it. After scanning through the first couple of pages in the book, I was hooked! As I was reading, it was like I was transported into an alternative universe where I was watching every character. That's how powerful this book was. Your description of the characters helped me to develop an exact picture rather than it being a big blur. The suspense of the novel was probably the best part. You never knew if Bobby's secret was going to come out! Then about 2 years later I read this book again and recognized a greater importance to it. Even though this book was full of intriguing elements, there was one thing that really stood out; it was Bobby and what he was going through. He was literally invisible! This forced him to suffer through situations that some people suffer through every day. For example, he was shadowed from the real world and this made his social life difficult.

When I was reading this book, I studied a passage where Bobby was wondering if he was the only one who was invisible. At first, my response was, "Of course you're the only one," but then I began to ponder that he wasn't the only one. As I expounded my musings further, I knew that he definitely wasn't the only 'invisible' one, but a lot of people don't realize this. However if you look in our school you will see several 'invisible' people. When you are in grades six through twelve, it is hard to fit in. If I moved to a different school, I could definitely pick out groups or 'cliques', every school has them. There are several groups; the popular, the jocks, the trouble-makers, the comedians, and MANY more. But there's a big problem with one group. It's the invisibles. Invisibles are the ones who try

to join a group but seem to be left out or to not fit in. After the first couple of days of my sixth grade year, I immediately saw groups beginning to form. People who 'stuck out' began to be ignored by their own friends. The transition between elementary to middle school is probably the most challenging situation for a teenager socially. Lunch was and still is the worst place for invisibles because it was when the groups were able to get together. When an invisible sits at a table with a group, he or she is constantly excluded from the conversation. After they began to be rejected from a group many times, they will be desperate enough to join any group that will accept them. The problem with this is that if they join a group that makes poor or irresponsible decisions, they might also make poor decisions. What I hope for is that someday invisibles will take a stand, speak out for themselves and find good influential friends who accept them for who they are.

In your book, *Things Not Seen*, Bobby faces challenges of becoming invisible, but is able to overcome his invisibility by simply bundling up and putting on sunglasses. In other words, when people are 'invisible,' they are held back because they are ignored. I anticipate that these individuals will battle against what other people think and will be themselves. If someone doesn't like you for whom you are, then they are not your friend, it's as simple as that. Invisibles have power, but some don't realize it.

Ultimately, invisibles will break away from the stereotypes that people claim they are. Reading this book has inspired me to become a catalyst to help show them the way, and I am very thankful for this opportunity. Perhaps these invisibles can create their own group called... the leaders.

Thank you,

Jadrian Woods
Greensburg Jr. High School
Greensburg, IN

Level Two State Winner / Honorable Mention—Leigha Keck
Letter to Shel Silverstein, Author of *The Giving Tree*

Dear Shel Silverstein,

“Once there was a tree”, a cliché beginning to my favorite childhood book, the name of this book is *The Giving Tree*. You Shel Silverstein, have a way of impacting my life!

As a little girl I would visit my grandma’s house. When most of the kids visit their grandparents they say, “Let’s go play,” “Let’s go do something outside!” you get the gist. But not me, when I visited my grandma I requested to read ‘the big green book’, as I called it. My grandma would then read it to me, over and over; we finally stopped when she got tired of it, but not me!

This book had an impact on the way I live now. Even if you don’t have a lot to give, a little can help a lot. You probably know the point you were trying to get across a little bit better than I do, but I took it as the tree gave the boy a little bit of what he needed each time, even though it wasn’t a lot. An example of this is the first time the boy comes back and says that he needs money; the tree replied with, “I don’t have any money; I only have leaves and apples. Take my apples boy and sell them in the city. Then you will have money and be happy.” That event is the first of many wonderful things the tree does for the boy.

These kind acts performed by the tree impacted my life because in today’s society there are so many people that are selfish and greedy. Yet, in this book a tree is willing to give everything she had to make a boy happy. It is astounding to me today, with all the gossip and bad events, no one will give a penny or help anyone in need!

In conclusion, for almost 10 years I have kept this children’s book close to my heart. The tree and the boy’s relationship is touching, how the boy can vanish then come back years later and the tree is willing to give up anything for him. That is why I love *The Giving Tree*. This book is such an inspiration to give the bits and pieces you have to help someone in need. Thank you for writing this book, it taught me a valuable lesson that I still follow today.

Sincerely,

Leigha Keck
West Noble Middle School
Ligonier, IN

Level Two State Winner / Honorable Mention—Noah Mehringer
Letter to James Bradley, Author of *Flags of Our Fathers*

Dear James Bradley,

All of the most inspirational stories are the ones that really happened. *Flags of Our Fathers*, the book you wrote about your father's experiences on Iwo Jima, is as real as a story can get. Reality can hurt, but it can also motivate and that is exactly what your story has done for me.

For many people, the idea of war is comprised of what they have learned in textbooks; casualty counts, battles won or lost, and names of leaders. Your book has revealed to me the specific and unspoken details of the horrible things that occur in a war, and that each man blown to pieces or cut in half, every man that died had their hopes and fears. They were all people scared out of their minds who suffered grisly deaths. Reflecting on this I thought of veterans I knew in my community and deeply respected them.

From reading *Flags of Our Fathers*, I have acquired a new greatest fear. I shivered when I read the vivid description telling how Ralph Ignatowski was tortured in the cave. I didn't understand how someone could do something so inhuman. It was absolutely sickening, and it corrupted my views of the Japanese. Later in the book you described your visit to Japan, so I remembered not to make generalizations, that only the people that conducted the torture were cruel, and not their countrymen. Even so, it must have been horrible for your dad to learn of the pain Ralph experienced. All the men on Iwo Jima endured an overwhelming torrent of emotion that I had never known before. I am now more like those men, feeling emotions more acutely. I would like to thank you for this, but most of all thank you for sharing your family's memories. Your stories have inspired me to discover my own family's war history.

When we know the occurrences of the past, wars, as horrible as they are, can become inspiring and unifying. You played the role of the history teacher, and from you I learned the virtues of America; I have read more similar books in an effort to learn even more about myself. And it all started on a desolate island in the Pacific.

With admiration,

Noah J. Mehringer
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Winner / Honorable Mention—Haylee Owens
Letter to Judith Viorst, Author of *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*

Dear Judith Viorst,

I was glad to see the story you wrote about Alexander, although I am not sure if it mimics a time in your life. I know everyone has had a day where they wake up on the wrong side of the bed and the day continues to go downhill from there. No matter how hard one tries to do something right, the words or their actions just make everything worse. I have encountered this many times in my life. So, this is what made me have a connection to the book *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* and the main character Alexander.

This book made me recall one of the worst days I ever had. I remember my first day of school waking up feeling edgy and terrified about the whole idea of going to school with complete strangers. When I arrived I realized that my mother would not be able to stay with me. She would leave me with a room full of people I did not know, when she did this, I cried. My teacher took my hand and led me to the sand box where many of the students were playing, I no sooner sat down when I got sand in my eye, I began to cry again. After this, we colored pictures, and it went from bad to worse when snack time came. I only got one cookie instead of two because the teacher ran out. Finally, we made it to story time, and I enjoyed sitting listening to stories. However, I could not listen to the story because a kid kept hitting me in the back and interrupting me while I tried to listen. I could not wait to leave that day and see my mother. I knew that we would go home and have some fun for the rest of the day.

As I ponder about this book, I realized that Alexander and I had some common strengths and weaknesses. The strengths we both possess are that we try to look for the best in all circumstances and try to learn from our bad encounters. I learned after the first day of school not to sit by the sand throwers, to try to sit close to the front of the line during snack time to ensure I got two cookies, and never have someone sit behind you during story time. My weaknesses that are similar to Alexander's are we both become extremely grumpy when others bother us, and this grumpiness can put us in a bad mood for a long time. I need to remember that at times people do not intend to annoy me, and I should be more tolerant. I am sure I also annoy others as well when I do not intend to.

This book has made me think about many important details for my days and life. Everyone on this earth has a bad day from time to time, God said there would times of pain and strife. These times are when He is trying

to teach me a lesson, and I need to be patient and listen to what He is trying to say to me. This is what makes someone a stronger individual. God also provides many phenomenal days and blesses me whether I recognize it or not. I know my hardships are not even close to what others suffer.

In acknowledging these simple facts, I should always see the positive in every event or person and not continue to be grumpy when something negative happens. If I focus on all the good things in life, the number of my horrible, no good, very bad days will be very few and all my wonderful, fabulous, exciting days will be many. Thanks for writing this book and making me think more critically about my life.

Sincerely,

Haylee Owens
Greensburg Jr. High School
Greensburg, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Tate Allen
Letter to Bill Wallace, Author of *Red Dog*

Dear Bill Wallace,

I am an eighth grader in Ligonier, Indiana. I like playing sports, going camping, and I also like reading adventurous types of books. One of your books called *Red Dog* really influenced me by showing me how important my family is to me. No matter if we argue or disagree with each other, we always come out as a family in the end.

This book has also brought back memories from when I used to live in Montana. Memories of the giant mountains and all of the animals like antelope, deer and buffalo. It also reminded me of how fun it was to camp and hike in Yellowstone National Park. It reminded me of my old Australian Shepherd names Casie. She would always play fetch and knew a lot of tricks like lay down and shake. She was just like the dog in the story, always loyal and protective of her master.

Something that I learned from your book was to always keep on working towards your goals no matter how many obstacles get in your way. It also showed how far someone will go to keep their family safe, like Adam running through the wilderness to save his stepfather, mother and sister before the gold miners got to him. It showed how much you can rely on your dog to help you accomplish your tasks. Thank you for writing a book that has influenced me and that has taught me important life lessons.

Sincerely,

Tate Allen
West Noble Middle School
Ligonier, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Aiysha Amjad

Letter to Rick Riordan Author of *The Lightning Thief*

Dear Rick Riordan,

I can still remember myself peering through the dusty wooden bookshelf in my third grade teacher's classroom, looking for a book I had yet to read. My parents had drilled into my head that I should read as much as I can because reading lands you right in front of success. As I was searching for the right story, a book called out to me. The water seemed to splash at my face, forcing me to read it. The Empire State Building lit up, and invited me to come over. I pulled out the book, and my teacher walked by and murmured in my ear, "*The Lightning Thief* is the perfect story for you. Start your adventure."

I gingerly took the book and strolled to my desk, this was the moment my life changed. Like a supernova happened to my life, I was pretty sure that the other kids thought I was weird, because I was always caught reading the *Percy Jackson* series. During lunch, during recess, even during gym, unfortunately I had the book taken away from me countless times. Later on I discovered Fan Fiction. I started staying up late, hiding under my comforter reading for late hours to reveal myself the next morning with my face imprinted with the rectangular shape of my iPod.

Mortal. Immortal. Two simple words I have been using to distinguish people ever since I read the series. This book really flabbergasted me. An ancient Greek person seems to be inside of me because I've stopped seeing people like normal ones. Always pondering that just maybe they could be a disguised monster, or a searching satyr, or maybe even one of the Three Fates.

I have felt differently since finishing the series. I have understood the magical but dangerous world of a demigod. I have understood the perfect friendship of Percy and Annabeth. I always find myself craving for a demigod's 'imperfectly-perfect' life. It's like finding that one camera with an amazing lens, and your whole world switches into HD. I'd literally asked my doctor for any signs of ADHD so I had an excuse to be a demigod. My friends think I just take my obsession to the extremes, but I know I'm just preparing for battle.

I've been inspired to travel to Greece, Rome, and Long Island. I actually flew over Greece, and begged my parents continuously to stop and marvel at the Parthenon. But the one particular reason I've felt so attached to the books are the characters. I have the pride of Annabeth and the love of water like Percy. My Greece adventure has yet to happen but I have been preparing myself with little things like learning the Greek alphabet.

Mr. Riordan, you are truly a wonderful teacher. You have taught me never to teach a kid that might look a bit strange, because I never knew it could be a Cyclops protecting me. You've taught me to be braving, tough, and not to care what other people think or say. I have learned that everyone has their own opinions, and not let what people say get to my head. But the biggest thing I have learned is that everyone can be a hero. It doesn't matter if you're odd, like Tyson, prideful like Luke, maybe even a seaweed brain like Percy. You've shaped me into the person I've wanted to be my whole life. Because of you, my world is as enchanting as can be. Overall, I just want to say thank you. Thank you for making my childhood the best it could be. Thank you for being my teacher.

Sincerely,

Aiysha Amjad
Belzer Middle School
Indianapolis, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Jinan Ayub

Letter to Elvira Woodruff, Author of *The Christmas Doll*

Dear Elvira Woodruff,

Reading. Just the thought of the word makes me shiver with joy and pleasure, especially after reading your book, *The Christmas Doll*. This book is what a 10 year old girl read aloud in her library the day she picked up the best book she ever read. Because of your book, the way I live my life today on a daily basis, and my point of view on the world has completely shifted.

Growing up, and still today, I never really appreciated what I had in my life that a lot of people didn't. I had food, (healthy food) every day, I had not only a house but I had a home. I had parents, but most importantly, I had a family. My family helped me through thick and thin, through everyday life struggles, they supported me through everything. The main characters in the book also struggled all the time. I also have a home I can always go to. I slept at home, ate at home, watched TV at home, and played at home. Everything that I do traces to my home. Lucy didn't have that. She had to worry about where she would spend the night and if she was safe. I had the advantage of knowing that everything was going to be alright and that I would always be safe. I had the rare gift of security.

Something that I did everyday on a regular basis was to complain. I would complain all day and night, for the smallest and silliest things. I would complain about my older sister a lot, and how she always made a mess, (I am a neat freak!). But, throughout the entire book I never heard Lucy complain, once-ever. Also, Lucy treats her little sister, Glory, with so much respect, and always has her sister's back. This is one of the important things that I learned from reading the book.

Most of the story revolves around this doll, Morning Glory, which Lucy and Glory find by the river and love her to death. This doll is old and dirty, (something that I would never touch). She only has that one doll, that one toy that she cherishes forever. While I throw most of my toys away or break or damage them and it doesn't hurt me at all. It should hurt me; a lot of unfortunate children in the world only have enough money to buy one toy. That's it! Just one toy their whole life. That 'one toy' they care about so much. All I do is throw one away after I get tired of it. That is wrong.

I guess what I am trying to say is that, children all around the world are living in poverty, are homeless, or are orphaned. Those children love and enjoy their life while they have it, but people like me don't, (or at least didn't). But they definitely should. If they haven't started now, they better. It's children like Lucy and Glory that have to suffer everyday as an unfortunate child. This is exactly the reason why *The Christmas Doll* has touched and changed my heart forever. Thank you, Elvira Woodruff for telling me an absolutely beautiful story about determination, hope, love and bravery.

Sincerely,

Jinan Ayub
Fishers Jr. High School
Fishers, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Krista Bauer
Letter to Cynthia Kadohata, Author of *Kira Kira*

Dear Cynthia Kadohata,

I love to read, if I can find a good book. Some books I read have no impact on my life and I forget about the story, but there is one exception, the book *Kira Kira*, it has made a lasting impact on my life. I first came across the book when I was in 5th grade. My teacher recommended it to me but I just kept putting the book off. I finally decided to start reading it over Spring Break, not knowing that this book would change my life forever.

While reading *Kira Kira*, I kept thinking about my life. I was thinking, “Am I as positive as Lynn? When I am down am I trying to find the best in the situation?” I also thought about the situation Katie went through when Lynn died. Lynn was always optimistic about everything; she also had a very big impact on Katie. Lynn was the big sister; she looked over Lynn like a mother would.

Lynn is a positive person in Katie’s life; she made sure Katie was never in trouble. This taught me that I need to be a positive influence to everyone I come in contact with. I can also relate to *Kira Kira* in my own life. I too have a big sister; I don’t know the feeling of her being gone from my life. I admire Katie, going on after a tragedy like that.

Kira Kira has changed my perspective on life. I am not the kind of person who takes life for granted. Your book has shown me to enjoy life and the people in my life. It also made me realize to look forward to a better, brighter tomorrow. *Kira Kira* taught me that we should take care of each during rough times. This makes you a better person and comforts the person you are helping. The person you have helped may take your actions and pass them on to another person, it’s a chain reaction!

Kira Kira is one of my favorite books. I never knew that it would have a lasting impact on my life like it has. It is important to me because it has taught me many life lessons that I can cherish for the rest of my life. The book helped me through a rough time in my life, when my dad lost his job. It was a change that I had to adapt to for a while. My family and I had to cut back on spending and eating out. At first I didn't like this change but after a while I began to see that this change was minor. I go to spend more time with my dad since he was home more. We were able to do more things together, like going to the State Parks and going on trips. *Kira Kira* taught me to be a better person in everything I do. Thank you for writing *Kira Kira* and inspiring students like me to become a better person.

Sincerely,

Krista Bauer
Greensburg Jr. High School
Greensburg, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Erin Browning
Letter to Randy Pausch, Author of *The Last Lecture*

Dear Randy Pausch,

“Dream as if you’ll live forever, live as if you’ll die today.” This is a quote by James Dean that my teacher has posted on the classroom wall. Every time I leave the room I look up and read the quote, it never really clicked with me until I read your book *The Last Lecture*.

One day in my language class we were asked to write a letter to an author of a book that inspired our lives in some way. Well, I tried and tried to recall a book to write about, but I couldn’t think of a single one. My language teacher gave me a list of books I could read, which I wasn’t thrilled about, and I didn’t see one that looked interesting to me. Then I saw your book, *The Last Lecture* sitting on his desk. He looked in the direction of my gaze and suggested the book to me. As I read the book, I found many of your stories and life lessons very inspirational and just plain amazing.

Before I read your book, I had a daily routine. I would get up, go to school, go home, do homework, relax, and go to bed. So in a few words I was monotonous. After reading the book, I was taken aback at how many adventures and exciting events you had. One of my favorites was when you told of how on your wedding day, instead of driving off in a car, you went away in a hot air balloon. Something unique of yours that I read about was when you told of spilling Coke in the backseat of your new convertible, just to make a point. All of those events made me think about the fact that I was not living my life to its fullest. You made the most of things and had a positive attitude during most of, well, everything. I, on the other hand, was not. Now I am trying to do one thing every day that I wouldn’t normally do.

Most people connect with a book because they share the same strengths or weaknesses as the author or the character. I connect with the book for another reason, because I learned from it. I liked reading about how you went about situations, even the hard ones, like finding out that the cancer is back and is probably not going to go away. I am now taking what I have learned about your experiences, and I am trying to use those to change actions that I don’t like or that need to improve.

Okay, I do have one thing in common with you; my room can get messy because of all the clothes on the floor, sometimes, not all of the time. See, that's another way I am looking at what you did to change my actions because I have been trying to pick up after myself more than I normally do. This book is not important in my life because it helps me pick myself back up again. When I'm in the dumps trying to figure out what to do, I think about what you wrote. Even if the situation isn't the same, your positive attitude throughout almost everything is helpful. When you and Jia were at the hospital to find out if the cancer was gone and you found out it wasn't, you tried to keep a 'positive' face.

The Last Lecture made me realize that people in the world, including myself, are very negative or can take something great and turn it into something bad. I think that more people need to have your attitude towards life and just have a positive outlook on everything. I also realized that you didn't really start thinking of wasting time until you found out you only had a few months to go. Such as the time when the checkout register charged you double what you owed and you decided to just go ahead and pay the charge so you could get out of there faster. I think that people, including myself, should be able to let things go like you did, only be able to do it without the shortened time frame. We should live like that all the time.

Your book helped me realize how special life is and that we should live it to its fullest, no matter what. Thanks to your book, *The Last Lecture*, I will continue to dream as if I'll live forever, and live as if I'll die today.

Sincerely,

Erin Browning
Greensburg Jr. High School
Greensburg, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Nicole Crosby
Letter to Sharon Creech, Author of *Ruby Holler*

Dear Mrs. Creech,

Your book *Ruby Holler* has many great and touching moments in it. The book showed me that when things are not in the best aspects they could be, those things, no matter how bad, can always change for the pleasant.

When I saw how Dallas and Florida's situation was, I thought to myself, "Why do they have to be there, it's not their fault, they did nothing to deserve to be in a place like that." This helped me realize that some things in my life were not my fault.

When I was younger, my parents filed for divorce. No matter how many times friends and family told me, "It's not your fault," or "It's for the best," I always felt like it was my fault somehow, I felt guilty.

After reading your book it somehow made me realize that it's not my fault in any way. I had learned that I had done nothing to make my parents get a divorce. They loved me no matter what. They got a divorce against each other because of how they felt about each other, not because of me.

Ruby Holler also made me realize that there was really nothing I could do to make the situation better or change my parent's minds. When Dallas and Florida went from foster home to foster home and then back again, they had no choice or say in what was being done, none of it was in their control. They also couldn't change the minds of the people that were deciding what was happening.

This helped me grasp the concept that it was going to be okay no matter what. I learned to enjoy what I had while I could, because you cannot change the present, but you can change the future. *Ruby Holler* made me understand my predicament better. It helped me to love my parents unconditionally, I knew that they loved me after the file passed, but in some way it felt different. It's like *Ruby Holler* helped me cope with what I was going through, knowing that other people had it rough too. I knew that it was better off the way it was, because everyone was happy in this situation.

I am very happy now due to the recent realization. Thank you for this, your books are very inspiring and fun.

Sincerely,

Nicole M. Crosby
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Ashley Davis

Letter to Richelle Mead, Author of *Vampire Academy*

Dear Richelle Mead,

When I think of a superb book, I don't think of a book that your friends have recommended to you or a book that makes you laugh. I think of a book that makes you look at your life and want to change the little things that hurt you. The first time I read *Vampire Academy* I only read them because my friend told me to, not really understanding the meaning of what I was reading. The second time I read them was because I liked the rhythm and flow of your words in my mind but, still not quite comprehending what you were really trying to get through. But the last time, I really dug deep into my soul to fully appreciate what you were writing and then it hit me.

Your series could actually do great wonders to my life. I think about all the things Rose did and it made me want to be more like her. I want to stand up for what's right no matter what kind of situation it may put me in. I want a best friend that could really understand what I am feeling, even without me having to tell her. I want the kind of relationship that Rose has with her mom in the end. Rose and her mom's relationship in the beginning make me think of my mom and our relationship in the beginning. It makes me what to tell my mom how much I love her every day. My mom and I have had a windy past. I have said some hurtful things to her and because of the way Rose and her mom work things out it made me tell my mom I am sorry for everything. It made me realize that my mom and I didn't have a good past because we both weren't really putting in the effort to understand the reasons why the other did what they did. But I soon realized that we were not going to have a high-quality future either if I didn't try to understand my mom. I understand that my mom did what she had to do to make my future brighter, and I can't even tell her how grateful I am. Now we are as close as a writer and their pencil. I would not have even thought of the way I disrespected my mom if it was not for your books.

Also your books have taught me that there are more important things in life than who has the prettiest clothes, or who is the smartest, or even who has more friends. It has taught me that life is about love, loss, friends, family, and sacrifice. My mom always told me that the people with a good life didn't get that life from having more friends or more money. She told me that they got that life from doing what they believe was right and along the way they had loved, been loved, and lost many things

important to them as a sacrifice to have their fantasy turned into reality. Your book teaches me that to get the happy ending in life you have to work for it, not have it handed to you.

I hope that in my future I will get the life I want from doing my best in everything I do. I will only get my dream car if I get a job. I will only get a good job by going to college. I will only go to college by succeeding in high school. I will only succeed in high school if I pass middle school. And I will only pass middle school if I try to do everything to the greatest of my ability. Whoever says that life starts when you want it to start is right. And I chose to start my life right now. Thank you for showing me the true meaning of life.

Your reader,

Ashley Davis
West Noble Middle School
Ligonier, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Mary Dewell

Letter to Katherine Paterson, Author of *Bridge to Terabithia*

Dear Mrs. Katherine Paterson,

If it weren't for my curiosity, I would have never read your book *Bridge to Terabithia* and written you this letter. You see my friends told me not to read it, since it was so sad, but I just had to know. Looking back on it they were just trying to help, since I have a tendency to take books really seriously and can get pretty emotional about them. What my friends didn't tell me was how important this book would be to me and how much it would heal the many wounds this life of mine has cast upon me.

One week before I started Kindergarten, my mom got a phone call from someone at my church. I remember looking into her face with my five year old eyes and seeing panic and terror growing upon it. She kept looking at me until she got off the phone.

One of my friends from preschool was on his way back home from a family vacation and was hit by a drunk driver. He was killed on impact and was found guarded by his sister's lifeless body.

At first, I didn't understand. I thought that it was all a joke and that I would see him the next week in my Kindergarten class. But he never showed up.

Then when I was in fifth grade my grandma died. That was really hard on me and my family. Again, I couldn't believe that she was actually gone. I didn't want to accept it and thought that she was just in another room and would come out to give me a hug in just a couple minutes. But she never did.

I struggled with the loss of my grandma for a long time. I blocked out my friends and the people who loved me, which was a big mistake. I even had a couple of visits with my school counselor, Mr. Mugford. While all of this helped a bunch, I still had holes that needed to be patched up. Then in the summer of 2012, I found *Bridge to Terabithia* on a shelf in my house and thought that I should give it a try. Ever since that day when I read your book, I have accepted that my friend and grandma are really dead. But that is okay with me now. They are watching me in heaven and want me to live every day to the fullest.

When I read *Bridge to Terabithia*, I felt like I wasn't alone. Even though Jess is just one of the characters in your book, he meant so much more than that to me. Jess felt real to me. He was going through some of the same struggles that I faced when my friend and grandma died.

I can't even begin to tell you how much Leslie taught me in your book. You see, I am the kind of person that likes to have things set and in order. I strive for perfection in everything I do, and Leslie taught me that it doesn't always have to be that way. I need to keep my eyes wide open and look around for new chances and ideas. Even though I am in seventh grade now, I can still use my imagination. The world has so many opportunities. If I don't start chasing them now, I may never catch back up and win the race. The final thing that Leslie taught me was that everyone, including myself, has something special and important to offer to this great world of ours. You may have to dig down a little bit, but it is there.

I can't even begin to thank you enough for your amazing work, but have one question. Is there a sequel?

Sincerely,

Mary Dewell
Klondike Middle School
West Lafayette, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Emily Durham

Letter to Suzanne Collins, Author of *The Hunger Games*

Dear Suzanne Collins,

I'm an 8th grader who is curious about death. How it happens? When it happens? Why it happens? But no one can give me the answer I need. The answer I want. The answer I can't live without knowing. To me, death is where you sleep for eternity. Where you will have the most wonderful dream with the God who created all of us. The God gave us our lives. The God who watches us, for us to go on the right path that he set out for us to do. Like people say, "Things happen for a reason." They do, but you might not always love the way things happen.

In *The Hunger Games*, you showed so much detail into the death of every person. If I was one of those people in the arena, I would close my eyes and dream of the place I would go next. Where there's life, where the sun is always shining, where there's no evil to harm me. Having one person die can create a lot of damage for their loved ones. I remember all the funerals I went to, and not once did I shed a single tear. Not one. Sometimes I hear people saying, "She has no heart. She's not even crying. Oh, just look at her dress, too bright for a funeral." I liked dressing up in bright colors, never liked the whole "black" thing. The reason I dress up in bright colors is because I believe that it's a celebration for them to move on to a better place. Being in your book, in your district you had to wait for the Games to end to be over to have your son or daughter back. That is cruel, that is ridiculous, that is stupid.

To have someone die in your family is hard to bear. My grandpa died last year because of having a disease. Before the viewing starts, you let the family have an hour to mourn and look at the loved one you lost. When my father saw his father, he broke down in tears. He cried so hard he couldn't breathe. I've never seen my dad cry so hard in a while. His tears rolled down his red, puffy cheeks. It almost made me cry, but when I looked at my grandpa again I suddenly stopped. Knowing death now, is all so sudden as well. I hope I never have to see death in the next world. I really do hope. Being in the Games, the tributes probably always thought of the brighter side of death. Knowing what might for them on the other side, but, I'd like to thank you for writing the book. Reading it gave me a fuller perspective of death.

Sincerely,

Emily Durham
West Noble Middle School
Ligonier, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Gabriella Eck

Letter to J. K. Rowling, Author of *The Harry Potter Series*

Dear J.K. Rowling,

Before reading your first book (which is definitely my favorite!) and the rest of the series, I was pretty depressed. After finding out that famous imaginary childhood models such as Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy were not real – which those guys are everything to a five-year-old – all of my imagination was gone, as if it was sucked away. Life was boring, and after school I would plop on the couch and watch the television, or stare at a crack in a wall for a while. But then one day my mom told me I should read your book, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. As soon as I turned the first page, I was hooked. I was lost in the world of Harry Potter, where nothing was impossible and imagination roamed free. I then realized magic was everywhere, not just in the text. How caterpillars turn into butterflies, tiny little seeds turn into gigantic redwood trees, to even electricity turning on a light bulb is just – well – amazing! I saw ordinary objects from new perspectives that a person may have never seen before that we take for granted. It is crazy how we use things without a thought!

Your books also made me proud of who I am. When I read about Hermione, I thought you were talking about me! I am a total bookworm now, and I don’t have a big group of friends and hang in the “it” crown. Hermione just had Ron and Harry; two best friends that will always watch her back. I have a Ron and Harry too in my life, but their names are Eric and Dustin.

The imagination in your books has definitely rubbed off on me. Because of it, I am in a Destination Imagination group that went to finals, which is where the best of the best go from around the world. Destination Imagination is a term of extremely creative people that at competitions, they must face crazy structural challenges and skits and use their imagination to fix it. That week at Knoxville, Tennessee my pin trading name was Sorting Hat Girl because I wore a sorting hat around competition, just to be fun and dorkey. Other teams thought that was really cool, and even took pictures with me!

Thank you for changing my “muggle” life into a magical adventure.

Thank you so much,

Gabriella Eck
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Merris Egloff

Letter to E. B. White, Author of *The Trumpet of the Swan*

Dear E.B. White,

Your book *The Trumpet of the Swan* was very life changing for me. Growing up, I was a quiet child. I kept to myself and my friends whenever I saw them in the hallway. I did not raise my hand that often and just sat there next to my eager to learn classmate. Instead of offering an answer I just waited till I was called on.

Your book showed me it was ok to be different from others. Also, not everyone will like you or be nice to you like when Serena shuns Louis because he is “defected.” Everyone is special in their own way and Louis proved that to me. Not everyone has to be loud to get their point across. Instead they can have a quiet voice that speaks to all. Louis also showed me that everyone has their own talents like playing the trumpet or for me playing the violin.

To me, Sam has a big impact. He shows love for animals and which I learned to love animals no matter how cute and fuzzy like my cat it or how scary looking they can be. He loves all animals all colors and sizes and so do I because of how this book has touched me. He loves and cares for the environment and which I learned to do it also.

When Louis learns to read and write after he goes to school, I learned that school is not a torture time for kids, but instead is a time to learn. After Louis returns, he realized that his learning did not do him any good because his family did not understand him. Then he realizes that just because his family cannot understand him, but maybe humans can. He is very excited to be able to share and communicate with people. I was just leaning cursive and that inspired me to try my hardest so I can write to people. He learns to carry on conversations with people. That showed me that the impossible things are really possible. You just need trust in yourself.

Thank you for showing me and others that being different is ok. You also showed me that not everyone can do everything that you can do. Not everyone is perfect because we all have “defects” no matter how hard we try to fix them. My “defect” is picking at the skin around my nails. I am working on fixing that. Louis showed me that no matter what you can or cannot do, you can do anything you want if you just put your mind to it. You just need to believe in yourself.

Sincerely,

Merris Egloff
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—A. J. Falk

Letter to Mark Bowden, Author of *Black Hawk Down*

Dear Mark Bowden,

Hello, I am the grandson of a Marine and nephew of a pilot. Your book *Black Hawk Down* makes me thankful that both are still alive and uninjured. In your book War isn't as glamorous as TV or movies make it seem. You don't have unlimited lives like in games. You only have one shot at the world and you have to take it. War is a vicious, ugly, bloody, scary, and emotionally and physically draining beast. *Black Hawk Down* is the best example of War without the realities of the battlefield.

In *Black Hawk Down* I get connected with the soldiers. It seems like I learn about them and then they suddenly get wounded or killed. I get connected and feel like I am there bleeding tears as a soldier bleeds. This book shows a reality and closeness to the characters unlike any other war novel. Like with me and "Elvis." I learned about this funny Black Hawk pilot and I'm thinking this guy can't die. Then he gets shot down and I felt like I died with him. I never met him but even now I still think of "Elvis" whenever I read a war book.

Your book flew as fast as a Night Stalker. Armed with missiles of emotions, death, pain, and sheer terror, your machine gun shoots every word out on the page with feelings and blood behind them. Your pilot is the reader. It is never silent and is definitely never slow. That is a great thing to have in a story. This book can add new aspects to someone's life without being boring. In some classics they try to give you a new aspect on life but it is buried underneath all the boring things. Your explanations in the book were necessary to getting to know the soldiers.

This book was definitely a "treadstone" as my teacher says. Now whenever I see a veteran I say thank you for protecting me. These men and women who serve us always have stories to tell. My dare to you and all who read this or war novels is find out what their stories are.

Sincerely,

A.J. Falk
Klondike Middle School
West Lafayette, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Araceli Flores
Letter to Karen Kingsbury, Author of *Unlocked*

Dear Karen Kingsbury,

Have you ever read a book that touched your soul, not only that, but taught you a life lesson? When I read your book *Unlocked*, I was able to answer my question with a proud “YES”! Currently I’m an eighth grader from Indiana. I read your book last year as a seventh grader. One of my favorite hobbies is to read during my free time. It helps me discover or find out about true or fictional stories of the characters that teach me the great meanings of life, many times they teach me how to improve my own, but other times they show me how to appreciate my own more. Such as your book *Unlocked* has helped shape me step by step into who I am now and my personality.

The book has showed me to help others no matter what their personal problem may be, even if the person may be different. I personally wish that more people would read this book such as people who may be having problems. Not only because this story could happen in reality, but because of the lesson the story has behind it. If more people read it, we could change the world little by little. Each step would add up to a better cause. For example, a bully could stop from bullying someone else if they read it. They would be able to see the consequences, and the effect it has on the person, and the damage it could cause; not only to the victim but the people surrounding the victim. They would be able to open their eyes and see that there are better things to do than hurt or damage others feeling and self esteem. Of course, stopping a bully wouldn’t be the only thing this story could accomplish, but it could also change the amount of people who help others, such as it did to me.

Today I help others more than what I used to before I read this your book. Your book made me open my eyes and see that helping others and watching them improve can be the greatest gift that anyone can receive. I saw the reality that God made us all different for a reason, and that reason was for us to work as a team. Such as brothers and sisters who help one another out. Many times people don’t help enough until they’re the ones in need of help, which sooner or later life shows them the mistake they made.

As many more books are written, many are abandoned. For the reason that at times the reader understands the message of the author, but doesn’t want to accept that it applies to them. Why? Well, because they’re afraid of change. I’m glad that that wasn’t my case. I was able to accept

my mistake of not helping others as much as I should of, and I was able to change my mistake by taking steps. All because of one book, *Unlocked*. I will always remember the book's teaching and your message. I will smile to do it, because I know I've done my part. Thanks to that I can say I've read a book that has touched my soul and has given me a life lesson.

Sincerely,

Araceli Flores
West Noble Middle School
Ligonier, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Chelsey Gindling
Letter to Nicholas Sparks, Author of *The Last Song*

Dear Nicholas Sparks,

“Life, he realized, is much like a song.” Years from now if I remember any line from this book, it will be this one. What is life like to you?

I encountered *The Last Song* half way through my 7th grade year. I was in need of some desperate AR points. I had always wanted to read a book by Nicholas Sparks, but never knew what book to read. I had seen the movie, and I was a big fan of Miley Cyrus, so I decided upon that. I had been hearing so many good remarks about this book, and the author alone, that I couldn’t wait to get lost in the book. I can honestly say I did! Your book has changed the way I view certain things in my life. It mainly has changed the way I spend my life.

While reading this book, my mind was spinning like a fair ride. Thoughts were flowing through my head. *Will my future be like this? What will my future relationships be like? Life is very precious.* I began to think of my past, and how hard it was because of the relationship I have with my mom and a boy. I realized that someday my mom won’t be here, and that I need to get over the hatred I have for her. While reading your book, I kept thinking “you never know when your time is.”

I can relate to Ronnie’s life. She struggles at believing in herself. She goes through depression in many different ways for different reasons. She has a hard time with her parents. She also slowly learns about friendships and relationships. Being a teenager isn’t easy, and I was glad to know that somewhere out there someone might be experiencing the same troubles as me. Ronnie had an attitude; it was bad and good. It just depended on the people she was with and the situation. Ronnie and I both share some strengths. She didn’t care what people thought of her; she was herself. She knew when she had to be strong, and when to let go. Lastly, even though she didn’t really seem to believe in herself and wanted to give up at times, she overcame the things that were bothering her and kept her from doing what she knew she could. She eventually got over how her dad had left her at a young age. She overcame her hate towards him.

I find this book very important to me. It found a way to teach me more about myself and life in general than people could. Every chapter seemed to teach me something new. By expressing feelings, thoughts, emotions and actions throughout each page, it really taught me a few valuable lessons. I will forever cherish *The Last Song*. The lessons learned will always stay in my mind.

What all did this book teach me? First, life is what you make it. Ronnie started off ruing every day, keeping herself bottled up, and not caring about the people who loved her. Those actions helped me realize that hating every day you live does nothing but depress you. It is your life, and if you don't like something, change it. Another thing this book taught me was life is very precious, and that you should enjoy every minute you have of it. When Steve died, I began to realize this; you never know when your time is, so live everyday like your last. Lastly, my parents will always be there to support me. I may question it at times, but nobody else loves me more than them. Friends come and go, and so do boys, but no matter what family will stick with you forever. I learned that I shouldn't take them for granted, and I changed my ways after reading this book.

Thank you for writing this book, and many of your other books. They always find a way to pull at my heart and change the way I look at life or the events that go on in it. Anyone who doesn't read your books is really missing out.

Sincerely,

Chelsey Gindling
Greensburg Jr. High School
Greensburg, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Megan Gramlin
Letter to James Patterson, Author of *The Maximum Ride Series*

Dear James Patterson,

You have inspired me so much. I have read many of your books. I am currently reading the *Maximum Ride* series. The *Maximum Ride* books have inspired me, because the books have taught me you can do anything you set your mind to. People, who want a perfect world, design many things that are supposed to beat Max. However, Max despises this idea. She wants to beat the other creatures the mad scientists created. Even when the fights get tough, Max always wins. Max can do anything she sets her mind to, and I can too!

You have also inspired me, through the *Maximum Ride* series, by teaching your readers, and me to never give up. Max, Fang, and the rest of the flock get in a lot of fights with erasers, robots, and other creations the bad scientists have made. The fights get tough sometimes, and sometimes they can get captured. However, the flock never gives up! They push through it. Even when the flock is put through gruesome tests, the evil scientists have created. They find a way to push through them, even when the tests are designed not to be beaten; the flock pushes through and finds a way to beat the tests! Never give up! Plus there is the character Iggy. Iggy is blind, he can't see, but he still fights and knows where objects are. He doesn't let the fact that he is blind, stop him he never gives up! Iggy pushes through! Plus, when the flock tries to find their parents, they always get left with dead ends. They get upset sometimes, but they never give up! You have taught me to never give up!

You have also, most importantly, inspired me to recycle more often. You are right about how the global warming issue will become my generation's problem. I like how you use Fang's blog to raise awareness about the issue also. It is a mission, everyone's mission, we have to fulfill. The world's kids' mission to save the world, by not trashing it. We have to reduce, reuse, and recycle. The human race will be living in our own trash if we do not do something about it soon. My school recycles plastic bottles, paper, and cardboard. I used to think it was a joke, but I was way wrong. I have done more research on the issue, and some of my favorite animals are going extinct because of global warming, such as the polar bear. I now care a lot about recycling and do so every chance I get. Thank you for inspiring me to care about our planet.

Sincerely,

Megan Gramlin
Salem Middle School
Salem, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Haley Gross

Letter to Laurie Halse Anderson, Author of *Chains*

Dear Laurie Halse Anderson,

I read your book, *Chains*, for my eight grade honors language arts class. At the beginning I didn't think I would like it, but as I read I started to really care about Isabel and Ruth. Isabel's life was much different than mine, but there were a few ways I could relate to her. One way that I could relate to Isabel's life was that Isabel really cared about her family like I do. I enjoyed reading the book because it helped me to understand what life was like for African Americans in America at that time and it was written in a way that makes everyone care about Isabel.

Like Isabel, I have a younger sibling who I care deeply for. I look out for my brother as much as I can. We do not always get along, but I have never met anyone who gets along with their sibling all the time. I felt extremely sorry for Isabel when Ruth was sold. For me, this part of the book was the most emotional. Isabel basically had her reason for living taken from her. I can't imagine how much harder life then became for her. I am very curious to see if Ruth is actually still in the country or if Madam lied to her. Family is very important to me so I cannot imagine Isabel's pain as her family was separated, beginning with when she was taken from her father.

Chains helped me to understand what life was like for many African Americans. I knew about slavery, but I liked that the book was told from Isabel's point of view. This made the story very personal and easier to connect with her. Every time Isabel felt pain, whether physical or emotional, I understood what she was feeling. I liked being inside Isabel's mind and more than a few times I got so caught up in the book that I felt like I was actually there with her. I was glad that Isabel found Curzon because she really needed someone to be her friend in a new place where she knew no one. I was also hoping she would end up belonging to Lady Seymour. She would've treated Isabel and Ruth so much better than Lockton and Madam ever did. She also would not have sold Ruth. I believe she would've taken her to a doctor to try and find out what was causing the seizures.

In conclusion, I really enjoyed reading *Chains* and I am planning to soon read *Forge*. *Chains* helped me to understand what America was really like for African Americans. I felt like I was there with Isabel throughout the entire story. I cared very much for her and Ruth. *Chains* made me realize how much we take life for granted. I am very lucky to live in a country where I am free and there is no slavery. I am also lucky that I can do what I want without being stopped because I am a girl. Many women and girls across the globe do not have that privilege. *Chains* made me realize how lucky I really am and what a great life I have.

Sincerely,

Haley Gross
Salem Middle School
Salem, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Emma Grow

Letter to Marcella Pixley, Author of *Without Tess*

Dear Marcella Pixley,

Everyone is interested in different types of books, and there are tons we can choose from. There are adventurous books with mystical journeys, there are mysterious books with a spicy twist at the end, there are informative books, and lots more! But, seldom there is a book that you come across that truly makes you think and can affect your actions. That story can teach you to let grudges go. It could even teach you to be more appreciative of someone or something. The novel *Without Tess* did both for me.

The relationships with siblings differentiate with every family: you could have a rocky relationship and always fight, you could barely converse with them, or you could be best friends who love to hang out with each other. Just like in *Without Tess* where Liz and Tess were good friends, my sister, Lydia, and I share a close connection. Lydia is a bubbly, hilarious, and zesty young girl who can flip your bad day to a great day in a heartbeat. We enjoy spending time together whether it is playing a competitive match of Just Dance together, or bouncing on the trampoline, we are chronically laughing and giggling. I could not fathom not having Lydia as a little sister!

As I became transfixed in the unique story *Without Tess*, I could not help but to think of my younger sibling. How Tess and Liz would create various games of their own, would be there for one another, and be in a world of their own, all reminded me of Lydia and I. I attempted to place myself in Liz's shoes and see what I would do if my sister were to pass away. Would I be able to bear the absence of my crazy sister? It is terrifying to try to picture it. To no longer hear her goofy voices she does or to see her silly faces she crafts.

In addition to making me ponder about Lydia, reading *Without Tess* made me think about how you cannot bottle up guilt. Liz kept her guilt of thinking she killed her sister for years! I comprehend that you need to release that guilt whether it is talking to a friend, as Liz did with Niccolo, talking with a parent, anything! You need to wash the guilt off of you! No one can live a life dwelling on the past! We all have to learn how to accept what has happened and move on, just as Liz did. You cannot constantly wonder “what should I have done”, but wonder “what should I do?”

Without Tess opened my eyes with what I am blessed with: a wonderful one of a kind sister. I understand that you need to cherish what you have, not mope about what you want. I would like to thank Marcella for a story that was well told and that made me realize that I need to let go of guilt that I may have and to be more grateful of my animated younger sister.

Sincerely,

Emma Grow
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Kilian Guensche

Letter to John B. Severance, Author of *Gandhi, Great Soul*

Dear John B. Severance,

Before I picked up your book, Gandhi was a stranger to me. Gandhi never crossed my mind. He was just *that guy from India*. But before I flipped the last page of *Gandhi, Great Soul*, he was a hero.

He taught me that “A man is a product of his thoughts, what he thinks, he becomes,” though our eyes have never met. He told me “You must be the change you wish to see in the world,” though we have never exchanged words.

Though enduring the cruel doctrines of apartheid and segregation when he was mistreated on his visits to South Africa and Britain, he had never done anything to physically harm an Englishman. For, “An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.”

In his lifetime, he had liberated not only a subcontinent, but a subcontinent of Brahmin, Kshatria, Vishya, Sundra, and Untouchables. And when he died, he died a father, not just to his daughter, but to three countries, even though he had never reached his dream of an independent, unified India. He taught me that you may never in your entire life reach a single goal, but you can always accomplish great things.

Mahatma, Mohandas, or just Gandhi, he was a great soul.

Sincerely,

Kilian Guensche
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Ashley Hale
Letter to Sharon Draper, Author of *Copper Sun*

Dear Sharon Draper,

I am a very slow and relaxed reader. I can never open a book and feel motivated, or enthusiastic about reading it. To see the amount of words and page numbers just devastates me and makes me want to attach it to a parachute and let it float away. However, when I opened your book, *Copper Sun*, I didn't worry about the words, or how many more pages I had to read until I could throw it away and let it wither apart. I read *Copper Sun* to my fullest potential, because I knew something about it made me yearn to read it and to feel the way I felt. It was as if it was fate.

As I began to dive deeper into *Copper Sun* I started to realize that it wasn't just a book, it was my life. This book was laid out like a game board just like my life is. There are the pieces that participate in the journey, the path that keeps us going on the right trail until the finish line, and the game cards that tell us how we will face the challenges and how we will continue our journey. However, you can't complete the game without deciding who you're going to be.

In *Copper Sun*, Amari has to decide how she is going to be herself as she is becoming a slave. Amari's bravery and independence throughout the book inspired me to be myself. She inspired me to dig deep and find the things that made me, me. Amari also influenced me to be a role model to others, just like she was to Tidbit. It was very difficult to look at myself in the mirror and write everything I would change of myself down. The list just became to get larger and larger as my self-esteem got smaller. Until one day as I started to really consider the person I am that I realized I have all the qualities to becoming a great student, and a great person. I also realized that people do look up to me and compliment me on the person I am. Amari has motivated me to stop listing the bad things about me, but to start listing the good things. To not mourn over my bad qualities, but to enhance them. Lastly, to not keep them in a cage all locked up, but to set them free.

Once you have your playing piece then you continue your journey across the game board until you draw a playing card. In *Copper Sun* Amari meets a young woman named Afi who prepares her for life ahead. As I began to read about Afi and Amari's relationship I started to think about the playing card in my life until one day it struck me. The playing card in my

life was my brother, Nick. He has been my supporter when I was facing an obstacle. He has been my best friend when I need someone to listen to my feelings. Soon he will be heading off to college and getting married, but he will always be part of my journey. No matter how or when my brother leaves he will always have been in my card deck. He has changed my life and pushed me along in my journey.

There's nothing left to a board game except the journey. In *Copper Sun*, Amari and Polly bicker about which way to travel to freedom. They are unaware about what challenges they will face and what discoveries are ahead of them. I am a very young girl. I have not even begun to cross my first stone in my board-game. However, your book has inspired me to walk with hope and dignity. To enjoy the beauty of life, and to expect the unexpected, because what you might think is the end may turn out to be the very beginning of something wonderful.

Copper Sun has motivated me to give a book a chance before setting it adrift. It has also made me be able to look at myself in the mirror and smile. I have learned to walk with an open heart, and always give people a chance, because who knows, they might just be my playing card. The good is only begun. I am beginning my journey as a new, enhanced person, but I always know if I look up into the sky I will see the copper sun shining on my path to the future.

Sincerely,

Ashley Hale
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Kenneddee Hart
Letter to Janet Fitch, Author of *Paint it Black*

Dear Janet Fitch,

Everyone in life experiences different things. We go different places, see different scenery, and we all read different things. Because we all experience different events we are molded into unique beings—our thought and opinions are transformed by our experiences and knowledge. If you only stop to think, perhaps gaze around you at other peers, you will see different faces. You will see different hair color, clothing, and eyes. Behind those eyes lies a story. A story you may not know and may never know, but it's there. And these people carry with them their own knowledge. I have learned with the help of your book *Paint it Black*, not to take these stories for granted and also not to jump to conclusions about people.

To be brutally honest I used to judge people far too much. For whenever I passed someone on the street with torn, ragged clothing I never put much thought into what kind of person they really were. I used to just dismiss them as filthy trash that had nothing worthy of my time. Perhaps they carry around memories of being a gold medalist in the Olympics, or maybe this person would be the next Albert Einstein or Steve Jobs. They could have been the most interesting person with the most beautiful and exciting stories to tell and I would have never known because I didn't even give them a chance. This went on for years of my life—who knows just how much I missed. I was like Josie in this sense. She only saw the overbearing, snotty side of Meredith. Behind all that I believe she really was a loving compassionate mother. She had rough times and through those times she was molded. Her personality and the way she behaves are because of the things and people she encountered in her past.

I went along with Josie on her journey to discover the true nature of people. My emotions spiraled down low when Josie was in yet another rut and when she reminisced about Michael my heart leaped. I was tossed and turned. Even after closing your book to join back in with the real world what I read affected me. Throughout the day I took notice of the diminutive actions of my family, my friends, and my peers. I stopped to think about what their life was and is like. For once in *my* minuscule existence I felt genuine compassion for people. No longer when someone I do not know all that well spoke to me did I judge them within that initial second. I stop and think; I put myself into their shoes.

I have you to thank for that. Your book molded me and I can note it as one of the experiences in my life that helped make me who I am today. It made me realize what I want to do. I want to travel the world and hear other people's stories. I want to weave beautiful tales of woe. I want to know all there is to know. The first thing I need to do though, is "try moving a stone."

Sincerely,

Kennedee Hart
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Rebekah Hoffer

Letter to Cornelia Funke, Author of *The Inkheart Series*

Dear Cornelia Funke,

I am a girl who, if I read one book more, would have ink for blood, paper for skin, and dust jackets for internal organs. I've had my nose continually stuck in a novel since third grade when I really got addicted to fantasy, but of all the hundreds of books I've read, yours have been some of the most inspirational. I was especially enamored with your *Inkheart* trilogy, which was completely unlike anything I'd seen before. From the first time my mother read to me from a picture book, the characters have always come alive in my daydreams, my imaginary friends, and the fantastic worlds I visit while sleeping. When I dove into *Inkheart*, I was introduced to a whole new cast of people to meet and places to visit. Meggie struck a special note with me since she reminded me so much of myself, but I never thought this book would bring to life such things as it did. Many of the characters and settings were brand-new and yet, somehow, breathtakingly familiar. I'm always traipsing through magical forests and medieval cities in my mind-palace, after all. I not only warmed to the people and places, though. The actual story was what really brought it all together for me. Not since Harry Potter had I experienced such plot twists! The antagonists practically dripped with malice, especially Basta, while the good guys ranged from lovable to mysterious to clever. I could hardly put the book down.

When I made it to the back cover and set it aside at last, my eyes were alight with all the new ideas swirling around in my head. I longed to be able to read myself away like Meggie—and I did. Ever since I read that series, I've never looked at a book the same way. The characters, in my mind, were as real as the desk in front of me. When I read, I wasn't just scanning the words on the page. I was plunging into a different world. I was escaping the world I live in to go on my own grand adventures. Crazy? Perhaps. Childish? Who cares? I'm practically still a kid anyways. This is the definition of my existence, and it feels like it always has been. I am a proud bookworm, and I will be until the day I die.

What your books did for me most of all was inspire me to write my own book. I'll admit that I decided to be an author when I was nine and read *Inkheart* when I was twelve, but at that point in time I was in between my feeble attempts at novels. I had tried to write a book four times, and I was thinking up an idea for Project Number Five, but I was flagging. Your books gave me new energy and ideas, and that fifth book turned out to

be my best one yet. I'm shamefully proud of it and have high hopes that one day it'll be finished, maybe even published.

My last note is that I would like to congratulate you for being the only author I can remember who made me get teary-eyed when a person died. Dustfinger's death in *Inkspell* was so selfless and unexpected- absolutely the most beautifully written death scene I've ever read. Thanks for giving me such a great trilogy to read and for giving my career as an author new hope.

Sincerely

Bekah Hoffer
Belzer Middle School
Indianapolis, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Finnia Keenoy

Letter to Kimberly Griffith Little, Author of *The Healing Spell*

Dear Kimberly Griffith Little,

The Healing Spell really opened my eyes. It made me realize not to judge someone on their appearance because I don't know their story. It made me realize that what I have today could be gone tomorrow. It also makes me think twice about what I say because I might regret it later. I have also realized that keeping secrets is not a good thing to do all the time. After reading your book, I realized how much my mom does and what it would be like with her laying lifeless in the middle of our living room. I discovered how much I actually love my mom. I thank you for that.

I never really used to think about someone's mom being in a coma and how you would never know. I knew that some people could have a hard time at home, but I didn't know it could be that serious. There are probably at least a dozen people in my school like Livie. Maybe it's not as extreme, but still pretty bad. People can hide things. That's why we shouldn't judge others because we don't know. They could have a mother in a coma. They could have a sickly grandmother in their house. We don't know, so why do we determine whether we like someone on their appearance? I'm being very hypocritical right now because I'm guilty too. I've done this. And, after reading *The Healing Spell*, I realized that is was the wrong thing to do. Everyone deserves a chance. When I say things to people I think twice before saying them. I might regret what I said and not be able to fix it.

The things I have today might not be there tomorrow. One day Livie's mom was out and about and the next day she was in a coma. One day Livie was happily hiding T-baby and the next day, due to someone's mistake, he was gone. I now appreciate everything a little more because it won't always be there.

"I'm angrier at the fact that you tried to keep it from me than what you actually did."

We Keenoy children have heard this plenty of times from our mom. Being honest is so important. If we just came clean, she wouldn't be as mad. Also, telling the truth would keep us from having a guilty conscious and we would be baggage free.

My mom is an amazing woman. I've always known that but reading *The Healing Spell* made me realize how much she does and what it would be like without her to keep us under control. She has to work a full time job and takes care of us (my brother, Forster, my sisters Flannery and Faleigh,

and me) which is like another full time job. She also does most of the chores around the house. We do help with some chores as well as doing some of them too. If she wasn't here, we'd all be a mess! We just can't function without her.

I discovered how much I truly love my mother. Thank you. Thank you for making me realize what an outstanding mom she is. I view her presence a lot differently now. I cherish it because she won't always be there forever.

Sincerely,

Finnia Keenoy
Klondike Middle School
West Lafayette, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Anthony Kleumper
Letter to Randy Pausch, Author of *The Last Lecture*

Dear Mr. Pausch

With each lesson in your book, I found myself coming up with more and more ways to change my life. In one lesson, I learned that I should write letters to people who are dear to me. Since I started writing letters I have grown closer to my friends and family. All my relatives appreciate the kind hand written notes just as you did.

Every lesson was one I cherished. I hate to admit it but I realized that there was a plethora of things I was doing wrong in my life. One of them was that I had never really liked funerals. My disliking for them wasn't because they made me dreary or depressed but because I was struck with boredom during each visitation or burial. I was the same way with baptisms. In some cases, the problem was that I valued materialistic things like my time or a game more than the baby or deceased person and their loved ones. You taught me to participate in these events and to realize that people, no matter how big or small, old or young, are worth tons of gold more than any other interest I may have, whether it be a new game or the big football game that everyone was going to see. I have now had a chance to correct my mistakes and to pass on the lesson on to my siblings so that they will not be like I was.

As I first read the lines when you talked about how leadership was key in succeeding in life, I thought that I did a pretty good job. However when I delved deeper into the subject I soon saw I was wrong. I saw that leading wasn't just knowing all the answers in your group, or volunteering in class. I saw that it extended to leading my siblings on the right path and that leading was stepping up to a bully for someone else, or helping another, student who is afraid to ask for help, find the right classroom. That leads me into one of the biggest changes I need to make in my life (or rather my sisters life). I have always been shy of strangers. My sister happens to be even more shy; she is afraid to ask. She backs away from opportunity and hides behind my mom or simply leaves us. She is deterred from doing the things she wants to do. She doesn't ask for these privileges because she believes they won't be given. She is only six. I don't want her being denied these privileges because she is afraid to ask. I have decided to teach her that all she has to do is ask. I want for her to be given the things she wants.

As I read your book the list of changes I needed to make to my life grew astoundingly long. Now I tell people about the book *The Last Lecture*.

But if I were to change the name to fit how the book changed my life I would change one word. I would rename the book, The Lifechanging Lecture.

Sincerely,

Anthony Kluemper
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Uriel Macias

Letter to Michael Williams, Author of *Now is the Time for Running*

Dear Michael Williams,

I read your book called *Now is the Time for Running*. I checked it out because the cover was a kid with a soccer ball. This caught my attention because I love soccer. Any time I'm angry I go play soccer. That's how I get my anger out. Also when I'm sad I go outside and play soccer even if it's freezing cold. It feels so good when you kick the ball. It takes with it all my bad and sad feelings and smashes into the goal net. It crushes all of those feelings, and makes me feel really good when I hear the swoosh on the goal net.

Right away when I started reading it, I already had a connection with it. I knew I was going to love the book. Until I got to the part where they kill all of his family. I was almost crying in that part. It made me think of my cousin who got shot and killed in Mexico. That's one of the reasons I don't want to go ever there anymore. I had a lot of connection with the book; that's what made it my favorite book.

When I got done with the book, it left me hanging. I was really mad with the way it ended. This book really made me change a lot. How? I train harder in my soccer practices and take it more seriously. My goal is to become a professional soccer player, or at least play soccer in college. It also made me appreciate more the things I have. But the most important thing that I learned was to never give up on your goals even if you're destroyed in your inside.

Sincerely,

Uriel Macias
West Noble Middle School
Ligonier, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Brandon Mair

Letter to Todd Burpo, Author of *Heaven is for Real*

Dear Todd Burpo,

Your son has changed the way I look at God, his son, and our afterlife in Heaven. I no longer doubt whether God exists or his son actually resurrected. Because of Colton, I firmly believe Jesus is our savior and God without a doubt exists.

The way that Colton described every detail about God, Jesus, or Heaven blew my mind. He stated everything without hesitation and, because he had never learned this in Sunday school, it caused me to believe that much more.

The fact that Colton had appendicitis and it developed into a life-threatening situation is inspiring enough. Even more so, he lived to tell the tale. But, to recall every little detail that was going on while he was under anesthesia in an operation room proved to me that, not only God, but Heaven existed.

As Colton continued to recall factoids and details about God, Heaven, Jesus, and his own family over time, it only further bolstered my new belief. His being able to look at a painting or sketch of Jesus and tell you whether it was drawn correctly or not proved to me that he had seen and visited with Jesus in Heaven.

To think that only a few days before, I had doubts about reading your book. My parents had to beg me to read it because I had been having second thought about God recently. As I began to read through the book, I asked myself if I even believed God existed. I still had no clue. I read cover to cover from the inception of baby Colton to your ending letter. I read the last few words of your letter and I realized I had an answer to my earlier question.

Thank you for writing about Colton's incredible experience and for opening my eyes to what goes on around us. Also, thank you for writing and publishing *Heaven is For Real* and for getting out the message to all who have not been enlightened by Colton and his recollection of his journey to Heaven.

Your book put a new perspective on my life. I feel more grateful for the privileges that I get and the opportunities that I receive. Because of my belief, I have a new level of happiness about me now and the things that once I despised and once seemed impossible to perform are now trivial to me. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Brandon Mair
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Landyn Mann
Letter to Christopher Paolini, Author of *Eragon*

Dear Christopher Paolini,

Have you ever been in an embarrassing predicament where it seems everyone around you is laughing at you because you failed? I have and it's horrible. When I wrestled a couple years back, I hardly won a match. Some people made fun of me, but my parents never did. I just moved on though, and I never gave up. The following year I won more matches. I have never really been that much into reading until I read the *Eragon* series. I had no idea about your books until my sister told me I should read the *Eragon* series. She kept walking around in our house carrying the book *Eragon*. I think she was tempting me, but I'm not sure. She told me it was a fantasy story with dragons and dragon riders. She also told me it had a ton of action in it, so I decided to give it a try. The *Eragon* series has influenced me to never give up in accomplishing my goals, such as doing well in school.

The book series made me think about my future and how my decisions will shape it. If I tried to be like the bad guy in the *Eragon* series, Galbatorix, and try to rule the world, my future wouldn't be how I want it to be. I would be hated from everyone, and I couldn't stand that. I would rather do little things to help people so that they like me. Then my future would be like I want it to be.

Eragon and I are not the strongest people in the world. Neither one of us is insolent. We both learn from our mistakes and correct ourselves, but *Eragon's* mistakes are much more crucial than mine are because he fights in many wars. One final thing is that *Eragon* and I don't like to be well known by everyone.

The *Eragon* series has taught me to enjoy life because it can be way too short. I am never giving up at being successful in life. I think my future will be better if I help other good people in need like *Eragon* has, except I wouldn't fly on a dragon and use magic spells to help people.

I now realize that some people in the world have really evil minds about taking over the world. I also learned that giving up can cause major consequences and can easily change your future differently from what you want it to be like. I want to be successful in life, and I won't let giving up change that.

Sincerely,

Landyn Mann
Greensburg Jr. High School
Greensburg, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Hunter McCune

Letter to Walter Dean Myers, Author of *Fallen Angels*

Dear Walter Dean Myers,

Fallen Angels has truly changed the way I look at friendships. The way the soldiers put their lives in the hands of their comrades is unbelievable. Trusting someone else with your life takes a lot of courage, and these soldiers have not known each other long. When the rest of the squad is killed, Private Perry and Pewee trust each other to keep them alive. Battling side-by-side they make it back in one piece. Even though the two have only known each other for a few months, they have bonded enough to trust each other with their life. I would not want to put my life in the hands of someone I have known my entire life, so the two must have been extremely close.

The entire squad forms a strong relationship with the others. They have an understanding of each other and respect this common likeness. They have all endured the same training and share this trait. Other than this, they all have little in common, except for where they are. They were all raised in different places with different people, yet they come to this jungle in the middle of nowhere and have a mutual understanding of one-and-other. They recognize that underneath they are all afraid to be where they are, and this brings them closer together. This makes them a tightly knit squad.

They all share a common goal, to survive and return home. They know they all pursue this common goal, so they trust each other to help get them out of Vietnam. They all know that by forming these friendships, they will have someone looking out for them on the battle field. By looking out for someone, someone will hopefully be looking out for you in return.

This book truly inspired me to build better relationships with the people near to me. Knowing someone has your back gives you a sense of confidence. Knowing that you have someone else's gives you a feeling of responsibility. Good friendships are crucial, an *Fallen Angels* expresses this in an outstanding way.

Your Friend,

Hunter D. McCune
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Grace Mehringer
Letter to Richard Paul Evans, Author of *The Walk*

Dear Richard Paul Evans,

Some books are enjoyable stories that entertain readers for a couple of weeks. Every once in a while, you find books that cut deep and leave footprints on your heart. Your book, *The Walk*, cut deep to my heart. Even though Alan loses everything, he finds the courage to walk. *The Walk* taught me several lessons to last me a life time.

About five years ago, like Alan, I lost someone extremely important to me, my grandma Nancy. She was my go-to person. When I fell, she helped me get up. After she passed away, I didn't think I could get up or be blissful. I managed to keep going, but there was always an empty hole in my heart. As I read *The Walk*, I realized my grandma was always with me like McKale was with Alan. *The Walk* helped my grandma start to fill the vast, empty space in my heart. Your book made me realize that my grandma would want me to be exultant instead of gloomy. I see her through different objects and activities. Now, I know she was telling me to be cheerful the whole time.

As I read more and more of *The Walk*, more lessons appeared to me. After Alan lost everything, only a handful of people remained loyal to him. It made me thankful for everyone in my life. I am also thankful for all those previously in my life. Now, I make sure to tell everyone special to me that I love them every day. I'm also thankful for all that I have. I used to always ask for more, but I have now learned that I have abundant possessions. I know from your book that the unexpected could happen any day.

The third lesson I learned was to never give up. Even though Alan lost everything, he still had the courage to go on his walk across the country. I have learned that even at your worst times, you should never give up. Alan faced endless challenges on his walk but still kept going. I'm thankful for everything I have; I never give up. I'm thankful that I had such a terrific grandma. I now discover courage to live my life joyfully.

The Walk taught me numerous lessons that were exceptionally close to my heart. I have learned to live every day to its fullest and to be glad. I am more thankful for all the blessings in my life. I have found courage to be ecstatic on horrible days. Instead of dwelling on grief, I find courage to be jubilant. Your book left a deep impression on my heart. I found courage to go on my life's journey. Whoever reads your book will be inspired to start their life's walk.

Keep walking,

Grace Mehringer
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Brooke Miller

Letter to Ellen Potter, Author of *Slob*

Dear Ellen Potter,

A few weeks ago, I finished reading your book, *Slob*. I liked this book a lot. There are many ways I could relate my own life to this book. One way that I can relate to this book is, because I also have a sibling that I am very protective over. I know that Caitlin, also known as Jeremy, is extremely protective over Owen. She cares about him a lot and I feel the same about my sister, even though we do fight sometimes.

I can also relate to the fact that Owen likes to invent things and dream up creative ideas. I haven't officially invented anything, but I have made up items that would help me in the future. I would love to be like Owen and try to invent an item that will help my life in some way.

One thing I can't relate to in *Slob* is the fact that Owen and Caitlin's parents have passed away. Thankfully, my parents are both still alive and together. If my parents weren't here, my life would be so much different. They help me so much in my life. When I found out about the death of Owen and Caitlin's parents, I felt horrible that they would have to be put in such a terrible and life-changing situation. They are very brave for sticking up and taking on the responsibility of living with a new family or parent after all that has happened to them. This book has taught me to appreciate all that I have in my life and that I am surrounded by people that love me. I have learned to be thankful for everything I have now.

Sincerely,

Brooke Miller
Salem Middle School
Salem, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Susie Miller

Letter to Sharon Draper, Author of *Out of My Mind*

Dear Sharon M. Draper,

I am a normal eighth grader in middle school who faces all the everyday challenges in life. There are days when I don't know what to do with myself. Then I think of your books. I don't know why but for some reason that always reassures me that I will come through alright. Your writing has not only helped me come through challenges, it has also helped me be who I am today. Before I read your books, I was always afraid to follow my dreams because of the fear of what other people might think. Like Melody in *Out of My Mind* I now have enough confidence to stand up for myself and get what I want. It's like I'm a totally new person.

I was introduced to your books last year when we had *Copper Sun* as a book club book. After that I read as many of your books as I could. Like Melody in *Out of My Mind*, I drank up all of your words. I just couldn't get enough of them; I was always thirsty for more. Somehow whenever I thought that my life was unbearable you always helped get through. When there was no way to just make a situation disappear, I would read one of your books; letting myself forget about what was going on around me, as I drowned in your words. When I'm gulping down your words, it's almost like I'm right there with the person, having the feelings they have. When I read *Out of My Mind*, I was going through a very tough family problem, and every time Melody was about to cry, I could feel her emotions build up until they exploded into a million tears. After I read *Out of My Mind*, I came to the realization that I'm not the only person that has to face challenges in life. It made me feel good to know that I wasn't alone.

Although all of your books have had an amazing effect on my life, the one that stands out to me the most is *Out of My Mind*. I have always thought that it is horrible to make fun of special needs children, but that book changed my life forever. Now when I see a special needs child do something silly, I think of Melody, and say something nice to them. Special needs children have always been really special to me. I love how they are always smiling and happy. To me they're like a whole group of suns that are here to brighten our day. When I see someone bullying a special needs child, I'd like to ask them why they are judging them if they don't judge us. Even though I still catch myself laughing at a special needs child, if they do something silly, you have helped me understand that they have feelings too. You have not only helped me feel different about special needs children, but also the people that take their time out to help them.

By writing *Out of My Mind*, you have proved that the saying “don’t judge a book by its cover is totally true. *Out of My Mind* has not only helped me look at the good things about special needs children but also everyone else that I meet. Because of your books, I look at people in a whole new way. Instead of judging them by what I see, I try to learn more about them. Even though I see the same people, I notice something new about them, that I never noticed before I read your books.

Thank you for teaching me to let everyone, not only me, be who they want to be.

Sincerely,

Susie Miller
West Noble Middle School
Ligonier, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Nellie Mowat
Letter to Stephen King, Author of 11.22.63

Dear Stephen King,

Books don't generally offer a connection to my life. Particularly not ones concerning time travel. But when I read *11.22.63* I did get a sense on my own life in it. It wasn't any distinctive thing it is a common thing, it happens every day. Death.

I had a person I would play with every day after school. When I was little, his name was John Fierst, and he was my grandpa. We would always do something together, build a nest out of pillows, make Jell-O into different shapes, or play barber shop. Grandpa Feirst was everything to me, my best friend, my sidekick, my role model. A lot of people in my small town knew him because he was the history teacher at the local high school for so long, and he knew everything there was to know about history. People who only thought they knew him for his outside appearance, a demanding teacher, a gruff historian. But I had my own image of him, what he was actually like. That's why I don't think people really understand why I couldn't really get over it when he died. Because they didn't see him as this affectionate person like I did.

Like I said, we would play every day. But six years ago it started to slow down. I could no longer over to his house every day. He would be at the hospital receiving treatment for stage four colon cancer. I didn't really know what was going on. All I understood was that I didn't know what was happening to my beloved grandpa. I didn't know that the life was gradually eking out of him.

When I read about Sadie's demise in *11.22.63* I felt like I was partially reading about my own life when I was reading about how Jake suffered. Host the person he loved most, and so did I. Sadie was there for Jake when he got attacked, and Jake was there for Sadie when her ex-husband came after her. Much like how my grandpa was there for me when I was sick, and I was there to (unwittingly) comfort him when he was in the hospital.

A lot of things were painful the year that my grandpa died. He was very sick and in a lot of pain and I could almost never see him. It had been two years since he was diagnosed and it had taken a toll on everyone in our massive family. My mom wasn't around a lot because she had to stay and take care of him. Like how Sadie would take care of Jake.

The worst thing by far was seeing everyone cry on November 3, 2008. He had died at eleven o'clock Monday morning and all anybody felt was pain. We cried because we were missing the roots to our family tree.

It was surreal to realize that my grandpa was gone. He was truly gone. I would never be able to see that smile that meant that he was up to something. Never again would I hear the joking voice or the words of wisdom.

After he died I thought about how long it was. I always felt like I was saying goodbye in my heart, but I don't think I ever could really say it. I didn't get to see him in his last minutes. I was at school, blissfully ignorant that my grandpa had just passed away. I think Jake got the better deal when his loved one died. He got to say his final goodbye and then Sadie was gone. I never got to say any final goodbye. It always felt like I was saying a temporary goodbye. Jake was very lucky. He was a very lucky man indeed.

I tried not to think about my grandpa's death until I read your book. But when I did read it I picked up on something: everything happens for a reason. He couldn't stay with us forever. And it was better for him so he wouldn't suffer. It helped me to think about it in that way. That if my grandpa were still here, he would be in a lot of pain. If I had a choice between having my grandpa here and him being in pain, or him being in heaven, I would definitely choose heaven. Because I couldn't bear to see him in pain, it only made me feel wounded in my heart.

The one thing that helped me more than anything in all of this was going back and reviewing that day that he died. I remember feeling a strange feeling that I have only felt once in my life. It was total happiness. It felt like I was that happiest person on earth, and I had no reason for it at all. I like to think that it was when he got into heaven.

Maybe my story doesn't seem all that connected to *11.22.63*, and you are entitled your opinion. I on the other hand, like to think that it was the first stepping stone. It was the first stepping stone on the path to recovery; the path to healing. It made me see everything in a new light that made it possible for me to accept my grandpa's death. It has helped more than you, or anybody will ever be able to understand fully. Thank you so much for helping me be able to heal.

With Best Regards,

Nellie Mowat
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Jaelen Nice

Letter to Mike Lupica, Author of *True Legend*

Dear Mike Lupica,

I've read a bunch of your books like, *Heat*, *Travel Team*, *Underdogs*, and *Summer Ball*, but the one book that I made the biggest connection to was *True Legend*. Like Drew "True" Robinson, I am a basketball player and have been told by many people that I have potential to be a Division One college basketball player. Unlike Drew, I don't have agents or any scouts, nor have I played on national television, but I still have a dream of playing Division One.

I live in the state of Indiana where basketball is a big sport. Like Drew, I eat, sleep, and drink basketball. It's the one thing I can do that clears my mind. Drew and I have another thing in common, as well. In addition to the fact that we both love basketball, we both have had trying times in our basketball careers. One of my trying times was when a player that I knew was better than me got the best of me. This compares to when "King" got the better of Drew in a game causing Drew to lose the concept of "team" ball. Resembling Drew, I felt like this game was a one-on-one matchup between me and my opponent. With our team down, I decided to take matters into my own hands and try to bring my team back by myself. Funny how things didn't work out, fortunately, my teammates picked me up from my bad decision making and we were able to pull off a win! Similar to Drew, I used that game as motivation to get better; I spent countless hours in the gym. In the end, I not only fine tuned my skills, I had a stronger performance the next time I faced that same opponent. I did it with a balance of scoring, passing, all the while utilizing teamwork!

There are some differences between Drew and myself, however. Unlike Drew, I don't have all of the distractions that go along with teams scouting me, having an agent, no do I go to a big school that gets nationally noticed. Another major difference between Drew and me is that I take more pride in my school work than Drew did in the book *True Legend*. Unlike Drew, who got by on his basketball skills and counted on his friends to do school work for him, I actually do my work by myself not expecting to be cut any slack because of my athletic ability. I know in the long run it is to my benefit to be responsible for my own work.

The other character, Urban "Legend" Sellers, also inspired me. Urban reminded me to stay in school and forced me to remember that there is a life outside of basketball. Urban has also shown me a point of view that I never really understood. I never knew how much one person

could depend on one thing to get them by in life. In Urban's case, he depended on basketball and didn't work that hard in school. He didn't plan for a future that didn't include basketball. I learned from that character that once can enjoy being an athlete but it's important to obtain a good education and life skills that will carry you places outside the gym.

This particular story enters my mind often while working out in the gym or working out a math problem. It's not uncommon for me to think back to the events that occurred throughout the story and remind myself of what's really important and how to keep my priorities straight. I have to agree with John Calipari's statement, "True Legends get it right."

Sincerely,

Jaelen Nice
Salem Middle School
Salem, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Connor O'Brien
Letter to John Flanagan, Author of *The Ruins of Gorlan*

Dear John Flanagan,

I have read a number of books and not many have altered me like your book *The Ranger's Apprentice: The Ruins of Gorlan*. It has transformed my view on the way I respond to specific things. Almost everyone at some point in their life feels like they're "not good enough." It's a mutual thing, but we shouldn't let it stop us from doing things and moving on. A few years ago, I felt the same way.

I was trying-out for the JCards. It was the most elite travel baseball team in Jasper, and I had to be on it. My parents were supporting me immensely on this because they knew how much I treasured baseball. At the time though, I wasn't the biggest, quickest, or most athletically inclined kid on the field. My dad and grandpa both played varsity baseball, and I wanted to do the same.

While at try-outs, I comprehended that I was not worthy enough to play compared to the year's previous players. I was Will. I didn't belong there like he didn't belong in Battle school. The other players were more advanced than me. They were smashing balls to the fence, some over it, while I couldn't make solid contact. Every ball hit at them, they fielded with ease. I, on the other hand, took a few shots to the stomach.

I didn't make the team, of course. I was a distraught kid. I then understood that I was going to have to work harder than all of them to improve. And I did. Will's alternative route was becoming a Ranger and demonstrating he can do anything. Mine was attesting myself to all the people at that try-out. That next summer I was asked to be on a different travel team. It was brand new and just started. I was eager to play the JCards, wanting to beat them for all their scoffing at me. When we played them, we got crushed. We weren't the best team. Actually, we scarcely won a game.

Last year, I was asked to play on the JCards. I guess I was "good enough" now. Before I could decide what to do, my coach and their coach conversed and arranged to take the most skilled players from each team and put them together. I won my first baseball championship that year, and I started pitching that game.

Now, I'm on one of the advanced teams in the Midwest region. Your book inspired me to persevere and not give up like Will. I was unwavering like he was and it all worked out. I was distressed at first, like Will, but then I worked at it. I converted to an improved person for it. Will educated me how to work for something even if I don't like the condition. Whatever you do, it takes practice. I know I can be formidable enough for anything now; it just takes a little effort.

Sincerely,

Connor O'Brien
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Ella Perel
Letter to Jerry Spinelli Author of *Stargirl*

Dear Jerry Spinelli,

It was very refreshing to read about a girl who is not afraid to be herself and do what she believes in even though she came across to others as strange and weird. She knew it was weird to play the ukulele while singing "Happy Birthday" to students at lunch, but she knew it would make some people happy. She knew it was unusual to carry a rat around school, but she did it anyways because she didn't care what people thought. She knew it was atypical to put a tablecloth on her school desk and have a vase with a flower in it, but it didn't stop her from dressing her desk up in every classroom. She even made up her own Pledge of Allegiance because it made her happy. These actions eventually made the whole school pay attention and change their ways. They finally started noticing each other in the hallways and nodding to each other. It was as if they awakened from a long slumber. They started acting like a community rather than individuals. Everyone was so surprised by the effect she had on the entire school that some thought she was planted there for that purpose. Stargirl received much grief because of her actions, but none of the negative feelings stuck with her. She always saw the best in everyone and knew what to do if they needed cheering up. These qualities are vital to becoming a great person.

It is scary to think that in some parts of the world people get persecuted, even killed, for not following the rules of the community. Unwillingness to accept others for who they are can even lead to wars. I am happy that I live in a community where people respect others' cultures and beliefs. I am grateful that my parents immigrated to this country from Russia for these very reasons. They could not practice their Jewish faith there while here I am privileged to go to a Jewish day school, go to a synagogue, and celebrate religious holidays. Unlike them, I am able to practice my religion freely.

I see people like Stargirl throughout my community. We organize food drives, donate clothes, and help rebuild our neighborhoods after natural disasters. I feel good about being part of a community like this because I believe that it is my job to help out and fix something that I am a part of. From time to time, I prepare and deliver lunch to homeless people in my city. I remember the first time I did this. I felt weird and scared and didn't want to come out of the car. My little brother had no problem running up to these strangers and handing them food. I had all sorts of scary thoughts going through my head. What would the passerbys think of

me? Would the homeless attack me? Would this act of kindness embarrass them? They were all very grateful and would start eating right away. Some of them even shared their sandwiches with the others. What felt odd at the beginning, ended up being a rewarding experience at the end. I bet it was this very feeling that made Stargirl do various acts of kindness for strangers even if she wasn't understood by others.

I could not have read this book at a better time in my life. Much like Stargirl, I, too, will find myself in a new school environment in the near future. I will be moving from a class of seven kids who I have known since kindergarten to a class of seven hundred people who are strangers to me. I will go from a private middle school to a public high school. I hope to use Stargirl's character as an inspiration when I make this transition. It will be important to me to make new friends while still being true to myself. I hope they like me just the way I am. I have definitely learned from reading your book that while it may seem easier to change to fit in, it may not always make me happy. I intend to use Stargirl as my role model in this exciting and challenging time in my life.

A big fan of yours,

Ella Perel
The Hasten Hebrew Academy of Indianapolis
Indianapolis, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Loralee Potter

Letter to P. C. Cast Author of *The House of Night Series*

Dear P.C. Cast,

Throughout reading the entire *House of Night* series I have been captivated. The thrilling plot line pulled me in from the start and has kept me enthralled while I continued to read. I have noticed the theme of being different is carried out through the series. After all, the popular social queen, Zoe, is portrayed as an outcast because of her newly acclaimed differences. This made me realize how often people are unfairly judged, and how often they are judged based on false pretenses, or because of something they can't even control.

There are a few close calls in actuality, but the series proves that no person, or group of people, is truly stereotypical. The "evil, power seeking, blood thirsty, demonic vampires," are conservative, help local charities, and just try to stay out of the way of humans. Another example would be Heath, who is portrayed as a self-centered, egotistical jerk, though he is willing to die for the love of his life even if she doesn't share his feelings.

So many of these situations are put into context, and it helped me realize that people are only judged by those who don't really and truly know them. Those who are afraid to know them. The people who are on the outside, looking in.

I look around myself and I see faces. I once thought I saw people, but I really didn't. I haven't taken the time to know who these classmates are—what they like or dislike, what they do, how they feel. I haven't taken the time to care, and neither have most other people. We go through our lives judging others and thinking we actually know them. In our minds we really do because we don't have anything to tell us otherwise.

But every now and then, a series like this is written. Some readers simply enjoy the story, yet others understand the deeper meaning. Here, it is proven that sometimes the ones we judge are the unlucky ones; the ones who haven't been dealt the best hand, and we don't notice. We go on with our lives and miss an opportunity to get to know a new person that maybe we thought we knew before.

If we took that time to meet them, or even to simply accept the fact that we didn't know them, and that our opinions shouldn't be based upon things we don't know, then there would be a greater sense of understanding among people, and overall better relationship system among mankind.

Every time someone gets a little push in the right direction, when they read a certain book, or certain books (*House of Night*), when they listen to a certain song, when they hear a certain story, they get a little closer to that understanding; a little closer to that united power. Thank you for adding a piece of artwork to the collection that helps us understand, that helps us realize that each of us can truly make a difference, whether it helps an entire nation, or simply a simple person.

Sincerely,

Loralee Potter
Salem Middle School
Salem, IN

Letter to Margaret Peterson Haddix Author of *Running Out of Time*

Dear Mrs. Haddix,

I have always loved history. And while most of my other classmates were snoozing in Social Studies, I was on the edge of my seat listening to the stories of explorers coming to the New World and the intense battles of the Civil War and the inspiring words of Martin Luther King, Jr. I have always wondered what it would be like to live in the past, but when I read *Running Out of Time*, I could understand Jessie’s shock and confusion of everything that she discovers in the present day. I know that this book took place in the 90s, and sometimes I thought, “What would happen if this was set in 2012, with today’s technology and culture?” It’s crazy to think that in less than 10 years, we live in a totally different world. Your book opened my eyes to not only the bravery that Jessie possessed to go on this kind of journey, but how much our world has changed, and whether or not I would want to live in the past.

One of my favorite parts of the book and one of the parts I most remember is at the very end when Hannah finds out about lipstick. She is so excited that she is able to make her lips look red. It’s incredulous that something as simple to us as a tube of lipstick can seem like such a huge innovation. We can take so much for granted; waking up to your iPod, taking a shower with warm water, picking out your favorite Hollister t-shirt to wear, throwing on your Ugg boots and your North Face so you don’t get cold. Would the people of today be able to live without all of the luxuries that we have today? Or better yet, would we be able to voluntarily throw it all away just to live in a history park/tourist attraction. I asked myself that question while reading your book, “Would I want to live in the past?” Honestly, I don’t think that I could. It might be fun for a little while, but I would miss my old life.

I have always looked up to Jessie. It would take such an act of bravery to be able to go out into the real world, having no idea what to expect or who to trust, let alone having people who are willing to kill her to keep their secret safe. The pressure she must have been feeling had to have been like a burning and intense reminder of everything that she was fighting for. Thinking about saving her family and friends had to have been the one thing that kept her going. I wondered if I would be brave enough to follow in her footsteps. I wasn't sure if I could but then I thought, "What if it was my family that was in danger?" Jessie is such an admirable role model, not only in her bravery, but in the perseverance that she demonstrates. Through all of the hardships and obstacles she had to face, she never gave up. I believe that whenever anybody ever feels like giving up; they can think about everything that Jessie went through and how she overcame everything standing in her way and that we might be able to do the same thing.

Thank you so much for writing this book. It has definitely made me think about whether I could live Jessie's life; from living in the past, to venturing out into the present world to save her family. I would be scared to go to the present, but I think that if I had Jessie by my side, I might be okay.

Sincerely,

Brittany Potts
Fishers Jr. High School
Fishers, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Haleigh Reed

Letter to Jodi Picoult, Author of *My Sister's Keeper*

Dear Ms. Picoult,

Hi, my name is Haleigh, and I am in 8th grade. I came across your story, *My Sister's Keeper*, in 2009 when the movie came out. After watching the movie and getting the waterworks turned on, it inspired me to read the book. I found that the story remains in my mind long after the cover was closed. I found myself thinking about the events after I had finished the book it has taught me many life lessons, but three specific lessons really stick out.

You taught me that sometimes the hardest decision is the best decision. When Kate's mom, Sara, found out that Kate wants to die, she was heartbroken. Anna and Jesse understood, but Sara saw it like they were ready to give up on Kate. They all love her so much, but the amount of pain she endures is not worth living through. This lesson does not only apply to life or death situations. Sometimes I am torn between decisions. Once, I had the option of going camping with my friend or going to my grandmother's 84th birthday party. I really enjoy spending time with my friend, and maybe my grandmother will not notice I am gone. After reading your book, the answer was clear. Although it was a heart tearing decision, I reasoned with myself that there will always be another camping trip, but my grandmother will not ever turn 84 again. It turns out my grandmother has been developing health problems, and that few hours I spent with her seem so precious now. It was hard to make that decision, but in the end, it was the best decision.

You taught me that the bad experiences always lead to something better. When Ana unexpectedly died, other broken ends seemed to fall into place. Kate got her kidney transplant and lived, Brian overcame his alcohol addiction, Jesse became a policeman, and Campbell and Julia got married. This relates to my life, because some good friends of my family passed away in a tragic plane crash recently. Our family and friends have been having a hard time with it. Even though we grieve over our loss, the accident has brought us closer than ever before. It seems like we are one big family, and I am starting to believe we really are.

Last but not least, you taught me to not dwell on the past, because the future has so much more to bring. After Anna died the Fitzgerald's move on. Campbell doesn't commit suicide because he took Anna's life. He knows he made a mistake and grieves over it, but in the end he moves on.

He marries Julia, but never forgets Anna. Kate doesn't cry every day because she misses her sister. She feels like she takes Anna with her because she has Anna's kidney. Just like in your book, the moving on process of our friends' deaths is hard. They were a big part of our lives, and we will never forget them. Always remembering them does not require never moving on, though. Their children, family, and friends will eventually accept that their lives will never be the same, and accept the change. We remember the memories with our lost friends and families, but we also look forward to the new memories we will make in the future. Jodi, your book has helped me, especially through my recent losses and hardships. Each person who reads your book will take different lessons from it, but the lessons I learn are lifelong. I will share these lessons that I have uncovered. I will also share this book, so others can uncover their own lessons. Your book has changed my view of life and might eventually change my life.

Sincerely,

Haleigh Reed
Greensburg Jr. High School
Greensburg, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Taylor Rose
Letter to Lisi Harrison, Author of *The Clique*

Dear Lisi Harrison,

I recently read your book *The Clique*. The book made an impact on my life because it taught me when things get hard or tough don't give up, keep going. I also learned that it's ok to be yourself and to stick up for what you believe in. Your book also taught me to be more outgoing and to go to new places and make friends.

Claire went through so much from Massie and her friends, also known as the "clique" or "pretty committee". They spilled red paint on her new white skinny jeans, made her walk home in cold weather a couple of times, and so much more. Claire could have just decided to quit, but she didn't she kept on going. I can now stand up to people and not be afraid because your book is what inspired me to be able to do it. I've had to deal with this clique at school and I was scared because they were all taller and bigger than me. After reading *The Clique* I can now stand up for myself and the clique at our school.

I play volleyball at my school and after the season was over I still wanted to play so I went to a club party. The club I went to was at another school, and I didn't know anyone. It was hard to make friends because everybody already knew each other. This made me connect to the book because Claire moved from Florida to New York, Not knowing anyone. Claire slowly started to make friends and that was how it went with me at volleyball.

I just want to thank you one last time for writing a book that has inspired and changed me so much. Your books have made it so much easier to be myself around people. I've been able to make new friends, not just in volleyball but at school too. Claire got bullied, made fun of, and had to make all new friends. If she can do it, so can I.

Sincerely,

Taylor Rose
West Noble Middle School
Ligonier, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Abby Sengsanith

Letter to Stephen Chbosky, Author of *Perks of Being a Wallflower*

Dear Stephen Chbosky,

I am not a wallflower. I used to be, but now I am not. I realized this through Charlie's letters and his actions. The three main characters (for me): Sam, Patrick, and Charlie, meant a lot to me. I thought of myself as Charlie, and two of my friends as Sam and Patrick. When I was younger, I was sort of/thought of myself as a wallflower. I didn't talk much to the other kids because I was very shy and I didn't really join in during some of the activities. I then met who was soon to be my best friend for all eternity—just like when Patrick invited Charlie to come sit with them at the football game. As she and I started becoming better friends, she lit the spark inside of me that sort of makes me what I am today. Today I am loud, outgoing, determined, funny, fun, and well, I am still a little bit shy (which I probably will be a little bit for the rest of my life)!

This book made me realize that it is okay to be "them" or "the weirdos." Being "them" or "the weirdos," has made me realize that I've had some of the best times of my life so far while doing so. While being "silly" and "weird" I've found out this is the *real* me, and I've discovered it through this book.

The world around me now looks...different. All of the letters that Charlie wrote about life and relationships, I now realize that a lot of these things actually do happen in real life. I realize that these things don't just happen in stories or books, they happen in real life. Getting abused, suicide, relationships, high school drama, and many other things actually happen in life. Through reading this, it has opened my eyes about life. It has taught me that some of these scenarios will happen when I get older and I now understand them, even though I am only in middle school.

The quote, "Charlie, we accept the love we think we deserve." Has a gigantic reason for me putting it in this letter. First of all, it's my most favorite quote from the book, and lastly it is the cold, hard truth. This quote got me thinking a lot. It made me think about my friends, and my family. I literally even wrote it down so many times just to remember it! I honestly am not very sure if it relates to my life or not, but I know that this quote will have something to do with my life later on—I can just feel it.

Life. This book taught me the truth about life. Bad things happen. Sometimes there isn't always a "fairy tale" ending. Sometimes you make bad decisions and a lot of changes happen. I thought of one of my best friends when Sam went to college. My best friend was moving to a different

state. This was a big change for me and it made me angry and sad, just like it did to Charlie. I see Charlie in parts of myself and I see Sam and Patrick in my friends. I saw this whole novel as real life. Thank you for opening my eyes and showing me the reality of life.

Sincerely No Longer a Wallflower,

Abby Sengsanith
Klondike Middle School
West Lafayette, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Jared Sermersheim
Letter to Ben Mikaelson, Author of *Touching Spirit Bear*

Dear Ben Mikaelson,

When my seventh grade language arts teacher handed my group your novel, *Touching Spirit Bear*, I presumed it would just be another conventional book. I was erroneous. *Touching Spirit Bear* was an inspiring novel for many reasons.

The way Cole’s parents neglected him made me realize how blessed I truly am. Not everyone is as fortunate as I am. I would have to say your novel transformed my life. I will acknowledge that I used to pick on people without even thinking about how it will affect them or what even transpires in their personal life. After I had finished your book it surprisingly opened my eyes. Now I try my hardest not to descend to that level and be a bully. Even if it ever happens I try to make it right, like Cole does with Peter. I always think of this book before I say some mean, ignorant comment to or about someone.

Cole changed greatly throughout the novel. Garvey and Edwin influenced him with great tactics that most definitely worked. This relates to my life because it sent a caution sign dashing across my brain, saying “hey man, what are you doing?” every once and awhile.

Touching Spirit Bear explains that anyone can change their ways and that everyone deserves a second chance. You have convinced me to go out of my way to help people that, maybe, I don’t even know. Your novel has greatly contributed to my life. I am a much conformed person because of this.

You helped me to always give 100% in school and sports. Your book persuaded me to become more open with my family and to spend more time in their company. I would strongly recommend this book to anyone willing to read it. I feel I am an altogether better person because of this book and for that I thank you.

Sincerely,

Jared Sermersheim
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Olivia Simon

Letter to E. L. Konigsberg, Author of *The View from Saturday*

Dear E. L. Konigsberg,

I have grown up learning to dread books that are “required to read” by the teachers. These are usually about social studies, causing very little enthusiasm from the students. I had a different reaction to *The View from Saturday*. It has changed the way I view people and my outlook on life.

My heart broke after hearing the bullying that Julian Singh went through after starting at Epiphany. Honestly, nobody deserves that. I vowed to never let any taunting or bullying that I saw going on let be. I have stood up to numerous people, and even gained a couple of friends.

Noah Gershom has completely changed my last minute thinking strategies. If I was helping plan a wedding, I would go berserk if I had to figure out gifts for random people at the eleventh hour. He has showed me not to stress if I am under pressure like that.

Ethan Potter showed me that no matter what anyone says, you can always exceed people’s expectation and branch out to achieve you own dreams. No matter how much his parent’s wanted him to take over the farm because his brother has his whole life planned out, with far greater things ahead than they think Ethan can achieve, he proved them wrong.

Nadia Diamondstein is the character I can relate to the most. This is because she feels left out and thinks that she is not important. I have felt like that before, and believe me, it is terrible. When her father congratulates Margret on the sea turtles instead of her, I literally felt her pain. Nadia finds a metaphor in her life and that of the sea turtles. I also find metaphors in my everyday life.

Mrs. Olinski showed me that no matter how challenged you are, if you can try, you can change other’s lives. She definitely changed Nadia’s, Ethan’s, Noah’s, and Julian’s lives, for better.

The View from Saturday will not only continue to inspire young people, but show people how to change their lives and the lives of others.

Sincerely,

Olivia Simon
Belzer Middle School
Indianapolis, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Carly Vaught
Letter to Christopher Paolini, Author of *Eragon*

Dear Mr. Paolini,

When I first started your book, *Eragon*, I visualized Eragon as a poor, pitiful farm boy that has to struggle to hunt for his family and simply gets some bad luck when stumbling across Saphira's egg. However, as the story progressed, Eragon and Saphira got stronger. Eragon and Saphira battled practically every day, constantly in hiding, always on the run. The more the story moved on, the more I realized that even Eragon, a poor, simply farm boy with no special talents and anything that separates him from anyone else, can come out on top against the odds and become a hero. I learned that you don't have to be the most powerful or the strongest or the toughest or the fastest or even the wisest, normal, everyday people, like me, that don't go on elaborate adventures or don't explore the vast unknown can still be heroes.

I know that *Eragon* is a book and that it is fiction and that none of the things such as dragons, elves, or magic could actually really happen, but even the smallest of things like helping someone rake leaves or donating a few dollars to a charity can make us a hero to someone. True, those acts are not as heroic as the acts Eragon does such as saving Arya from Dras Leona, saving entire cities from urgal attacks, or killing a shade, but it doesn't mean that the simplest thing can't have a large impact on someone's life.

It's funny how people these days think that you have to be someone great or intimidating to anything significant in this world, but, in truth, everyone can make a difference in one way or another. Even if it starts out minute, such as Eragon's journey around Alagaesia, it can expand into a large impact and before you know it, it is spread all over the state, then the country, and then all throughout the whole world.

Yourself as an example, you wrote *Eragon* when you were sixteen (if I remember correctly) and that has inspired me to start writing too. I even got to go to your book signing up in Indianapolis, Indiana, and it made me realize how young you really were and not everyone can write a book series such as the *Inheritance Cycle* at such a young age. When I first heard about *Eragon*, it seemed pretty interesting from what I read on the back, but once I started reading I couldn't stop and after waiting nearly a year after reading *Brisingsr*, I cried when I finished reading the last book, *Inheritance*, because I had been reading the story for so long and I knew so

much that I was really depressed that the story was over, but it really made me think about how even the people that not many people know about can become important, if not to everybody then to someone and in the end, that's all that really matters.

Sincerely,

Carly Vaught
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Level Two State Semifinalist—Anna Wagner
Letter to Bill Lorencz, Author of *Cinderella*

Dear Bill Lorencz,

With a bibbidi bobbidi boo my life was magically transformed into one of a princess. I would put on my tiara and gown and everything would be as right as rain. Smiles were recovered and tears were dried, ready for the ball.

Cinderella was my favorite book, and only book my ears were accustomed to. It was the only book my eyes would shut to, and where my dreams would ignite every night. If I did not fall asleep my mom would repeatedly read it until I was on a carriage of dreams. My mom even stopped returning my beloved book to its home on the book shelf. It soon had a new home on my night stand beside my bed.

Cinderella always reminded me of myself, a girl with a heart filled with dreams waiting to come true. I use to feel just like her when she was all alone in the garden struck with sorrow. I would also find myself sad and alone. I did not have an abundant amount of friends when I was young; I was too shy to make any. The thought of being a princess made me feel like I was one with all the friends in the world.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can hurt me. *Cinderella* let me see I could do something about it. I have true friends in the world, I just have to know how to speak up and find them. I grasped her will and determination to get back up instead of falling back down again. I learned you have to have the will to believe, and a little magic never hurts. I received the ability to be a princess, and courage to find friends who would accept me for who I am.

In the end, my wish was granted and that was the end of that fairytale. It may not have turned into your usual fairytale, but it was magical enough for me as my friends and I rode away in a carriage of friendship and giggles into the sunset. Who know, tonight might be my night at the ball.

Sincerely,

Anna Wagner
Jasper Middle School
Jasper, IN

Clouds

Little lumps of snow,
seem to cover the sky,
gazing up,
you stare,
wondering if you will every walk up there,
though you won't,
you try,
and find,
it was a lie,
you stand,
on top of the world,
nothing in your way,
so could it be,
that there's a different world
hiding up here,
Could it be that it's
not just me?

Indiana State Library & Indiana Center for the Book

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE 2013

Winning Letters by Young Hoosier Writers

LEVEL THREE STATE WINNERS: GRADES 9 THROUGH 12

1st Place: Victoria Lincourt—Crawfordsville High School / 165

2nd Place: Sandy Rickerd—Logansport High School / 167

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Trey Rogers / 185

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Kittens

Furballs that play like
Cute little children who are
“Purrfect,” in and out.

Ravenous Winds

Howling winds chase across the land
Like hungry wolves gnawing branches off trees
“Til there is only a forest of spines.

Spring

Out of the dead woods
Come new signs of life that speak
A new beginning

Level Three State Winner / First Place—Victoria Lincourt
Letter to Harper Lee, Author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Dear Harper,

While some might look back on childhood as a montage of soccer games, sleepovers, and chocolate chip cookies, I will always see my memories of growing up as a giant stack of books next to my bed. To an adolescent self, books seemed to be a cool glass of lemonade, and I a weary desert traveler. I loved devouring the stories contained. From adventure, to mystery, to fantasy, I read them all – and at an alarming pace. Countless times, my mother found me reading under the covers by the light of a flashlight, or she saw me stumble through the morning after a sleep deprived night filled with Nancy Drew, the Magic Tree House, or the adventures of Narnia. Books were the fodder for my imagination, and I read them solely for their stories.

My father first recommended *To Kill a Mockingbird* to me one lazy summer day. I cracked open the red hardback cover and flopped down on our couch, determined to give it a try. I traced the first words with my eyes, and struggled through three pages. When my father walked through the back door half an hour later, he found me frustrated and grumpy. He agreed to let me set down the book, as long as I tried again after dinner. We reconvened on the couch, under dusky lamplight, and he was the one to open the book to the first page. I snuggled up against him, and smelled his cotton shirt. He began to read, and as his smooth voice played with the language, the book began to enchant me.

I fell in love with the story, but I was more enthralled with the parallels the small details drew to my own life. I grew up in western Virginia, and the summers you described called every scent, scene and sound into an alarming clarity. Like Jem was to Scout, my kid brother was my constant playmate. Days would be spent out of doors, acting out scenes of our own imagining and playing parts we created for each other. When my father’s car pulled into the driveway after a long day of work, my brother and I would race to his window and ambush him as soon as he stepped out. When I read the book for the first time, and had to assign an image to Atticus, the role was always played by my father. With his round, wire rimmed glasses, his habit for sweater vests, and an affinity for newspaper reading, my father with his wise words of wisdom (“life is an open-book test”, “if at first you don’t succeed, try, try, and try again”) was and is my picture of what Atticus should be. These parallels between book life, and reality made me realize the full extent a book can reach. Before I

read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I had no idea that a book might be able to relate to me. The tale of the summers that changed a young girl's life, changed mine too.

After reading your book, it saddens me to hear degrading slurs shouted in school and on the bus. Even if I didn't grow up knowing racism first hand, like Jem and Scout, I haven't gone without encountering it. I hear words and names tossed around between my classmates as if they were supposed to be a part of a casual, every day conversation, and it makes me want to scream. Once again, I can relate to your book. Just as Jem was blindsided by the results of Tom Robinson's trial, I am caught off guard. How can this bigotry still exist? Have we not learned our lesson, taught through the failures of the past? Have we forgotten? Has it been so long since we decided to do away with prejudice? Or have some still held on to a speck of hatred. Perhaps they have passed it down through the generations. It is in stories like yours that my hope for humanity is restored. Maybe all we need is a kindly neighbor to watch over us from his front room window. Maybe we can be that neighbor for each other.

Sincerely,

Victoria Lincourt
Crawfordsville High School
Crawfordsville, IN

Level Three State Winner / Second Place—Sandy Rickerd
Letter to Ellen Hopkins, Author of *Perfect*

Dear Ellen Hopkins,

Perfection is a very general term meaning something without flaw, but what does it mean to *be* perfect? What does it mean if you have your own opinion of what is flawed and what is not? I had this question for a long time. When I was 16 and a half I read the novel *Perfect*. I'd read all your books before it, feeling a small connection to the intricate poetry and the characters handily crafted by you, not having many similarities to them. As I read *Perfect*, something was difference, something was new, and I kept reading and reading. Little did I know how much I truly had in common with the characters in this book.

As quoted from another of your books, "Clear Blue Easy is clearly blue, but it wasn't easy finding out I was pregnant," which was exactly how I felt in February of 2010. I was almost fifteen and here I was, life had barely even started yet and I was already in charge of another. What was worse was that around my sixteenth birthday the relationship with my son's father ended in disaster, and I was convinced it was because of the baby weight left over. I starved myself for weeks, would eat and then starve myself again, striving for perfection, striving for the love I could no longer receive from my ex, until I was down to 80 pounds at 16 years old and 5'4". In that sense I remind myself of Kendra, who starved herself, striving to be skinny because she believed she was fat.

In another way I remind myself of Cara, who tries so desperately to be who everyone wants her to be, to be up to their expectations and can't be herself without letting everyone down. She makes the decision to follow her heart anyway. When I discovered my own pregnancy, I knew I'd never abort, that was something I could never handle doing, but adoption wasn't completely thrown out. Giving him up would've been the hardest decision I'd ever make, and something a lot of people thought I should do. But I knew that I was capable of caring for my own child, even though giving him up and continuing my teenage life was what was expected of me.

So I wasn't everything they could have hoped for in an honors student, but Cara and I both realized that there's no happiness in being what someone expects of you if it's not who you really are or want to be, or if it's not what you want to do with your life. Every character in the book strived for perfection in some way, to make someone else happy, even though what everyone else wanted, wasn't what they wanted. In the end,

when disaster strikes every character in their own way, they realize, they've only got one life to live, and one chance to be who they were born to be.

My favorite thing about this book was that it taught me that perfection is an opinion, and as long as I like who I am, I'm perfect just the way I am. You taught me, as an individual to love myself, despite who did or didn't love me. You taught me to believe in myself and be the person I was born to be. I'm a wonderful teenage mother who loves her son unconditionally, despite everything and everyone who doubted my ability and thought I would be better off if I gave him up, and a girl who's not too thin or too fat to be loved. I know I'm not the only one who learned to fully love myself from this book.

Sincerely,

Sandy Rickard
Logansport High School
Logansport, IN

Level Three State Winner / Third Place—Legend Johnson

Letter to Kurt Vonnegut, Author of *Harrison Bergeron*

Dear Kurt Vonnegut,

Your short story, *Harrison Bergeron*, has spoken volumes to me over the course of my high school career. The precision of the thin veil of dark humor that you used to wrap up this story of a futuristic dystopian America has pushed me as a writer by emulating your writing style and poignancy. *Harrison Bergeron* is not astonishing in length, but that is exactly why it holds so much power. This story is memorable to me because of how much is conveyed in so few words. However, it is the content of the story that has pushed me as a person; your warning against total equality and how it could transform this nation into one run by imbeciles has inspired my own philosophies and ideals.

Each individual has talents of different degrees. On the other hand, I, for instance, am not particularly an amazing singer. I've never had the rhythm for dancing. According to my handwriting I ought to be a doctor, so it's safe to say I'm not exactly artsy. Fortunately, what I have always enjoyed most and had a knack for is language and writing. Along with the lessons I have taken away from your short story, I have aspired to be a great writer just as you have been. The foreshadowing and ironic devices you used in *Harrison Bergeron* along with the comfortable but interesting use of vocabulary make it enjoyable to read but easily relatable to people of all ages and one of my favorite stories. To be frank, I may or may not have had one or more boyfriends read this in the past (because there's a lot to be said about a boy who can—or can't—appreciate fine literature).

I was in the eighth grade when I was first introduced to *Harrison Bergeron*. We were beginning our unit on dystopian societies; my English teacher was so excited to discuss so we could begin George Orwell's novel *1984*. I still remember not participating much in that discussion because the image of Harrison and the beautiful dancer falling through the air, "dead before they hit the floor," stuck to the walls of my brain like peanut butter. Thinking about living in the day and age of *Harrison Bergeron* sent chills down my spine. I can't fathom the pain that day to day life would hold if I had to spend it with weights buckled around my neck or with an ear piece spouting sounds of gunshots or sirens into my head every twenty seconds. More importantly, I can't imagine how it would feel to be an individual *without* handicaps if I lived in this dystopia. To know that I was considered "normal" or "standard" or "talentless" while those around me were so great in strength or had such breathtaking appearances that they were forced to harbor hindrances so that I wouldn't feel lowly, to me, defeats the purpose of forcing equality.

Equality is not found in physical beauty, ability, or sameness. Equality is how we treat one another. Equality is the birth given right to life, love, and the pursuit of happiness. We are all *born* equal; this is where the human race lacks. In order to remain equal we must all have equal opportunity because it allows us to make a *choice*—we did not choose the life we were born into, how we look, or our natural talents. Judging someone according to their abilities is what can make one person “better” than the other. Humans are unique creatures with unique situations and needs. Making each of us “equal” to the other only lowers the standard of life. After all, communism only really looks good on paper.

Before having read *Harrison Bergeron* and realizing the horrifying effects that something like total equality could bring, I would have gladly agreed to live in a society void of competition. Competition for a teenager is intimidating. Eliminating the pressure to perform as well as my peers would have sounded terrific. I had spent too much time playing the “compare and despair” game. I would focus on shallow aesthetics or talents of other girls around me, “this girl is prettier than me, that girl is a better athlete, she’s smarter than I am,” and so on. Your short story has taught me that the world needs variety to function from the best people to the worst. We need the all-star Harrisons of the world, as well as the not so brilliant Hazels with the brightest minds leading us all so we can continue improving as a society. As you said before, Mr. Vonnegut, “True terror is to wake up one morning and realize that fools run the world.”

Harrison Bergeron is a reminder to me that whether I am the best at something or the worst, I am important in the balance of society as a whole. You as a writer have inspired me to read and strive for intelligence. I long for the day when a teenager writes to me about a story that I wrote that they connected to so deeply that they still remember the day they read it and how they felt goosebumps from the pure emotion in the text. Your innovative thinking has impacted me in ways that have changed my entire perspective on life.

For your work, I thank you.

Sincerely,

Legend M. Johnson
Crawfordsville High School
Crawfordsville, IN

Level Three State Winner / Honorable Mention—Alex Cagle
Letter to James Bradley, Author of *Flags of Our Fathers*

Dear James Bradley,

Your book, *Flags of our Fathers*, affected me on a very personal level. What I am going to write about is an *extremely* personal story. Even though this is going to be hard for me to tell I shall not withhold any information about how this book affected me. I will tell every fact to the best of my ability no matter how personal, for otherwise I shall not be able to effectively write this letter.

When I first read your book I was in 5th grade. At the time I was fascinated and *very* interested in war (by very interested you could almost say addicted...). Whether it was a book, movie, or video game, chances were, I was going to like it or be immediately interested in it. Sadly though, it gradually grew into an obsession. In literature class every written assignment I somehow found a way to incorporate war or some kind of violence. It even started to take a major toll on my grades. When I first saw your book, *Flags of Our Fathers*, I was like “Oh sweet! A war book! This looks epic!” But as I started reading your book I was almost bored. All it talked about was the characters and their early lives before the war. I wasn’t interested in that stuff. But I continued to read. I was just looking forward to the battle scenes. I couldn’t wait! But to be honest with you though, I don’t think I was prepared. Now, the descriptions did not go into much *individual* detail about the bodies and such. But did give some and that was enough. It talked about the description of “It was like trying to walk through rain and not getting wet,” about the bodies on the shores, bunches of men falling as they were shot, explosions ripping men apart, and about how some reacted to the bloodshed and slaughter. This is when I first started to realize the *emotional* cost (something that I haven’t even considered before).

As it went through the different accounts of the five flag raisers and what they faced, I started to have an even *bigger* understanding of what it was really like for them. I can still remember when you first talked about the flag raising and everybody cheered. It was an inspiration for them all and one of the defining moments of the battle for Iwo Jima and the entire war! Then when I was almost disappointed to find out that the picture taken was not of the initial flag rising where everyone on the island cheered. They were actually only there to replace the flag. Then when it talked about the first two flag raisers to die on the island I almost cried for the first time while reading a book. But, the part of the battle that got to me the most was when you talked about how your father’s friend got captured and tortured. It talked about how horribly it affected him. How he never talked about it to you and rest of his family. He

never told you about his experiences or even the medal he won. It affected him so deeply he never even wanted to talk about it. This again helped me realize that war affected people so much more than I thought and realized. I realized that war wasn't "fun" or "exciting", it was one of the most horrendous scourges on this world, and pitting men against each other with weapons, making them kill each other for lands and resources or even things as petty as personal grudges. It destroys lives and families and even in some cases it destroys minds. I'm sure you have heard of PTSD otherwise known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. A quote from the book also really opened up my eyes. To this day, this is by far one of my favorite quotes: "The real heroes were the ones who never came back"-Not sure who said it. I can't say I really know why though, sorry, it just...did.

Now by this point I was almost in tears, but the final straw that caused me to break down was the deaths of each flag raiser after the war. You talked about how Ira Hayes was just found dead and no one knows how he died. Almost like nobody cared. When it talked about the janitor finding Rene Gannon's body in the janitor closet after suffering a heart attack. But the last death got to me the deepest (I was basically in tears). The final description of your father's death, John Bradley's last few breaths, and how his wife told him that if he was ready to go, then go, and finally, when he breathes his last. I was downright crying at this moment. This was the first book I EVER cried about let alone a war book. It affected me that much.

After I read this book I finally realized the cost and effect of war on people. I learned that it wasn't always exciting and fun and adventurous, it was also emotional, and can take a horrible toll on people and their lives. After this book, I was no longer obsessed with war and violence. Now granted I still have an interest in it (an avid one at that) but not to the extent of before I read this book, and it doesn't stop me from enjoying games like *Call of Duty* and *Medal of Honour*. I also eventually went on to make the honour roll 3 out of the 4 quarters that same school year. Even now I am still getting great grades and I have not come across this problem since then. For this I thank you James and John Bradley, one for writing it and another for being the subject of the writing. Without you I might still have this problem and not be where I am today. Thank you.

Sincerely and thank you,

Alex Cagle
New Tech at Wayne High School
Ft. Wayne, Indiana

Level Three State Winner / Honorable Mention—Luiz De Assis-Wilson
Letter to Richard Rodriguez, Author of *Hunger for Memory*

Dear Richard Rodriguez,

Hunger for Memory was truly an eye opening and life changing book for me. In many ways my life mirrors that of Richard Rodriguez: I am a Latino in an area where whites are the most predominant population, I am a Catholic, both of my parents come from humble beginnings, but most importantly, I am what others consider to be a scholarship boy. Unfortunately that final statement is not completely true, I am probably the laziest scholarship boy that one may meet. I often do not do my homework, or do not complete projects. The only reason one would consider me a scholarship boy is because I am in the honors program at my school, and because even though I do not do my homework, I somehow manage to get good grades. One would question themselves, saying that work ethic was one of the most important, if not the main quality of a scholarship student. I would agree with that statement completely.

Work ethic is the important quality that ANY person can have. And that is why my situation was such a shame. My laziness was the cause of grades being much lower than my teachers expected them to be. All my teachers have told me at some point in my schooling the exact same thing, “Felipe, you are a very intelligent young man, but you just don’t apply yourself.” This book has finally allowed me to truly hear and listen to what my teachers have been telling me for the past 8 years of my life. I am finally making an attempt at applying myself. I have noticed a change in my attitude towards school. It is not a burden anymore. I look forward to the work I put in, so then I am able to reap the benefits. The benefits, are what have helped me notice the change in my attitude. My grades have made a significant jump. My grade in English class last semester was stuck with a D, but is currently at a B and has the possibility of rising. I would much rather see A’s and B’s than C’s or D’s. So for my current work ethic, I can thank Richard Rodriguez. There is one other very important thing that we have in common though. When I am assigned a personal essay as a writing assignment in English, I always struggle to make up a fictional story, or I just don’t do the assignment at all. Also, when doing autobiographical writing, I just can’t ever seem to recount a story truthfully.

His book has inspired me to write about my life and about how I feel. This inspiration is not for school though, it is personal. It is true that writing to an unknown audience takes weight off of one’s shoulders,

through expressing his/her true self. This self-expression is the reason I have recently taken up writing in a journal. I find that if I can recount events truthfully, than my writing improves and can also become more creative. I am able to twist real-life situations and turn them into a fictional story. My journal is very relaxing and stress free way of seeing the day's events and reviewing what had happened. I also see the journal as a way of improving my writing skills. As I said, I struggle in English so I will take every possible opportunity to improve my writing, thus improving my grade. Even though Richard Rodriguez and I seem to have an abundance of similarities, we do have one major difference. Once he had learned English, he almost refused to speak Spanish with his family again. On the other hand I am Brazilian and I speak Portuguese with my family every chance that I get. I enjoy speaking Portuguese, and I am always attempting to improve my vocabulary in it. While I was reading the book it made me very curious as to why he would give up Spanish when knowing two languages is such a huge educational advantage. My background in Portuguese has helped greatly with learning the Latin roots and in my own learning of Spanish. I would believe that a scholarship student would take every possible chance they could get to have an edge in the classroom, but he gave up a huge advantage. I know that the nuns made his parents speak English with him, but when he learned English well enough why didn't he switch back to speaking Spanish with his family? This book has been my biggest inspiration for wanting to do well in school.

Luiz de Assis-Wilson
Crawfordsville High School
Crawfordsville IN

Level Three State Winner / Honorable Mention—Chase Streetman
Letter to John Green, Author of *The Fault in Our Stars*

Dear John Green,

I can't say I'm entirely happy with you. Your novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*, left me bawling for an entire afternoon. As proud as you should be, for this is the only book that's ever made me cry, it was kind of a damper on my day! I've never read a book that's touched me as deeply as this quirky little tragedy.

It's truly something special that all the mundane qualities of *The Fault of Our Stars* are exactly what make it so memorable. It isn't grand, sweeping, dime-a-dozen tragedy of perfect characters. It's just so *human*. The dialect that Hazel and the other teen characters use is so organic and so accurate to how teens actually speak, that I could genuinely see many of the conversations happening between my friends and I. More importantly, these characters aren't perfect, and they act like one would truly act in their respective scenarios.

This book made me forever want to act the opposite of Hazel. As Hazel spends her entire life, unknowing of how long that may be, trying to minimize the fallout that her death will cause; I, quite selfishly, want to maximize the damage that my death will cause. It's made me realize how quickly life can be taken away, with or without cancer, and I want to make sure that I make the most of my time on earth. It's made me want to spend as much time as possible with my friends and family, as small as each opportunity may be.

What truly surprised me about this novel is how deeply invested I was in these characters, who became not unlike friends to me (in a completely not lonely way), because they felt so real. I can attest to the fact that many other people I know who read *The Fault in Our Stars* felt a similar emotion, and, even now, we can quietly exchange a "ceci n'est pas une pipe", and laugh as we remember the story of Hazel and Augustus, the friends we once knew.

More impressively, and I'm ready to descend into outright flattery, I'm even more impressed, and admittedly, a little proud, that this all came from a local author. While I know a few authors who came out of Indiana, I've never been truly impressed by any of them, with the obvious exception of Kurt Vonnegut.

Despite the several fond memories of the happy moments, I more than anything else remember the lessons that *The Fault of Our Stars* taught

me. It taught me about pain, and mortality, and frailty. As was so eloquently said by Augustus, "I fear oblivion... I fear it like the proverbial blind man who's afraid of the dark." It is these lessons that have stuck with me for the year and a half since I read it, and I sincerely thank you for it.

Sincerely,

Chase Streetman
Crawfordsville High School
Crawfordsville IN

Level Three State Winner / Honorable Mention—Candace Winfrey
Letter to Khaled Hosseini Author of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Dear Mr. Hosseini,

I live in Indianapolis and am a senior at Pike High School. During my junior year, we had a summer reading assignment which required us to read *The Kite Runner* and then take an assessment on it. Also during the winter, we were required to write a minimum of twelve pages over a novel of our choice, and I chose to read *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Your first novel had opened my heart and filled me with ideas and I trusted you enough as a person and writer to read your second novel. It is not adequate enough to say that your novel touched my soul.

The stories of Mariam and Laila are marvels and they taught me much about the lives of women in the Eastern Hemisphere of the world. Many people take advantage of the privileges that they have access to, like the ability to go outside without shame, the ability to speak their mind, the opportunity to find true love, and the promise of being free. I cherish my life more than I used to after hearing the stories of your two remarkable women. Even though they are fictitious, I know they represent many countries filled with women that have the same struggles. If your novel taught me anything, it is that no one is destined to be alone. While that may be true, many people of the world – especially from the West – see these truths about the East and know nothing about it. Mariam and Laila worked together even though their lives were at stake, and in a way they both were set free even though it resulted in one of their deaths. The West aids the East when there are large battles that involve many different people, but they do not realize that there is a war that isn't fought on fronts or hills, but inside homes on ordinary streets. We will spend billions of dollars when people are getting killed. I agree that this is necessary but those people are no longer alive, whereas the women who are abused by their husbands and in-laws suffer everyday with scars from weapons, emotional damage, and bodily transformations resulting from being burned. Their suffering does not end and their war continues for years. They wish for death to come but it won't unless they commit suicide or they are killed by their husband or in-laws. I have sympathy for the women that you give a voice to in your novel.

I plan to go to college and pursue degrees in Music Education, Social Studies Education and Law. After those have been achieved I dream of moving to a Middle Eastern country and living as a house-wife for a year.

I will check into an embassy of course, and I will move into a family's home and share duties with the wife. I will live and breathe as a Middle Eastern wife and I will write a memoir about my experiences. Many people discourage me from pursuing this goal, but I believe that the memoir that I write will appeal to Americans and make them fully understand what the truth is. I understand that not every marriage in the Middle East is abusive and that there are couples who deeply love each other and their children, and it offends me when Westerners generalize Middle Easterners by relating the religion of Islam to the rates of abuse in households. That would be like blaming Christianity for domestic violence in America. I believe that if Americans hear the struggles of Middle Eastern wives coming from an American who has experienced the same struggles, more will be done to provide aid to them. I myself have battled with depression and endured the fight with a prescription that seemed tempting when my life was too difficult to live. I now find myself selfish to not appreciate my life when there are those women who live horrible lives. My life is perfectly fine. This is why I feel like I owe it to these women that you speak for to experience what they feel every day and then educate Americans – truly appeal to them – the truths and facts that are often hidden from us.

If this novel has done anything, it has educated me about my potential and worth. I have the potential to help these women and decrease the domestic abuse occurrences in the Middle East. Laila had a happy ending with her new family. There is always hope for a battered woman, but only if someone guides her and sacrifices their time to save her life. I sincerely want to be this someone. I have lived a wonderful life with musical abilities and academic talents and have done nothing to give back to the world which provides it for me. Sure, I have performed volunteer activities in my city, but there is so much more than just my city. Every person is a person, and I would not be the person I am today without the forces of the world guiding me. So I in turn will not forget those that are lost and abused. I will not forget those who have no voice. I will not forget those who also have the potential to have a miraculous life like the one I have lived.

Sincerely,

Candace Winfrey
Pike High School
Indianapolis IN

Level Three State Semifinalist—Valeria Castro

Letter to Kate DiCamillo, Author of *Because of Winn-Dixie*

Dear Kate DiCamillo,

I can't say that your book *Because of Winn-Dixie* helped me out of a dark time, but then again I can't really tell you for sure. *Because of Winn-Dixie* may have been a simple children's book that wasn't nearly as complex as let's say, *Harry Potter*, but it still managed to make an impact on me because of the characters and the simple plot. I was eight years old when I first read your book and it made me happy. That may sound like an elementary school word that I shouldn't be using for my age, but that's how I felt, "happy". Your books affected me in a lot of simple ways. I wasn't able to relate to Opal in every aspect, but I knew how hard it could be to only have one parent and have to constantly wish that you were like every other kid in your neighborhood. I could also relate to Opal's need for a companion, a friend, or in her case, Winn-Dixie.

I was 7 years old when my mom and I came to the United States. I only had my mom when I was introduced to my new stepfather. At the time I was glad that my mom found someone she cared for since my real father had cheated on her with women way below his own age. I was also glad that I would finally have a dad. He may have turned out to be less of a father than I expected, but I, we, were able to move on. I didn't know English at the time so it was really difficult at school. To make matters worse, I was younger and smaller than all of the other kids in my 3rd grade class. The school I was enrolled in told my mom that I needed to learn English in 2 months or I would be held back a grade. Luckily, I was assigned a really talented English teacher and was greatly blessed by God. The problem was that I didn't have much luck with kids my own age, let alone older ones. I relied on the friendship of my teachers, God, and my mom.

My mom told me countless times "you can do it mi amor because you are a smart girl." To tell you the truth, it took some time to believe her. As soon as I did start to believe her words, we realized that my stepfather was becoming meaner and meaner until we got so sick of it my mom finally divorced him. It wasn't as fast of a process as it sounds. It wasn't like we just decided he was too rude and dropped him. It was a slight realization, but more of something that had to be done. Along with the divorce came the hardships of facing the unknown. We prayed to the Lord that everything would turn out according to his will, and that it would benefit us in the long run. We didn't have a house, a car, or a solid job other than the

houses my mom and I over the weekends. We had faith in the Lord that everything would turn out just the way we wanted it to, even if we had a few bumps and bruises along the way.

Within my stash of books, I had “Because of Winn-Dixie”. Maybe it was the simple reality within the book that made me feel better, or maybe it was because I knew that other kids such as Opal and I were going through tough spots too. I felt reassured that I wasn’t alone. Sometimes I would get to reading books about the hardships of another book character. Problems such as bullying, being an orphan, or some other type of complication were the most common. Usually, they would find a solution within a hidden realm of some sort or some kind of supernatural source that didn’t occur in my everyday life. Those characters may have had hardships, but I wasn’t going to find the solution to my problems in Hogwarts!

Because of Winn-Dixie was a story that I could relate to and take comfort in. It was a story that made me laugh and sometimes even cry. I became a person that tried her best to not judge a book by its cover, to take chances, and stand up for what I believed in. I’m not sure if that was your initial take home message, but I’m glad that I was able to see myself in your book, as well as what I was lacking, which was mainly *confidence*. I will admit that sometimes I forget to be confident and to not be pushed down by what I don’t understand, but because of Winn-Dixie I’m going to stop trying, but rather start *doing*.

Sincerely,

Valeria Castro
Wayne High School
Fort Wayne IN

Level Three State Semifinalist—Carleigh Hughes
Letter to Harper Lee, Author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Dear Harper Lee,

I read your book *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and thought it was a very interesting, realistic, and touching story. At first I didn't truly like your book because it started off slow, but as I continued to read, I began to actually like it. Your book really touched me; it was very inspirational and shows that you should never judge a book by its cover! You built up the action very well, and always had me on my toes. After I got midway through, I started to enjoy the novel.

When Boo Radley was leaving the presents for the children, I was very confused and a little creeped out, but as the story progressed I started to understand the man better. The racism certainly shocked me, I had no idea it was as bad as it was. I truly felt sorry for Tom Robinson because he shouldn't be accused because of his race. I really loved Scout in the book because she stood up for herself and what she believed in and was a very strong, goodhearted young lady. She really touched my heart because she gave everyone a chance. She had faith that everyone has some good in them and didn't judge them by their race. I was very disappointed in the Ewells; they were truly just mean people. They tried to get a man put away for being black. I couldn't stand how they lied all that time. I was very angry when Bob Ewell attacked the children, but I loved that part in the book because of how courageous Boo Radley was. Overall, the book was very well written, and it touched me deeply.

I truly did love this story even though I probably wouldn't read again, but that is only because I don't enjoy reading. The theme is a very important life lesson, never judge a book by its cover. No one should ever be disrespected because of who they are or what color they are. The novel really made me sad because of how rude a lot of people were, but also very happy that there was someone to stand up to them. From this story I have learned to always give someone a chance before just assuming they are not a good person, because I truly believe that there is good in every single person.

Sincerely,

Carleigh Hughes
Switzerland County High School
Vevay IN

Level Three State Semifinalist—Adeli Kinne

Letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, Author of *The Great Gatsby*

Dear Mr. Fitzgerald,

I thoroughly enjoyed reading your classic novel, *The Great Gatsby*. The book helped me realize things about civilization that I never noticed before. It also made me aware of a situation currently happening in my family that is similar to that of Jay Gatsby's.

In American society today, people are beginning to believe wealth is the key to happiness. This is not entirely true, which is proven in your book. Even though Jay Gatsby was a multi-millionaire and owned a luxurious home, he was not happy because he lacked his true love Daisy Buchanan. He thought that if accumulated a great fortune, she wouldn't be able to resist him. Even though this appeared to be true at first, Daisy soon began to lose interest in him. A perfect example of this was her absence at Gatsby's funeral.

My uncle, like Mr. Gatsby, is also a millionaire with a lavish residence himself. He possesses every physical object any middle class citizen would dream of, yet he has failed to find happiness. Divorced after a twenty year marriage and the father of a daughter with an eating disorder and self esteem issues, his life is in a state of misery. Though outward appearances suggest that he is a perfectly satisfied being, conversation alone will reveal a discontented soul who yearns for more no matter how much he acquires.

I am so glad your book, no matter how depressing, contained a lesson like this in it. Humans need to understand the amount of pleasure you find in your life is not determined by how rich you are monetarily. I know that no amount of money can buy me a life filled with meaningful relationships with family and friends, a profound spiritual connection to God, and a dream of a career that no one take away from me. Money is not in my equation for discovering true happiness.

Sincerely,

Adeli Kinne
Switzerland County High School
Vevay, Indiana

Level Three State Semifinalist—Samuel Lucas

Letter to Richard Rodriguez, Author of *The Hunger of Memory*

Dear Mr. Rodriguez,

After reading *The Hunger of Memory* my look on the idea of racism was dramatically altered for the better. So many people including myself always obtained the notion that African Americans were mostly the single race that was attacked by prejudice and segregation. Yet, despite the fact that blacks were targets for discrimination I began to understand the hardships that the Hispanics were forced to endure as well. A glaring disadvantage that the Hispanics had was their limited opportunity for education. While you were obviously able to steel yourself and become successful in the academic field, there were many others that did not have the determination or even the ability to do so. Your writing strongly and passionately described the situation that your family and race was in. It was truly depressing to learn of the pain and suffering that Hispanics had to withstand in that time period.

Me still being a young man I can relate to the variety emotions that must have been swirling about your mind. However it would be near impossible to fully comprehend how much of a struggle your younger years must have been. Your unbelievably strong faith in the Catholic religion inspired me to become stronger in my own beliefs. After reading the book I discovered so many parts of myself that I had no idea existed. It may sound cliché, but I was quite honestly humiliated of myself. The idea that I always had was required to feel pity for the minority and try to give them space. Now that I have been subject to your world I see the neglect and respect simply does not apply in this situation. My genuine shock at how utterly wrong I was in my thoughts and beliefs was an enormous wake up call. Your book has recently been a constant reminder of how pampered my own life has been. I may not be able to relate completely with your experiences, but I do wish to console and congratulate you for the pure stoicism you showed in your hardest times

Sincerely,

Samuel Lucas
Crawfordsville High School
Crawfordsville, IN

Level Three State Semifinalist—Charlie Reynolds
Letter to Ryan Smithson, Author of *Ghosts of War*

Dear Ryan Smithson,

I got this book the *Ghosts Of War* from my school library. I really respect what you did for our country. This book really inspired me and now I'm actually considering joining the military. I feel like it would be an honor to work in the line of duty that so many great people have worked in before me, and to become an honorable and respectable soldier of the United States. I would like to protect and defend this country and the people within it the way you did. It takes a lot of courage and guts to do what you did, and put your life on the line for our country.

My great-grandfather died in the attack at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese flew through and bombed our Navy ships in January, 1941. Which brought our country into World War II. Your book helps me understand what my great grandfather went through. It also helped me to feel closer to him even without me ever getting to meet him. That's another thing that influences me to join the Marines.

I felt as if it was really hard for you when you were stuck in the desert with over one hundred degree temperatures. You went through a lot just to defend our country. I think you're a really brave individual that you risk your life to keep this country safe. I feel bad for you how you had to leave your family behind, including your wife. It must have been really heart breaking for you but you felt like you had to defend our country after the 9/11 attack. You're a really brave and interesting soldier, I greatly respect you.

Sincerely,

Charlie Reynolds
Switzerland County High School
Vevay, Indiana

Level Three State Semifinalist—Trey Rodgers
Letter to Robert Graves, Author of *Count Belisarius*

Dear Robert Graves,

The novel *Count Belisarius* affected me more than any other novel I have ever read. Watching Belisarius grow and change from a boy to a man helped me realize what to do. I felt like I had a true relationship with Belisarius through the novel from his childhood to his life as an elderly man. I felt like I related with Belisarius.

Watching Belisarius as a boy around my age let me look up to him I treated him just as I would have any other role model in life. When Belisarius saved his friends by using a century old trick of blowing pepper in the enemy's eyes, I wished I could be that brave. I wished I could save my fellow students with the same compassion and courage that Belisarius did. I marveled that he could sit at a dinner table with warmongers and pacifists and relate with each. Belisarius was able to impress both sides of any clash in a way I wish I could. Reading of Belisarius's troubles not only made me appreciate Belisarius as a character; reading Belisarius made me reconsider how I was working as a friend and companion. Belisarius helped everyone and was loyal even in the worst of times. Belisarius served his king fairly even when his king did not serve him fairly and walked the moral high ground no matter what. Watching Belisarius grow helped me grow.

Seeing the hardships and troubles Belisarius had to go through helped me learn how to deal with my toils and troubles. Though the hardships were different, the way Belisarius dealt with the pain is admirable. When Belisarius was stripped of his titles, tortured, and outcaste by the corrupt king Justinian, I wanted to save Belisarius and banish the king. When Belisarius left his prison and stood outside the doors to Justinian's palace, praying, I realized how moral of a man Belisarius is and I wish to act in the way Belisarius did. I want to have the same morality Belisarius had. I cried when Belisarius helped defend his home city with his old soldiers. I wept with Belisarius during his leadership. I wish to emulate Belisarius' morals through all the pain and suffering. Belisarius still remained loyal to his king. I will be as moral as Belisarius.

Count Belisarius helped me realize where I want to go. Though Belisarius is not even alive, I feel like he is my friend. I want to be like Belisarius. Through every page of the book, I loved Belisarius and wanted to see him well. *Count Belisarius* showed me how the best of men act.

Sincerely,

Trey Rodgers
Crawfordsville High School
Crawfordsville, IN

Level Three State Semifinalist—Tyler Teel
Letter to William Shakespeare, Author of *Othello*

Dear William Shakespeare,

I never thought I would actually read *Othello*; then again I did quite like *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*. I saw that this was another tragedy and decided “why not?” Then I began to read the book and was quite interested in how the way the book might end. I was hooked and didn’t even think about letting my mind slip away from reading the rest of the pages, I had been caught up in the sequence of actions.

Othello was a character that made me realize the good from the bad in life. I have been mad at someone for even the most miniscule of issues. Then I realized that it was redundant of me to be enraged over the slightest issue that would be forgotten in a week. The character lives the life of an over-protective father who doesn’t want to lose the control he has over his daughter so then he seeks revenge. My father would more than likely go to his death fighting to get me back, but he is not over-protective and would more than likely not kill me as Othello did. I can relate to his character, but I am not quite as extreme as Mr. Othello.

I was pleasantly pleased with how well I was able to read in a fluent manner in the Modern English, of Shakespearean times, writing style that you used to compose your works of art. I was also surprised in the ending of the book as if I were there it would try to be resolved in another manner. It wouldn’t be a tragedy if I changed it though. I respect and adore your way of thinking when composing a masterpiece. I will be sure to recommend this suspenseful and intriguing novel to my peers and colleagues.

A pleased reader,

Tyler Teel
Switzerland County High School
Vevay, IN

Level Three State Semifinalist—Dustin Tice
Letter to Homer, Author of *The Odyssey*

Dear Homer,

In ninth grade I read the abridged version of your book *The Odyssey*. In the tenth grade I was asked by my teacher to read a book. I thought for the rest of my class, and then this book came to my head, and since I liked it so much, I picked up the longer version, and read it. There is so much difference between the abridged version and the longer version. I also like how your style of writing is in Dactylic Hexameter and also how you write in a different style of poetic form than all the authors that I have read. When I read this book, I felt something different like as if I was in the same shoes as Odysseus and faced everything that he had to go through and I felt as if I would never give up just like him.

I felt so many different feelings, such as giving up because I couldn't understand it at the beginning, but I kept going just like Odysseus. I also felt sad for Odysseus because of the long journey he had faced and everything in the future as I was witnessing it in my head because of the vivid imagery you used. I felt mad because some of Odysseus' crewman were greedy and tried to get into his stuff such as the bag of wind. Overall, I felt happy that I made the choice and read his book and because Odysseus was granted to go home finally. I liked how he plans to "get rid of" the suitors because he goes all crazy on them and destroys every one of the suitors, I like how it goes into detail of how he killed Antinous.

I am looking forward to reading *The Iliad* that you wrote, I heard so many good things about this book so I am hoping it is like *The Odyssey*, full of action packed adventures, I the main character going through a rough patch and the wrecks havoc all over the country of his foreign land. I think that the way you write is such a marvelous way to write, and it makes the book flow better. When a younger person reads the book, he can find out a great way to learn to write. Thank you for bring your wisdom amongst the modern world.

Sincerely,

Dustin Tice
Switzerland County High School
Vevay, IN

Letter to Ellen Emerson, Author of *Life Without Friends*

Dear Ellen Emerson,

One hellish afternoon in middle school, our teacher asked to grab a book for a book report being the end of the year; they were really trying to cram things in. At least that's how it felt for me. Any ways, a stampede of children rushed through. I was always the last kid to grab the books, because all the kids wanted *Twilight*, and oh my gosh pretty boys on the cover or the hot girls. Once the teacher left the room to yell at the kids running through the hall, I grabbed your book and skimmed through it. *Life Without Friends*. Seemed like a nice idea, but then again, I would hate to be alone. I had been for most of my childhood.

The night rolled around, I eyed the corners of the house to make sure my Dad and my brother were in their beds, not lurking around to watch me or bother me. I began to flip through the pages reading which felt endlessly through the pages. I turned to look at the clock. Midnight. I jumped up and ran to bed, knowing I would regret staying up so late in the morning.

The best thing about my Dad being a single parent, is the fact that he had to work overtime to pay for everything in the house, and to make life "peaceful." Once the alarm went off and the dreams smashed to reality, I got ready for the day, putting on my favorite shirt, a pink Woodstock shirt. I love the 60's nothing can beat that time. It was so historic and so filled with music enriched with history. I couldn't get enough of it.

Blasting some Beatles I brushed out my hair, a tangled chocolate mess. Washing my face and continually checking to see if maybe today I would be accepted in my school. I turned for my bedroom door down for breakfast, when I saw that book again and remembered that Beverly hadn't really cared what other people thought of her. She was just herself. I looked in the mirror again and this time put my hair up in a bun put on my favorite jeans and smiled. This is me.

Once dad had left and I was walking to the bus stop, I waited till my brother was far enough ahead and continued to read. I hadn't even noticed the girl sitting on the far side of the walk alone reading as well. She looked up and we glanced at one another. I then ducked my head down into my book. I was scared of being targeted for another bully. But...She looked scared too. I sat in curiosity on the bus kept looking at her. Hearing shouts from the back. "HEY LESBIAN GIRL!" I cringed. I sighed and kept reading.

“HEY WHORE DON’T YOU HEAR ME?” I turned to look at them and then I flipped them off.

The whole bus ride everyone looked at me differently. I couldn’t even believe I did it. After so long of being bullied, I stood up for myself, in a very inappropriate manner. I felt ashamed, but then again I felt just glad they shut up for once. The girl wouldn’t even glance at me. But I understood. She probably thought I was ignorant and stupid for doing that oh well. I started read again. Then I realized something. All the things they said weren’t true, but why did they hurt so bad?

That day was a living hell. Gossip had spread around the school what I had done, and people constantly kept asking. I wish I never done it. Some kids thought the group deserved it others just started new rumors to destroy me further. I cried in the bathroom grasping the book in my arms wishing I was never born, wishing I could have a better life than what I did, and wishing I wasn’t so alone.

Finally the bell let out, I was terrified to get on the bus. I was the last kid to get on, and I couldn’t find a seat, I wouldn’t dare sit in back. Not with those kids, not ever. I turned to see the girl I saw this morning knitting in her seat my book jangled in my bag. I jumped in the seat. She looked rather stunned, but continued knitting. “Hi, I said smiling.” She smiled back, “Hello!” She turned back to her knitting. “What are you doing?” I stared deeply at the design so far, it was baby blue and purple, it was so pretty. “Oh in my class we’re making hats for kids who have cancer.” “Can...” I stopped. “Can you?” She replied back. Crap I guess I’ll have to tell her. “Can I help you make your hat?” her smiled broadened, “Yeah! I needed a hand.” She showed me what to do, and for the whole bus ride we worked on the hat till we got off the bus

I jumped off the bus and found out what she lived. I walked her home half way and then I asked her. “Can I be your friend?” “Well that’s a weird question, but yeah. See you tomorrow! Hey maybe you can come over!” I was baffled after a horrific day, I had a happy ending a new friend who lived close by, and she was nice! “I sure will!” I ran home excited. Then felt so utterly stupid. I didn’t know her name.

Luckily the next morning she was at the bus stop. “Hey I forgot to ask your name.” She giggled my name is ally. “My names Elizabeth but you can call me Liz.” I sat on the ground with her. She was reading the *Eragon Series* and I was reading some little book. Made me feel impressed someone my age could read such a big book. At the time I was a great

reader, but didn't attempt to read anything gigantic just stuff I enjoyed or the teacher forced us to read.

I continued to read about her counseling ... Maybe, I could tell this girl my problems. No. I can't do that she'll think I'm crazy. But as I got to know her more, She noticed when we wanted to go swimming I wouldn't want to. I felt ashamed of my body. I had the upper body of a girl who hadn't eaten enough and huge fat thunderous thighs. I hated it. So because I hated myself so much at the time, I decided maybe if I cut myself, maybe it I puke up lunch or something, I'll lose weight and look pretty. I gave up once I was around her. Because she liked me, she thought I was pretty. She thought I was smart! I stopped all together. Then one day. My mom came back into the picture.

Dad screaming at me to quit caring what she does. "She's a drunk Elizabeth what don't you understand she's a liar. She's stupid." I couldn't grasp the fact that she would lie about something. So scary. I told my dad I was spending the night at my friend's house. And I knew that if I couldn't spend the night, I was sleeping in a park somewhere. I couldn't go home to that. So I jumped on my bike with my bag threw that book in there, my iPod Touch, and some random crap I threw in that I liked, and I rode off. I didn't care anymore. I just needed to talk to someone for a minute I figured I would just make up a lie that my dad was out of town and I locked myself out. But then I knew they would just solve their way around it. Her family is super smart. I knocked on the door. Ally opened it, Liz I can't play right now. I have to go eat dinner; I looked at her tear filled eyes, mascara running down my cheek. "Liz what's wrong?" I hugged her tight and sobbed.

I explained the situation to her parents and they looked concerned. They asked about my past. I stopped dead in my tracks. I knew if I told. They may never see me the same. I didn't care anymore, I openly told everything. Once I was done, everyone had melancholy smiles on their faces. As did I. They said I could spend the night, and they explained that my dad's anger was understandable and at my mother's current situation, wasn't to be concerned about. They explained, further about how my mother's lies and continually saying these things were for sympathy.

I sat kind of stunned I got mad for a second. Then I realized they were right. She was a liar. She had used me. Several times. I didn't even notice. I smiled broadly understanding that I didn't have to worry anymore, but secretly wanted to cuss out my mother badly. I hugged them. Her

father talked for a while to my dad for a while. A smile on his face after he was done. He ordered pizza and I had a slumber party up in Ally's bedroom that night with her little sister and brother Madeleine. I was one of the happiest days of my life.

After finishing your book and writing the best report ever written by man. I got a high score on my grade, and did one of the best in class. Kids still make fun of me and Ally too. Calling us Lesbians and such, then I realized why is it insult to be called a lesbian? Though I'm not, why? I became more faithful with God too. Her parents started taking me to church and the stress fell off like dominoes, new doors opened me and me and Ally and I wrote together and read together. And all because I looked up to your character Beverly. I did have counseling however, her parents some in high school. I finally got a councilor this year who wasn't aggravating or didn't listen, or sided with the wrong person, or thought I was a liar. Finally a person who understood, and didn't sound like they were Dr. Phil in on television trying to please the popular vote.

Life's grand, mothers, mother. I love her she has her issues. But I don't worry anymore. I know my life's this way, and I don't get stressed out My Dad retired now. He's enjoying it looking a sports car for our future. Me and Ally are more than best friends, we're sisters we know every detail about one another. Every inch like your book, I know every detail. Her family and mine are very close. She's been there since day one. And her family filled the hole that my mom tore open in my heart. I never thought a book could change me so much, more independent, more open and social, and letting me be myself. People accepting me and those who bully I ignore, I know tis not true. I'm a good person my names Elizabeth Winters thank you for reading this. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Winters
New Tech at Wayne High School
Fort Wayne, IN

A Storm on the Water

One day I went skiing,
At the lake close to our house.
It was the first time I had ever skied.
My legs were trembling.
But, I got up on my first time!
I was so excited.
Then it happened...
The thunderstorm rolled in.
It was a large dark cloud.
The rain felt like bullets on my skin.
I was terrified.
My dad tried to get me into the boat.
After he got me into the boat,
The rain felt harder on my skin than before.
We headed towards land.
My mom was holding me while I was wrapped in a towel weeping
I was so scared.
My mom tried to comfort me,
However, by the time we got to the dock, it was too late.
The water was too crazy for us to get the boat on the ramp,
Therefore, we had to stay under the canopy.
The boat rocked and moved and branches fell in the water making a splash.
After some time, the storm was over
and we all finally got to go home,
For round two of the thunderstorm.

LettersAboutLiterature

PARTICIPATE IN 2013-2014 Letters About Literature and River of Words Contests

It's easy and fun to participate. You can participate individually or as a school group. Letters for Grades 9-12 are due on December 10th, 2013. Letters for Grades 4-8 are due on January 10th, 2014. If you have questions about the competition, feel free to email Suzanne Walker at icb@library.in.gov. Entry forms for Letters About Literature will be available in August of 2013.

River of Words entry forms are already available at riverofwords.org. Entries are due on December 1st, 2013.

Letters About Literature and River of Words are great projects for schools, scouts, homeschoolers, public libraries, after school programs, and any group that works with youth. Feel free to contact us if your group would like to participate.

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