

the James & Madeleine *McMullan* FAMILY FOUNDATION

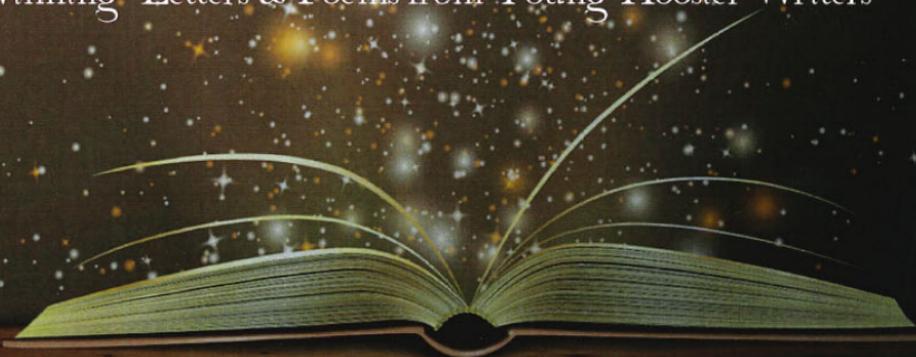
Letters About Literature

in partnership with *Poetry for a Cause*

Indiana State Library Foundation &
Indiana Center for the Book present:

2014 Letters About Literature Anthology

Winning Letters & Poems from Young Hoosier Writers



Indiana State Librarian, Connie Bruder

Indiana Center for the Book Director, Suzanne Walker

www.centerforthebook.org

Indiana State Library & Indiana Center for the Book

RIVER OF WORDS
LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

2014 Winning Letters and Poems by Indiana Students

Interim Indiana State Librarian
Connie Bruder

Indiana Center for the Book Director
Suzanne Walker

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SPECIAL THANKS

Margaret McMullan, Stacy Savage, the Indiana State Library Foundation, the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, and the Teachers, Librarians, and Parents who encourage young people to be active readers and to participate in the *River of Words* and *Letters About Literature* Contests.

Funding for the 2014 *Letters About Literature* and *River of Words* Anthology is courtesy of the Indiana State Library Foundation.
www.islfoundation.org

Congratulations from the Indiana Center for the Book

We are excited to honor your work in our 2014 book! *River of Words* is a national contest for young people that encourages them to reflect upon the watersheds in their communities through poetry and art. *River of Words* is a project of the Center for Environmental Literacy at Saint Mary's College of California. *Letters About Literature* is a national contest that asks young readers to write a personal letter to an author explaining how their book changed their way of thinking about the world. 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.

These programs are held all over the nation bringing states, schools, teachers, authors, poets, artists, and of course, students together to have a national conversation about reading, poetry, and art and how they affect and enhance our lives. Thank you to the teachers, parents, students and schools for your participation in the competitions. 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 and poems and reviewing dozens of pieces of artwork to arrive at the ones found here in this book.

We offer a 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 26, 2014 at the Indiana State Library. We also offer a special thanks to Stacy Savage who supported the awards for our *River of Words* poetry students. Our *Youth Literary Day* was a great event that included writing workshops, author signings, and readings of the letters and poems by our First Place Winners.

We made the decision to keep the works in this book true to what the child submitted. Sometimes there are grammatical errors, but we like to think that these 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 by the parent at the time of printing.

The letters and poems in this collection are heartfelt interpretations from young writers that touch on a variety of difficult themes including bullying, feeling alone, disease, death, racism, drugs, religion, environmentalism, being the new kid, and other serious topics that our Indiana youth struggle with daily. 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 and artists 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 and poems. They are a gift.

Suzanne Walker - Director, Indiana Center for the Book

RIVER OF WORDS / ART AND POETRY

Art Finalists:

First Place, Junior: Renee Patton—Lincoln Elementary, Hammond

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See their art work on the cover of this book.

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**RIVER OF WORDS POETRY
JUNIOR LEVEL WINNERS**

Nature Poem

Dalvir Bachra—Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis
First Place / Junior Level

The Breeze felt cool on my skin
The pond ripples as the wind touched its surface

There was a hum in the air
As the seasonal birds headed south for winter

Fall leaves danced in the wind
Spiraling to the earth

Green grass brushed my feet
As I launched stones into the pond ending the peaceful atmosphere

Untitled

Nate Griffin—Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis
Second Place / Junior Level

As I launched the slippery coal black stone through the air
It whistled, spinning quicker than the eye could see
Gracefully skipping
One
Two
Three times across the still river bank
It broke the strange silence
It had rustled the leaves that had lain
calmly on the top of the water before this disturbance
As it sank to the bottom the ripples faded out
Each ripple a smaller but more defined version of the next
The water almost looked like a bull's-eye
This seemed to spark the night to life
Fireflies lit up the night
Frogs began their harmonious croaking
And the gentle breeze swooshed the tall grass to and fro
The night was now alive

The Ash Grove Song

Kaylee Demlow—Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis
Honorable Mention / Junior Level

We sang by the river.
The clear water rolled through the forest,
like it had for so long.
The water whispered, in the background of our song.
With the river we sang,
our song by the river; the ash grove song.

We sang at the foot of ancient trees.
The rough bark lashed at our backs.
But the covering of soft, dark green moss
protected us from the cracking wood.
Together we sang,
our song by the river; the ash grove song.

We sang every night.
Wrapped in each other's arms,
we sang by the glistening light of the moon.
The stars winked at us from their perches in the sky.
With the moon we sang,
our song by the river; the ash grove song.

We sang not alone.
The birds buzzed alongside our warbles
And the crickets chirped with our croons.
All life through the forest,
paused to listen and join in.
We sang with nature our song,
our song by the river; the ash grove song.

Raindrops

Rachel Dowless—Fall Creek Intermediate School, Fishers
Honorable Mention / Junior Level

Let the rain fall on my skin
As the music plays in the background.
The sunshine – so close, I know I'll win-
Let the rain fall on my skin
You don't know how long it's been
As sweeter storms; what could be so drowned?
Let the rain fall on my skin
As the music plays in the background.
The lights go out and my story comes to an end.
You can't save me, I can't win
Let the rain fall on my skin.

Simply Rain

Christopher Everly—Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis
Honorable Mention / Junior Level

I sit upon the ancient oaken bench that dwells in my front yard as it creaks under my weight. I look at the wood surrounding my hand and hear a soft *pit* hit the seat, and the area in which the noise occurred became noticeably darker. Another *pit* sounded and this time feel something strike my hand lightly. I look down and see a small wet area on the top of my hand. *Rain* I think.

I grin and look up as the small *pits* become a steady pitter patter of water droplets rains from the sky and hits my face. I outstretch my hands and upturn my palms to face the sky. I turn and feel like I was transported into another environment. The imagined pine trees dance around me in the soft wind. I feel a singular droplet fall onto my awaiting tongue. A tall, lush, green dogwood tree stands in my way. I turn back and am back into my open, empty yard, snapped back to reality by the creak of the rusty hinges of my front door. “Dinner!” my mother shouts.

Untitled

Nevach Hite—West Newton Elementary, West Newton
Honorable Mention / Junior Level

The water is blue
It shines too
I stand by the water
Next to you

Water

Aaron Kuhn—Fall Creek Intermediate School, Fishers
Honorable Mention / Junior Level

Sitting on the beach
Diving at the coral reef
See all kinds of fish

The Gift of Water

Ava Marquardt—Fall Creek Intermediate School, Fishers
Honorable Mention / Junior Level

Water is a gift
It flows deep among my very soul
Crashing through my thought and mind
It bubbles beneath my tickling toes
Yet rains down from the heavens above
It swirls and dances across my vision
Delivering the peace and serenity that ripples through my imagination
It whispers soft yet roars with power
Its persuasive voice pleading to be set free
To rush alongside the willowing winds
And grow alongside the prosperous grasses
It trickles and drops and splatters upon my skin
As it chirps the crisp clamor of the dawn's dew
It brings us unconditional hope and bliss
Creating this paradise of equality and justice
But beneath its enchanting surface there lies
A clouded destruction lurking unknown
Destroying our love and crushing our dreams
A family no longer united
It bursts through the barriers we thought were strong
It invades the home we thought was safe
It shakes our fears and distorts our memories
It leaves us with nothing
It brings the good
It brings the bad
It shifts and churns, changing the world with it
We shall always appreciate its generosity and understanding
For if its existence was scarce in this world
This life it brings we would not know
We are thankful for water

Balance Keeper

Yannick Ndonga—Fall Creek Intermediate School, Fishers
Honorable Mention / Junior Level

Life force
Driving everything
Destruction
Leaving a trail of crushed dreams
Water is a tool
Only evil in the hands of its user
An element of nature
Unstoppable
Untamable
Comforting
Amiable
Water shifts
Making my day
Ending others
Infinite
Honored and respected
Feared and loved
Water is beautiful
Water is terrifying
Water is evil
Water is good
Water is balance

Oh, the Majesty of You

Lorelei Porter—Fall Creek Intermediate School, Fishers
Honorable Mention / Junior Level

Leaving disaster in your wake,
Or leave us with dry dust.
Oh, the chemical power of you,
Turning metal into rust.
Flowing swiftly with haste,
Or slowly, so it seems,
Softly, loudly, quickly, slowly,
Through rivers, brooks, and streams.
Coming from the earth,
A natural hot spring,
Though the river not five feet away
Is just about freezing.
Falling from the sky,
Flooding or hydrating,
Not a drop the same.
Flowing down the hill,
Going through the mountain,
Or shooting to the sky,
From a beautiful fountain.
Fog, rolling or spreading,
Rainbows brighten blue,
Snow falls frozen cold,
Making the world anew.
I see my reflection in you,
Staring back at me,
From deep blue to clear, green or brown,
Oh, the majesty of you.

Water

Clayton Toner—Fall Creek Intermediate School, Fishers
Honorable Mention / Junior Level

Take a bath, take a shower,
prove that you have water power.
Water is what makes a flood,
water also makes up mud.

You feed water to your plants,
I use water to wash my pants.
Water is known as H₂O,
it shows us the path, with a RAINBOW.

**RIVER OF WORDS POETRY
SENIOR LEVEL WINNERS**

Death of a Planet

Noah Workman—Westfield High School, Carmel
First Place / Senior Level

The color Bluish green, the world unseen,
unique in size shape and sheen.
it is filled with life
and being destroyed by human strife.
Fish swim through all the seas.
The wind blows through the trees.
Humans polluting the atmosphere,
the earth starts to scream in fear.
Trees thin and recede.
Oxygen is a need.
The earth is starting to bleed.
Our fate is undecreed.
The earth dies,
as life leaves all eyes.
Turn back the clock; it is not too late.
Do not leave the destiny of an entire race to chance and the hands of fate.
Reduce your carbon footprint.
Reuse everything, even newsprint.
Join the missions.
Sign petitions.

Nature to a Blind Man

Tate O'Herren—Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis
Second Place / Senior Level

Nature to a blind man is

The sound of the orange autumn leaves rustling in the wind
and slowly dancing to the ground.

The hooting of the barn owl at dusk searching for its mate.

Nature to a blind man is

The low thumping of the horses hooves as it gallops
down the lush green pasture.

The sweet smell of the freshly blossoming red rose on an early summer morn

Nature to a blind man is

The CRASHING of waves against the rocky coast misting his salty face

The sound of fish splashing his tail to soar through the air
and then splashing back down.

Nature to a blind man is

The taste of a gentle mist dripping on his lips one lazy spring day.

The soft touch of a fluffy lion's mane.

Nature to a blind man is

The scales of a fish rough as sand paper.

The waterfall cascading down spitting large cold fresh drops of water.

Nature to a blind man is

The deafening crack of thunder that rattles you deep to the bone.

Nature to a blind man is

Listening to the chirps of crickets one hot summer night

never seeing nature's greatest beauty of the stars shining brightly down on him.

Earth's Noises

Branson Deen—Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis
Honorable Mention / Senior Level

Chirp, chirp, tweet, tweet
Earth's noises is the only thing I hear
As I walk through this large forest of trees
The wind is like a person whistling in my ear
The sun is like a smile on the blue sky's face
And the birds sound like a beautiful
Symphony of chirps and tweets

Then, I come upon this hill
It was a mountain in the middle of the forest
Then I hear the sound again
Chirp, chirp, tweet, tweet
I say, what is that lovely sound?
I follow where the sound was coming from

Along the way I hear the whistling of the wind in my ear
Then again, I hear,
Chirp, chirp, tweet, tweet

My Special Place

Michaela Emanuel—Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis
Honorable Mention / Senior Level

I stand on the sandy beach looking out to the shimmering blue ocean
As I stand there I wonder how the clouds became that color
Shades of cotton candy pink, light blues, and the brightest of whites
As they descend downward towards the horizon
The colors get lighter and lighter
The rest of the sky is light blue
Not a single error can be found in it
For it is pure beauty
I ponder on what it would be like
To get closer to the cotton candy clouds
And the baby blue sky
To just fade away and be at complete peacefulness
I'll have to wait until who knows to when
To see another view like this one
So for now I'll just enjoy the view right in front of me
If someone was to ask me what it looked like
I wouldn't be able to do it justice
It was just too beautiful
The way the clouds met with the horizon
Or the way the ocean glistened in the sun
When you throw a rock in all the ripples were perfect
I thought of coming here as a child
Holding my father's hand
This was my special place

Pleased to Be Here

Rayven Lopez—Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis
Honorable Mention / Senior Level

I sat on the old wooden chair
And kicked my feet up on the stone bricks
The bonfire heated the warm breeze around me
The wind swirled leaves past me, dimming the light
I glaze up to the stars
Millions of miles away, twinkling brightly
The moon shone down on me
Lighting the darkness of the wooded campground

The old radio started to die down
The crickets started to chirp rhythm
Like a broken record on repeat
I take a whiff of the forests trees fragrance
It smelled so heavenly
I inhaled the fresh crisp air; I was pleased to be here

Laughter of people, buzzing of old lights,
And acorns falling to the ground is what I hear
I slowly close my eyes
And concentrate on the
static of the burning fire

Humanity

Sylvia Yun—Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis
Honorable Mention / Senior Level

I see humans
But no humanity
Like the Venus flytrap
It conveys a disguise so intricate
It makes you fantasize
About the true evils that lurk within them.
Because of that,
I hide.
In a gloss over
And watch as
The scent of salty ocean air
Becomes a fume of black charcoaled smoke.
White bombarding waves,
A mural of artificial flagons.
Jungles of centenarian oaks demolished into,
Skyscrapers of perplexing heights.
Soft green pastures of exotic petunias,
Into hot sticky thoroughfares of asphalt.
Our ecosystem is precious
And I believe, we are aware,
of the discontentment of it
But for some reason
Our greedily nature
Conspires us to demolish and build
Where is our humanity?

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE
LEVEL ONE

Level One / First Place

Sara Purdue – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Lauren Tarshis, Author of *I Survived the Japanese Tsunami*

Dear Mrs. Tarshis,

Scared, tired, and cold. I was being carried across the street in my mother's arms. Everybody was running in the same direction, toward the neighbor's house, and I didn't know why. Suddenly, I was shoved into a tiny storage closet with fourteen people and three dogs. I was clueless why I should panic, but I knew I wanted to. Then I realized what my mother had told me before running across the street, a tornado was stirring, and we were right in the path.

In the beginning of *I Survived the Japanese Tsunami, 2011*, I was immediately questioning the "ripple in the huge Pacific Ocean" that turned into the "monstrous wall of water." I wasn't sure whether it was a small storm, or the terrifying tsunami described on the cover. I was suddenly taken back to my memories of the 2005 Tornado.

When I was three years old, a terrifying tornado stormed through my hometown, Newburgh, Indiana. The tsunami that threatened Shogahama and most of Japan caused Ben to have to escape a ferocious beast, the tsunami. When the tsunami in Shogahama swept Ben up, he was frightened and his mind was swirling. I felt the exact same way, my thoughts becoming the tornado that I was afraid of.

Even after years have passed, I still think about what happened on November 6, 2005. When I read a book, I learned that life must go on. Through the story, you told me that disasters will happen, but you aren't put into this world to dread that bad things in life. You are put into this world to love every good moment. You must put your past behind you and live in the present. Your book taught me this through a character, Ben. Chapter after chapter, Ben's experience started to turn into mine.

Even though your book is fiction, it taught me a real life lesson. I have always been told, "The past is the past" and "Live in the present." I thought that I knew this, but until I read your book I never truly understood what they meant.

The last words in *I Survived the Japanese Tsunami, 2011* got me thinking. "And together they began their journey home." After I climbed out of a cramped closet I was in during the tornado, I had to carry on. I had to put that memory in the back of my mind. I will journey on and remember that day, but won't dread it.

I Survived the Japanese Tsunami, 2011 reminds me that I can do anything, no matter what. Ben was petrified when he was drowning, but he remembered

something that encouraged him to keep going and do it with all of his strength, his dad. Therefore, when I need encouragement, I will think of your book. Thank you for encouraging and reminding me to live in the present, not the past.

Sincerely,
Sara Purdue

Level One / Second Place

James Walsh – Blair Pointe Upper Elementary, Peru

Letter to Gary Paulsen, Author of *Liar, Liar*

Dear Gary Paulsen,

I read your book *Liar, Liar*, and it helped me realize what I'd been doing for the last 4 years. I had always been dishonest, and it was a big problem because I was getting too good at it. I thought that lying was a skill, and I was masterful at it. I was always deceitful in not walking the dog as far as I should, getting an extra cookie after, or getting an extra can of soda. I couldn't go a single day without lying right to someone's face. The problem was I was very proud about my skill of lying.

Then one day I read your book. Once I started, I couldn't stop reading it. I was excited that there was another boy better at lying than I was. He fibbed so that he could get out of class, he lied to get his friend to be quiet, and he told untruths to pit his brother and sister against each other. At that time I actually admired his creativity and skill in lying.

Then I read to the place in the book when he got punished for what he did. I watched how his web of lies untangled until he was left with many things stripped away from him. His friendships, his car keys, his free time, and his allowance were all gone. Then I realized what I'd been doing was wrong. Without reading your book I would still be insincere and making my web as big or bigger than the teenage boy who lied even more than I did. So I told my parents about what had been going on, and of course, I got punished badly, but not as badly as him. I felt much about how I did things, and I never lied again. Almost.

Sincerely,
James Walsh

Level One / Third Place

Kayla Oxley – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to J. K. Rowling, Author of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

Dear J.K. Rowling,

On my eleventh birthday, I absolutely could not wait for fifty white, graceful barn owls to drop piles upon piles of letters into my fireplace that read:

Kayla Oxley,

We are pleased to inform you that you been accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment. Term begins on September 1. We await your owl by no later than July 31.

Of course, it didn't happen. However, I could still feel the magic boiling inside me from the suspense and adventure of your spellbinding, beautifully –written book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Even though I'm not, and will never be a wizard, your book has changed my life forever.

In third grade, two boys in my class asked me why I hadn't read the *Harry Potter* series. I retorted that the books were too big. I had always thought *Harry Potter* books were the world's biggest books and that I would never be able to finish one. However, that was in the third grade. Anyway, I picked up the first book of the *Harry Potter* series and started reading it. I regretted that I hadn't started reading your book sooner. I whizzed through all seven books. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* was the best.

I was so obsessed with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* that my family and I ended up driving down to Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida. The very first attraction we scrambled to was – you guessed it- *The Wizarding World of Harry Potter*. The previous Halloween. I had dressed as Hermione Granger (I've been told I look just like her!) I wore my Hermione costume to Universal Studios. Every time I turned a corner, I would say in a British accent, "Hey! That's from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows!*" or "Merlin's Beard! I love those things!" My family ending up leaving that day with jellybeans, a chocolate frog, a stuffed pygmy puff, pumpkin juice, and a replica of Hermione Granger's wand. The trip was a dream come true for I had been right in the middle of on your books.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows inspired me to write and keep a journal of book ideas. I've even tried to write my own series! As I ponder what it would be like to walk down Diagon Alley or wear the sorting hat upon my head, I eventually accepted that I may never receive a letter. I have all the details of fantasy I need thanks to your work of art. I realize my life is one big fairy tale,

with surprises like winning a Quidditch match or challenges like Voldemort around every corner. I can be a witch-like muggle in my own way without attending Hogwarts. However, I still have hope that all those piles upon piles of letters will be dropped into my fireplace someday.

Your captivated reader,
Kayla Oxley

Level One / Honorable Mention

Adrianna Black – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

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

Dear Mr. Todd Burpo,

Just last year, I embarked on the voyage of *Heaven Is for Real*, your inspiring and life-changing novel. Since then, I have often pondered what I discovered about heaven through your book, but it just occurred to me a few days ago what this book really changed about my faith towards God. I no longer see heaven as the rainbow-filled city of a child's imagination. I now see it as a reality, as true as the earth we live on. Heaven, to me, should fill your heart with hope at the sound of its name. It is a reassurance that dying is not the end of life, but simply the beginning.

I have been exposed to the Christian lifestyle since I was born, as my family and I have always attended church on a regular basis. However, in my younger years, I found church to be a dull, meaningless place where I could never find anyone to play with. God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit were not a part of my life, more a part of my parent's life that they hoped to share with me. The idea of death was scary, something not to be thought of. Why think of dying when you have practically your whole life ahead of you? My thoughts about the Lord, though, changed when I entered the young adult ministry in the 5th grade. My pastor showed me the true meaning of God's great glory and what he could do for my life, in that same year, I picked up *Heaven Is for Real* and starting reading.

When I first started reading *Heaven Is for Real*, I was hesitant. Would I find interesting, worthwhile information or a hundred and fifty four pages of fake nonsense? As I soon found out, *Heaven Is for Real* was more than just a novel; it was insight to a place more powerful than the human mind is capable of imagining. The book was so heartfelt and meaningful I felt sure that not a word of it strayed from the truth. I may be misleading you, Mr. Burpo. When I address the book as powerful or meaningful, I do not intend to allude to the book being complex. In fact, I found your novel to be quite the opposite. *Heaven Is for Real* was written with a simplicity that reflects on the true meaning of the book; God, heaven, and the pureness of the Christian life.

When my journey with your novel came down to the last page, I was struck with a feeling I had not felt before; a peace that only comes with following the one, true God. I realized, in that moment, that heaven was now going to be part of my life. My days of ignorance and carelessness were over, and my life was about ready to enter a new path unknown to me before, that path of the Lord. Your novel brought to me a hope that cannot be explained. Colton's experience showed me death is not the end, that actually, death is only the beginning of a life full of eternal joy. Knowing that death was not to be feared and that God was my friend changed my perspective on life.

As I continue to grow in my Christian faith, I find myself referencing your book. Not just for old time's sake, but to answers the questions that nag at my mind. *Am I really going to get to heaven? Is there a heaven in the first place?* Each time I go back to your book, however, one thing is clear: God's great grace san save us all. Without your book, I could still be lost in the belief that humans only have other humans. Without your book, I would be a different person. Without your book, the most important part of a human's existence would be missing from my life: God. Thank you, Mr. Burpo, for writing your book and saving me, and hundreds of other people, from a fate that no one should have. For your awe-inspiring story, I will always be grateful.

Adrianna Black

Level One / Honorable Mention

Julia Chumlea – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Erin Hunter, Author of *Warriors*

Dear Erin Hunter,

Warriors, has changed the way I see things. It has changed the way I interpret my surroundings. It has changed the meaning of the full moon or the clouds in the sky. It has changed the way I look at any cat. I wonder, as I look into the eyes of a wandering cat, what depths of meaning are in there. What memories of their past may follow them forever. I wonder if they have ever known the glory of living in a clan. I find myself using terms from the books or find myself knee deep in endless talk about *Warriors*. Many may say to me I am wrong to love *Warriors*, but I only sigh sadly at them, and wish I could explain what meaning, what adventure, what secrets, mystery, magic, and wonder is found deep within the pages, hidden from view. I wish I could explain that *Warriors* isn't just a series, it's more than that. It's a journey that you take, an exploration, and adventure. It's a whisper in the wind, a demand in the thunder, a mystery in the shadows, and a playful call in the river.

After closing the covers of the last book, I might find myself wailing, "I'm starving, when is the hunting patrol going to get back?" when we need to take a trip to the grocery store. Or when a stranger walks through the backyard, I might mutter "How dare you ignore the borders, stay on your own territory!" Whenever I pass through the library, I can't help but steal a glance at the three rows of similar spines all bearing the word *Warriors*. I can't help but run my fingers along the smooth binding of each book feeling a rush of excitement of the bolt of power I feel, standing there with the books which have grown to be a friend, someone who has struck with me forever and forever more. I shiver at the realization that my hands are passing so much excitement, sorrow, and adventure in just a few brief moments. That such small objects can contain such a life changing experience is truly amazing. Unbeknownst to me, opening the first book was a commitment that would stick with me through life. As soon as I read the first words, I would never be able to step down; I was destined to finish every last book, every last page, sentence, word. I let the book become me. I blocked out all other living things; every problem, every person. My book is my safe place; my hideaway. When I read through the pages, nothing else matters but what comes next.

Warriors is something that nobody can take from me. No one can make me feel different about my love for the books. For if it was not for books, how could one feel the wind rushing through their hair while sitting in the middle of a

classroom? How can one feel the glory of defeating their enemy while curled up in bed? How can one explore the unknown and feel the unimagined? Reading *Warriors* has taken me to a new world, and it was one I will never forget.

Sincerely,
Julia Chumlea

Level One / Honorable Mention

Katy Ewald – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Gabrielle Douglas, Author of *Grace, Gold, and Glory*

Dear Gabrielle Douglas,

Your book, *Grace, Gold, and Glory*, changed the way I view challenges and problems. Before I read your book, I would easily give up on what challenged me. However, now that I have read your book, I know that it is always possible to overcome something. You showed me that if you believe in yourself, God and everyone who cares about you, you will achieve success.

I am also a gymnast. I have been a gymnast since I was five and now I am in Level Eight. The balance beam was never been my favorite event, and sometimes I am scared to perform my skills on it. When I get scared, I think of ways you overcame your problems. You always believed in yourself, and that helped you tremendously. If you knew you could do something, you never let fear hold you back. From now on, I will always remember this.

I think of you as my role model. I try to follow the same path you did to become the All-Around Olympic Gold Medalist in 2012. When you trained, you gave 100% at practice every day. Reading about this had inspired me to do the same even when I am tired. I also want to follow the other traits you displayed during your life as a gymnast. These traits include confidence, courage, dedication, sacrifice and bravery. I think all of these play key roles in becoming a successful gymnast and person.

Your sacrifice of living with a foster family so you could train in West Des Moines, Iowa, showed me how much passion you had for gymnastics. Learning about this made me realize how grateful I am to have amazing coaches close to where I live. It would be very difficult to move across the county and live with a family I didn't know. This is another example of your bravery in which I want to follow. I would like to be successful like you when I get older; I will set that goal and strive to reach it. Maybe I will even make it to the Olympics someday by using the information that I learned from reading *Grace, Gold, and Glory*. That is my dream that I am going to follow.

Sincerely,
Kaity Ewald

Level One / Honorable Mention

Nathan Kussow – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to C. S. Lewis, Author of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

Dear C.S. Lewis,

Your book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* had a very big impact on my life. The book introduced me to fantasy novels, built a better connection to my parents, and maintained a family tradition. Also, the religious aspect helped me further understand Christianity.

This book familiarized me with fantasy. Your book opened up other fantasy books, the *Seven Realms* series and the *Inheritance* series, plus more. Fantasy increased my creativity in art and in writing. Fantasy also provided me an excellent way to pass the time. I also use the imagination I get from fantasy books when I'm playing outside. I remember when I used to imagine magic was real.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe helped build a better connection to my parents. When I was younger my parents read this book to me every night and it helped me bond with them. Your book also gave me an opportunity to talk with my parents and discuss details about my day. It was a great way for my parents to relax and unwind from a hard day at work.

This book maintained a family tradition that went back as far as I can remember. My dad and mom read this book to me when I was young. They also read it to my sister and brother. My dad's side started the tradition. My dad's mom read it to him and my dad loved it and he also thought it was one of the greatest books ever. And some day I will read it to my children.

The Lion, the Witch and Wardrobe had an influence on my Christianity. It made it easier to understand why I had to go to church and what was going on in church. Also it gave me something to compare to the bible and the testaments. I found out a lot from your book on how the bible worked. It worked a lot like reading a fantasy book it was fun to read and had some suspense.

This book had a very big impression on my life. It helped me get to know my parents, introduced me to fantasy, kept a family tradition, and made me further engrossed in Christianity.

Sincerely,
Nathan Kussow

Level One / Honorable Mention

Lola Phillips – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Rick Riordan, Author of *The Lightning Thief*

Dear Rick Riordan,

Every day, I wake up to what I think is a terrible life, but I associate having to do chores and having an annoying little sister as a terrible life. As I was looking for a good book to read, I came across a book called *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*. I thought it would be the same as any other fantasy action book, but then, I began reading. As soon as I read the first page, I was mesmerized. I had many late nights since I could not put the book down. As soon as I finished the first one, I read each and every one in the series. I realized that they were many lives worse than mine. I also realized in many ways, Percy Jackson was exactly like me.

Percy is very good defender of his friends, family and especially Olympus. I am a pretty good defender myself, even if it is for me, my friends, or debating over something that I think is right. Percy guarded Olympus in the final battle against Kronos because he fought for what was right. Also, in the final battle, he not only protected his friends, but he cared for the ones who had lost someone special or got hurt during battle.

I care for my friends in the same ways. A few years ago, I lost my Granny due to old age; I was heartbroken. I knew that I had to stay strong for my cousins and little sister since they were just understanding what the concept of death meant. So, I was there to comfort them and make things easier. As I was reading, I remembered how sad it was to lose someone special. Percy had lost a few of his good friends in battle. They had died in battle or sacrificed themselves. I started to feel bad for him and all his friends.

I realized I was starting to change. I began to realize that my life was not terrible, and that it was the life some dreamed to have. I don't take anything for granted anymore, such as having a loving family, caring and considerate friends, and a roof over my head or food on my plate. I began to envy Percy for not having everything I have but still fighting for what was right and putting his friends first. I have always wanted to be what I think every girl has dreamed of at one time; being pretty and popular. I have now realized that those two things aren't important at all as long as you have good friends and people who care about you. Because of Percy, I am finally realizing the great life I already have.

Sincerely,
Lola Phillips

Level One / Honorable Mention

Daelyn Quinn – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Morgan Matson, Author of *Second Chance Summer*

Dear Morgan Matson,

People tend to plan and schedule for the future; most of us focus on expectations and the impressions people will have on us instead of the present moment. What will we do next? What will others think? Constantly, we jot down our schedules for the week and plan upcoming events. I admit that my school planner is occupied with notes about approaching due dates that would mean absolutely nothing if there is not tomorrow. *Second Chance Summer* taught me a valuable lesson: never take anything for granted. The image of that idea turned from a filthy stain to clear, pure water after I finished your life-altering book.

Disastrous situations that are thrown at us haphazardly can cause us to reflect on our lives. Taylor figured this out shortly after she began to accept her dad's diagnosis. I then understood that moral realizations can result subsequently to these incidents. My great-grandma passed away when I was six and ever since her death I've continually questioned myself. Did she know that I loved her? Was I wasting my time on other things when I should have been by her side? Like you said, "It struck me now that beautiful days were not unlimited things". Taylor assumed that her dad would be with her forever, and I think sometimes I view life in that sense. Maybe, maybe, maybe....

Time is a precious thing that can be wasted doing things that have no importance whatsoever in the long run. We don't know what's coming so we need to take advantage of the time we have to do what matters, like making sure our families know how much we love them. Just before the end of the book, I realized that Taylor and I share many similarities. I became conscious that I was so concentrated on the speck of sawdust in Taylor's eye that I totally ignored the plank in my own eye. Occasionally, like Taylor, I disregard the fact that every second counts. In the end, you never want to admit, "I wish I would've..."

Second Chance Summer taught me that it's important to live in the present, doing the things that matter most. It inspired me to live like there is no tomorrow. Any day in the near future could bring a devastating circumstance that would cause me to lose something I took for granted. After flipping the final pages of your book, I came to the realization that the situations we run into considered dreadful to us, might help us figure out the mysterious of life, much like Taylor's plight. Still, my planner is overcrowded with notes, but I've learned to

take plenty of time each day and tell my family how I dearly love them. Through your book, I finally understand life isn't about living up to expectations or impressing others. It's about writing your own story from the present moment.

Sincerely,
Daelyn Quinn

Level One / Semifinalist

Jessika Bakehorn – Blair Pointe Upper Elementary, Peru

Letter to Amy Ackley, Author of *Sign Language*

Dear Amy Ackley,

I never really thought about losing anyone important to me. I know that everyone comes and goes eventually, but it doesn't really affect you until it happens to someone you love. In your book *Sign Language*, Abby's father begins to get very ill and eventually is diagnosed with cancer. About four years ago my grandmother passed away and I didn't really know that reason why since I was so young, like Abby, but now I understand. She had cancer in different parts of her body. She had to use an oxygen tank, or as Abby called, *Dartb* to help her breath. The feeling is terrible, and there are some things I wish I could've said just like Abby.

Throughout the book Abby is growing up, experiencing new things, and becoming smarter. I felt like I was Abby, and I was growing up with her or that I could feel her feelings and see things in her mind. The night her dad died, and she heard something telling her to go to sleep in her head, it was like it was in *my* head telling that to *me*. Abby is constantly imagining herself in the future, imagining that her crush will fall for her, that she'll be her parents favorite and such. I think that's something a lot of young people do because my friends and I are always imagining what we'll look like and what our sixteen birthday party will be like.

I come from a pretty big family; I have five siblings. We fight all the time and none of us have very strong relationships. In the beginning of your story, Abby is fighting with her brother Josh for her parents' attention and *his* attention, but he wouldn't give her the time of day and told her to quit bothering him and his friends. As their father gets worse, the siblings learn to stick together for him and themselves, since they know they won't be able to handle the death on their own. It's amazing how much they came together after the father passes and try to handle things with the move. I don't think I would've talked to anyone if one of my parents died, yet Josh pushes it all out and treats it like it was nothing. I would be more like Abby and bottle everything up.

Your book reminded me that not everything lasts forever-that someday it will be used up and gone, it reminded me not to worry about your future because it will come to you, not the other way around because when you plan everything out and dwell on things for years at a time and it finally happens, it might not be as great as you thought, like when Abby's crush, Logan, finally asked her to

the dance and then ignored her the whole time, she realized what wasn't what she needed. I found myself yelling at her like a lunatic because she said yes to him. Overall, your book has made me realize to cherish who and what I have because it could be taken from you in a heartbeat.

Sincerely,
Jessika Bakehorn

Level One / Semifinalist

Lauren Bruns – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Rick Riorden, Author of *The Lightning Thief*

Dear Rick Riorden,

Some people don't realize how much one book can change you, from acting nicer, to not hurting someone by saying something disrespectful. Some books give you lots of inspiration to change the way you live and to be a better person. I have been changing the way I live and act because of the book, *The Lightning Thief*. Percy Jackson does not have many things in his life and he often wonders what he has to live for and this has taught me not to take things for granted. Percy Jackson has not seen his father since he was very young and this has made me appreciate that I have both of my parents in my life. Percy Jackson faced lots of struggles and hard times in his life and this has influenced me to be kinder to everyone because you have no clue what they're going through. *The Lightning Thief* has given me a wake-up call to be a better person.

The Lightning Thief has made me realize how lucky and fortunate I am for all I have. Percy does not have much in his life, he has to live in an apartment with his mother and his appalling stepfather. He also is having trouble finding a school where he feels safe and where he can get a quality education. That has made me realize that I am very fortunate to have a safe home, a great school, and just a great life in general.

Percy had not seen his father since he was very young, because of that he now has to live with his mother and his barbarous stepfather, Gabe. From that it separated the bond that Percy and his biological father once had. This had made me realize that I need to be more appreciative that I have both of my parents and that they are always there for me. I now also appreciate that my parents and I don't fight a lot, my parents and I are very close and we have a great bond with each other. I truly appreciate that my parents are always there for me. Even though they can be annoying, my life would be very empty without them.

Percy Jackson faced a lot of struggles in his life from people bullying him at school, to dealing with his stepfather Gabe at home. I now am more grateful that I have a great life and that I am not getting hurt by anyone at school or getting hurt by anyone at home either. This has made me more cautious of what I do and say because you do not want to hurt someone by saying something rude or mean. This has also made me realize that I need to be nicer to everyone because they might be having a bad time right now and could use someone to make them smile.

The book, *The Lightning Thief* has helped me evolve into a better person. From being nicer and not saying negative things, to never trying to hurt someone by saying something disrespectful. I have a whole new perspective on life because

I read this book and I am very thankful for that. Before I read this book I was guilty of taking many of the things I have for granted. Something about this world that I did not notice before is that in the world it is only us the people, so if we judge and bully others the world would not be right to live in. Something I realized about myself after reading this book was that I did not treat others the way they should be treated. This work was meaningful to me because it kind of gave me a wake-up call to be nicer and appreciate the people in my life more because if they were not there I would be very lonely and sad. The authors work influenced me to be a better person and to be more appreciative of the things I have. Thank you Rick Riorden for given me strength and courage from the book *The Lightning Thief*.

Lauren Bruns

Level One / Semifinalist

Garrett DiCenzo – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

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

Dear Rick Riordan,

Percy Jackson is the craziest oddball I have ever heard of. That is not to say he was terrible, but to say that he was very intriguing. The first book made me feel pleased that Percy, this character popular at my school (or at least in my class), had so much in common with me, a not-so-popular kid. This book inspired me to discuss the events and characters in the book with others who have read the series. The *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series helped me understand more about the Greek gods by putting a realistic twist on it.

I thought the plot was interesting since I've never really read about the Greek gods, other than when I read a small book about them. The thought of being a child of one of these gods, and that the gods could be real, made me enjoy reading this series of books. I felt sorry for Percy Jackson since it seemed like the world had a grudge with him. He had the weight of the Olympians' fate on his shoulders, and Kronos really...well...hated him.

I could really relate to Percy. I've always felt like I don't exactly fit in, no matter what I do. Now, everybody's reading your books so now I have a great series and a new chance to finally become one with my fellow students. *The Lightning Thief* was a favorite because it is an epic introduction to a greater story. It really introduces the reader to who Percy really is, and shows them his powers over water and his other skills.

With all of these points taken into consideration, the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series is a very enjoyable series that will touch the reader, just like it did me. Its exquisite detail to words and profound storyline make it stand out in backpacks and libraries alike, as well as teaching others and me many things and making them pick up some interest in the Greek gods and their attributes. In conclusion, this series is one that will both touch and teach the reader many things they do not know, just like it did to me.

Garrett DiCenzo

Level One / Semifinalist

Aliyah Elfar – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Orson Scott Card, Author of *Ender's Game*

Dear Orson Scott Card,

I was never one of the popular or good-looking kids. I wished all my life I could be someone else. I was never happy with the way I looked. I always felt so different. Adults always say, “It’s good to be different” or “Everyone is unique which is why we’re all special.” But, they don’t act like differences don’t matter. So to me the word “different” has always had a negative connotation. Your book, *Ender's Game*, changed my entire perspective.

In your book, Ender rarely made friends. When he did make friends as soon as he became good friends with them he was taken somewhere else. That’s kind of how it was when I joined EXCEL, a program for advanced learners which stands for Expanded Curriculum for Exceptional Learners. I had established a friendship and had become best friends with a girl in my class named Rachel. She was going to go to EXCEL as well, but she decided not to go. Even though we were very good friends, our friendship faded away because we didn’t talk as much anymore. Just like our friendship, Ender was whisked away from his group as soon as he became friends with some of the people at his school.

When I first went to EXCEL, although I hate to admit it, I was nervous. It was a brand new experience and a gigantic change in routine. As a persistent person, I’m used to doing things my own way. Ender wins all of the time and always finishes his work, which was his way of doing things. I often sat for hours absorbed in the pages like it was real life. I shared Ender’s pain, joy and sorrow. As I sat sucked into Ender’s world, I realized how horrible Ender’s situation was and pondered over how he had literally everything taken away and still got through it. He never let one change in life stop him.

Ender is a strong and confident person. I, despite what anyone might think, am not. However, I became confident after reading *Ender's Game*. Ender’s actions were brave and bold. He inspired me to be more confident. He made a point of winning. He would do whatever it takes to be the best. When Ender stood up to Bonzo, he didn’t want to hurt him, but he knew he had to end it. He has willpower strong enough to make good decisions.

Before I read *Ender's Game*, I didn’t belong. I was unhappy with myself. I never felt like I had a particular “friend group.” I wanted to feel like I was a part of something. I wasn’t very confident either. After reading *Ender's Game*, I felt empowered, inspired and happy. I used to worry about my curly hair or my lack of confidence. But now it’s like I put on a brand new pair of glasses.

Aliyah Elfar

Level One / Semifinalist

Kinsey Ewing – Fall Creek Intermediate School, Fishers

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

Dear Ms. Draper,

Your book, *Out of My Mind*, changed my life. I have to be honest, before, I always looked at people with disabilities in a way that I'm not so proud of, but when my mom got me this book for my 10th birthday, I learned that the way a person looks tells nothing about them. Once you get to know them, then you can truly look at them for who they are.

Your book opened my eyes for me and showed me that people really are like Tootsie Pops and even though one might stand out in the crowd, in a good or bad way, they are all the same on the inside.

Also, now that I look back on your book I realize that, in a way, I used to be just like Melody. Before I had even seen the light, I was different, and not in a good way. I had three cysts on my head and was expected to die. It was a tragedy. But just like when Melody was able to say her first words, a miracle happened for me too. The cysts on my head healed and here I am today alive.

Also, this might sound a little weird, but I felt like Melody was my friend and that I was walking along with her throughout the whole story. I was devastated when your book came to an end.

But your story changed my life and gives me inspiration, so I would like to thank you for that.

Kinsey Ewing

Level One / Semifinalist

Kaci Fugate – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

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

Dear Sharon M. Draper,

I read your book *Out of My Mind*. This book made me have a lot of mixed up feelings like the letters in alphabet soup which are usually all mixed up. I had times where I was outraged, encouraged, upset, very amazed, and really sad.

I was outraged when Melody's class mates didn't want her on the brain quiz team, even though she got 100% on her test. This made me feel this way, because I think everyone should have a chance to follow their dreams. Also I don't think that people should pull or push anyone away from their dreams.

It makes me look at people differently like someone like Melody who has disabilities that allow her not to talk or write could have such a vocabulary, so I wonder what they might say to me.

This book encouraged me to have friends that are all different, that are not just like me and like what I like. I was sad when people were making fun of Melody because she's different and her computer that talks for her was not cool. When people make fun of anyone it makes me upset because everyone should be nice to everyone.

I think it is amazing that people like Melody are so incredible because she is someone who doesn't give up on her dreams. This makes me feel this way because I always want to give up if something is hard, but this book encouraged me to keep going and fight through it even though it might be tough or it might be back breaking, but there is always something.

To this day I try to think of everyone differently now because even if people might seem odd or have disabilities like Melody they all are nice and have a special talent. We just haven't taken the time to help them find it, or ask them what it is.

This also makes me feel this way because it makes me really sad when someone is judged by what they look like. It's like saying you can't judge a book by its cover. This book is showing that Melody is a book that people don't read because the cover isn't fancy or sparkly and this book inspired me not to do that anymore.

The book *Out of My Mind* was a very inspirational book in many ways, but it can make your feelings get jumbled like alphabet soup, it did that to me. The book mixed up my happiness, sadness, excited, and nervousness. If there was only one book in the world to read in it would be this one because it might be the most inspirational book I have ever read.

Kaci Fugate

Level One / Semifinalist

Melanie Hamon – Riverside Intermediate School, Fishers

Letter to Stuart Hill, Author of *The Cry of the Icemark*

Dear Stuart Hill,

Thirrin. The name that I never thought of. The name that fit the character. The impossible name. How it happened, I'll never know. How it happened that your star character in the *The Cry of the Icemark* was almost the exact same one as my fantasy avatar from my games when I was little. Maybe the Lord wanted to teach me a lesson. I can't say. However, I do know that your characters took me on a journey – a journey that I will never forget.

It all started on a Monday, naturally. We were at the school library picking out books, and I was attracted to a stout book with a medium-thick spine. Be that as it may, none of these were what had grabbed me. The reason why I checked the novel out without even looking at the blurb (a habit of mine) was explained in a simple picture: the girl on the cover. Her red flaming hair, startling green eyes and the sword and shield she held in front of her proved nearly identical to my warrior-Queen Firetail, named only as strange a name as this because no name available to me at the time seemed quite right. I had never even heard of Thirrin before. Progressing, I found that the deeper I fell into *The Cry of the Icemark*, the more closely related the two princess/queens unveiled themselves to be. It shuddered and haunted at me, filling up most of my spare reflecting time with empty questions. How was this possible? Was it even possible for two strangers to have nearly the exact same idea? Were you, somehow or another, mocking me? I had never quite fit in at school, but I had friends and was happy. Last year I spent my time working my tail off to fit in with my new class, and when I finally felt welcomed (although my classmates were never unkind to me) at the end of the year, I had come back only to see them reunited with their best friends and I once more felt excluded. While my avatar of the princess/queen had been an elementary dream of who I wanted to be (strong, brave, courageous). Furthermore, I was once more reunited with the old “strange looks.” Despite my common sense ruling in, I had no other option to believe that somehow I was being mocked. It certainly felt like it. Hence therefore I continually prayed about it, asking for some sort of answer coming through to me. When I had not received any response coming from God, I proceeded to let anger take over my despair. How could he just blank me out? And so on, I blanked him out in return. I prayed only about once every so long if I did at all, though I wasn't sure if it was to make him turn around and feel sorry for me or simply because I had no other option.

My pondering, through all its difficulty, brought me to a question based on an observation of myself. Who was I? Through the years of different people I respected, I found that I always replaced my identity of whose I respected – whether a family member or a character. I supposed I was unsatisfied for who I was: a smart girl with a craving for adventure but a girl who had no muscles,

agility or anything in that boundary. I wanted to be out there or at least respected for who I saw on the inside but it seemed I could be recognized by none other than my quick tongue. I fantasized for being brave but had a wimpy terror tolerance. What's more, I was afraid of travelling in empty space, of being a personality that had no structure whatsoever and was not strong in itself. I thus resorted to one of my strongest suits debating (also known as arguing). I argued with myself whenever I could, until after a time I felt spent. I handed it to the hands of God (if he was there. I wasn't so sure in that aspect). Incredibly, I found my personality floating around aimlessly as days waned by. It may have been better closing *The Cry of the Ice-mark* and resetting it back on the shelf, but I was in too deep. There was no going back.

It was all fairly settled in indecision until I reached the final battle between the Ice-mark and the Polypontians. Maybe it was because of the renewing hope that came with the allies' arrival and Oskan's return. Maybe it was because of the fighting spirit that flamed up again, even fierier than Thirrin's temper itself. I couldn't be sure, but something in me broke then. Something tight and seclusive, something that had been suffocating my heart in a jail of defeat. It snapped suddenly, shattering and exploding in the warrior I had grown up with – the one that had been there all along. I felt there, fighting and determined and joyful and strong, maybe a little sad all at the same time. It became clear, dawning on me in the mystery of the night (for I had been up late reading) like a dense fog lifting to reveal a beautiful landscape. God did let me think he left me on purpose, so that he could guide me to you and your story, and so I could fall into this black, lonely pit and climb out, stronger than ever before. He was with me; he was my structure and would hold me steady on my way through life. Yes, I was the weak, smart girl who was more than she seemed on the inside. And I was proud. Life isn't about the difficulties that we experience but how we overcome them.

I was the overcomer. Like Thirrin, I overcame the "Polypontians" and came out a better leader than I was before. My classmates, (though they still weren't mean to me) if they cared to include me they could or whatever they cared. If they didn't, so be it. I was happy, I had friends, and they were kind to me as I was kind to them. I was never "in the crowd" anyway. This worked with me. Not everyone could be.

I just wanted to let you know that I couldn't have been through any of this without you. Thirrin and Oskan have helped me so much along the way and thank you for that! I will always think of Thirrin when I hear "overcomer!"

Melanie Hamon

Level One / Semifinalist

Ellie Jensen – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Ralph Fletcher, Author of *Fig Pudding*

Dear Ralph Fletcher,

From soccer and baseball, to football and basketball, my household is a buzz. My little brother plays every sport imaginable, so we are always going from one thing to another. I play travel soccer so we have a busy life, but our life is nothing compared to the Abernathy's in your book, *Fig Pudding*.

"We Abernathys always overdo everything," says 12-year-old Cliff, one of the six Abernathy kids. I read this story in third grade and ever since there's a minute connection to the story that takes up a place in my heart. Somehow when I read a book it doesn't mean anything; it's just another one of the thousands books in my lifetime, but *Fig Pudding* meant something to me.

This story really relates and connects to me in a number of ways, but it just seemed to wrap around me transforming me into one of its characters Cliff. Cliff is the oldest just like me; it has its ups and downs just like the Abernathy's and my family. If you have siblings you know what it's like arguing, fighting, hating and ultimately loving. I have one sibling and that's enough for me but imagine six. Six people to share your parent's love with, your food, your house, your own personal space and on top of that mimicking your every move. That's a lot of pressure.

I have never lost a family member since I was alive, but Cliff and the now five Abernathy kids did. Riding his tricycle into an ambulance killed Brad one of the middle children. I couldn't imagine learning to cope without the presence of one of your family members, but the Abernathy's did. They always made the best out of every situation, which to me is extremely hard to do.

In many ways the Jensen and the Abernathy family's are different but in more ways they are the same. Filled with kindness, compassion, laughter and most of all love. Even though technically the Abernathy family doesn't exist to the rest of the world, I like to promise myself that it is. Do you want to know why? It's because it means something to me real or not real.

Ellie Jensen

Level One / Semifinalist

Caroline Kittle – Park Tudor School, Indianapolis

Letter to Barbara O’Conner, Author of *How to Steal a Dog*

Dear Ms. O’Conner,

I really enjoyed reading your novel titled *How to Steal a Dog*. The character Georgina went through a lot of changes in her life. When her dad disappeared, her family was left to live in a car with no money to spare. I have never experienced the life that Georgina had. This made me realize how fortunate I am. My mother and father love me, feed me, and provide shelter from the cold. Furthermore, my relationship with my sister is similar to Georgina and Toby’s. She is always there for me and cares about my feelings. I love living in my warm cozy house with my whole family.

Also, this story made me realize that I want to get more involved in the community. Previously, I have not done as much volunteer work as I would like. Currently, I enjoy helping at *Christmas Benevolence* at my church by helping to bag and deliver food to needy families. When delivering this food, I am not in continuing contact with the people that live there, which makes me unfamiliar with their lives. I also like helping mom with chores around the house, especially with walking the dog! Your book has inspired me to do more work around the community in the future.

Georgina’s life turned upside-down after her father left. I hope that I will never be in her situation because I don’t think I would be able to be as brave as she was. I really appreciate you taking the time to write this inspirational novel.

Caroline Kittle

Level One / Semifinalist

David Lian – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Charles Dickens, Author of *A Christmas Carol*

Dear Charles Dickens,

Your book, *A Christmas Carol*, has been a very interesting story. If I were met by three ghosts who wanted to teach me a lesson, I would probably be so scared that I would do whatever the ghosts told me. The thought of waking up and being acquainted with a ghost who could go backward, forward, or present in time is quite startling. *A Christmas Carol* really has an emotional effect that will impact any reader.

This book had a big personal impact on me. When I was finished reading the book, I began to think back on how each ghost helped change Scrooge by teaching him many lessons about his bad deeds. The way that the ghosts taught Scrooge had an impact on me, especially the part when the ghost of Christmas Present showed Scrooge, the happy boy whom he said may die in the future. Before I had read *A Christmas Carol*, I sometimes wondered if I would grow up to become a very grumpy old man. Now I know that when Scrooge became greedy and grumpy all of the time, he eventually lost everything and everyone he loved. I reflected on this and thought that even though I cannot compare my personality to Scrooge, I can still learn from him by not making the same mistakes that he did.

A Christmas Carol also presents other lessons. One of them is that the book has several different points of view, and as part of the audience I can learn to see things from other people's perspectives. For example, the main character of your book is Scrooge, but there are still some parts in the story where Scrooge talks to his nephew. During these parts, the audience can see how other people such as Scrooge's nephew react to Scrooge's ideas and remarks.

In your famous classic, *A Christmas Carol*, I learned that I shouldn't act like Scrooge in the beginning of the novel because he was grumpy and greedy all of the time, and he eventually lost everyone he loved. However, near the end of the story I also learned that it is never too late to change.

David Lian

Level One / Semifinalist

Aubrey Mann – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Michael Buckley, Author of *The Sisters Grimm*

Dear Michael Buckley,

The Sisters Grimm series was read out loud to me when I was only nine. My sister read it to me and we related it to our everyday lives. These books changed the way I thought about books. Your stories had so much character and enthusiastic writing that I realized I should start reading more. *The Sisters Grimm* created many bonds for me, and my sister. Your books told me that you shouldn't leave books on the shelf to collect dust, you should read them.

With your books I was encouraged to read, have fun, and spend more time with my sister. They provided me with good stories and they made me feel happy that I took time out of my day for reading. *The Sisters Grimm* gave me new knowledge of how books can make me feel.

Even having read *The Sisters Grimm* so many times I still keep finding new details and attributes to them I've never noticed before. Sometimes I even feel as though your characters are with me and I sometimes wish they were. I even feel as though I have a special bond with your books because of the character traits they have. These traits make them feel so real and almost as though they are right in front of me.

You gave my sister and I something to connect with. We used to play games pretending she was Sabrina and I, Daphne. We loved Puck and his character and sass. My sister would even call herself the Trickster Queen. My whole family even read the series. Even my dad read it, and he doesn't usually read books. My sister and I used to draw pictures of the characters in the books when one page didn't have a picture. You gave my sister and me a connection with books that can't be broken.

Before I read *The Sisters Grimm* I had liked reading but I had never had a strong passion for reading. After I read them I realized books held new promises each time you opened them. Each one has a new twist and a creative storyline. You have really shown me what books really mean, a home for creativity and a place for you to learn.

Having read *The Sisters Grimm* so many times I realize that I could relate to Daphne when I was younger and now I can relate to Sabrina's life. Every time I open their pages again I realize that it will never get boring like some things you watch over and over again. *The Sisters Grimm* was the beginning of something great for me, and my sister. I always can find a laugh when I open its pages.

Even with it being three years since I first read the books I still reread them over and over again, and they never get boring. *The Sisters Grimm* began my true love of books. They encouraged me to read and they told me that I could always escape into books when it's a rainy day. You have shown me that you should give books a chance no matter what you first think of it.

Aubrey Mann

Level One / Semifinalist

Emma May – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Jessica Blank, Author of *Almost Home*

Dear Jessica Blank,

From the moment I opened your amazing book for Christmas, I fell in love with it. Your book taught me so much that I was missing in life. Your eye-opening book, *Almost Home*, taught me how much homeless people need our help. I think that this story is all about helping out those in need and one another. Also, Jessica weaved friendship, trust, and love into this book.

One time, as my mother and I were strolling through the parking lot at the store, a dirty looking man was holding a sign that said “Will work for food.” My mom and I just kept walking. I was confused why she was doing this. She pronounced that homeless can be fakes and just want our money. Then, in my heart, I knew what was right.

Almost Home showed me that most homeless people are real. They have had trouble in their lives and are just unlucky. People like me take what we have for granted. *Almost Home* inspired me to have a food drive in the future. Also, I am going to volunteer at the local food bank. I feel terrible for my actions to homeless people before I read *Almost Home*. It makes me have sympathy for Sugar and Rebas’ pain, frustration and suffering.

This book is my favorite book, by far. *Almost Home* is heartbreaking, but warm with love. I cried for sadness and happiness. *Almost Home* is a tearjerker. It helped me understand what homeless people have been through. *Almost Home* helped me learn a valuable lesson that I will never forget. Thank you, Jessica Blank for writing this perfect novel.

Emma May

Level One / Semifinalist

Gloria Merrell – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

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

Dear Suzanne Collins,

The Hunger Games series had such a huge impact on everything, and everyone in my life. Those books changed me, affected my time at school, and molded me into the person I am today. If you would do the honor of letting me tell you how, please keep reading.

First of all, they taught me to stand up tall. I am proud of who I am and will fight for what I believe in. That courage came from your books. After reading them, you won't catch me sitting around when something's wrong.

Secondly, they taught me to be fearless. No matter what the sacrifice is, I have to do what is right when everything else is wrong. It just takes one person to make a difference.

Lastly, people believe in you. Even when you're worn down and feel like giving up, someone has faith in you. That means it's important you keep going.

Hopefully, you know your book has taught me three important lessons and many more. It is my promise to share these lessons in order to make the world a better place.

Gloria Merrell

Level One / Semifinalist

Kelsey Minko – Benjamin Franklin Middle School, Valparaiso

Letter to R. J. Palacio, Author of *Wonder*

Dear R.J. Palacio,

Your book *Wonder* made a big impact on my view the world. I was going through an arduous time in my life. Kids were taunting me for petty things, as if they were trying to find fault in me in order to feel better about themselves. I found myself worrying too much about my peers' opinions of me and trying to change to meet their impossible expectations. But, this constant worrying was changing me into someone I didn't like. "Funny how sometimes you worry a lot about something and it turns out to be nothing." I realized that people have to endure greater hardships than what I was going through: fighting cancer, living with a deformity, or getting abused on a daily basis. Auggie had to live life in fear of what people would say to him about his face. Many children ran away when they saw him. His story changed my outlook on life. It made me reflect on my own actions. I didn't like it when kids at school hurled insults my way without even stopping to get to know me or thinking about how I might feel about their horrible words. I realized that my own words could also hurt someone else. We never know what someone is going through and how our hurtful words can cut another person down.

This book taught me how to be a thankful and positive person. I now understand that no one is perfect and we can always find a fault in others. I also realized that, while I cannot control someone else's thoughts and actions, I can control my own. That day, I chose to focus on the positive in myself and others. Remaining thankful for all the good in my life helps me to do that. I also chose to model that positive attitude for others around me in hopes that they, too, would want to see the glass as half full instead of half empty. In addition, I understand that a small act of kindness or a complimentary word can really make someone feel worthwhile. "Because it's not enough to be kind. One should be kinder than needed." This quote awakened me and made me want to become a nicer person.

Wonder is very meaningful to me. It taught me to accept others for who they are, not for what the price tag on their clothing is, or for what they look like. When Summer decided to be different and befriend Auggie, it taught me to think outside the box, to be a leader among my peers and not a follower, to be a part of the solution and not part of the problem. Thank you for your story and for making me look at life with a little more "wonder."

Kelsey Minko

Level One / Semifinalist

Wellesley Mobasser – Park Tudor School, Indianapolis

Letter to Wendy Van Draanen, Author of *The Running Dream*

Dear Mrs. Van Draanen,

When my friend was first telling me about your book, *The Running Dream*, it sounded depressing to me, so I didn't want to read it. When I started reading the beginning, I still thought it was depressing. It made me sad when Jessica started crying because she couldn't accomplish something. But when Jessica got out of the hospital then finally decided to go back to school, I changed my mind.

I have always liked to run. Not because I am exceptionally fast, just because I like to run. When Jessica loses her leg, she thinks her life is over. Anyone would feel that way. Anyone. The doctor is telling her that she is recovering quickly. They are telling her that everything is going to be fine. Jessica doesn't care because she is never going to be able to run again.

I loved how she didn't care what other people thought when she sat with Rosa in the special people lunchroom. I loved how she got used to Rosa's voice and pretended there was nothing wrong with it. Rosa was a great math student and couldn't run or walk. That means she would never be able to cross a finish line by herself.

I knew what was happening when it first described Jessica pushing a bag of soil in a wheelchair, I knew it was going to be my favorite part of the book. And it was. I can't exactly relate because I've never pushed a girl over a finish line in a wheelchair, but this scene put me in Jessica's shoes because Jessica didn't do it for herself. She did it for Rosa.

I haven't read a book since *The Running Dream* that I have been more attached to. There is not a single book that I have liked more. This book taught me to never give up for little or big bumps in the road, because there isn't anything that you can't do with a little believing.

Wellesley Mobasser

Level One / Semifinalist

Annie Murphy – Park Tudor School, Indianapolis

Letter to Peter H. Reynolds, Author of *The Dot*

Dear Mr. Reynolds,

Hi, my name is Annie Murphy. I live in Indianapolis, Indiana and I am a fifth grade student at Park Tudor School. Your book, *The Dot*, is one of my all-time favorites! My mother read it to me when I was little and I, in time, read it to my little sister. It amazes me how such a simple story can be filled with so much meaning.

Like Vashti, I often become overwhelmed, unable to start. For example, I had difficulty selecting an author to write for this assignment. Staring at a blank computer screen, the topic seemed too big and too complicated. With the due date approaching, I became frustrated and a bit irritated. Then I scanned my bookshelf and saw *The Dot* and knew what I needed to do – make a mark and see where it takes me.

In everything, the first step is *always* the hardest. Your book wonderfully illustrates the wonder and excitement made possible by taking the first, uncertain step. Vashti's frustrated jab inspires a study of color, contrast, and composition.

An inspiring teacher made the adventure possible. Seeing the dot framed in the swirly gold makes Vashti look at the dot and see herself differently. Her inner voice is silenced. Vashti knows she can do better and does. An artist is born. In time, Vashti becomes the teacher and shares her insight with a young admirer.

I questioned if 5th graders should select a picture book as their favorite story. But then I decided that short messages are often meaningful— “I love you”, “thank you”, and “good work” are simple messages that provide a great deal of comfort. Your book inspires me to try new things and to be open to new adventures. Your book also encourages me to accept my role of being a teacher—as a big sister, a table head, and a leader of the lower school. The best teachers share their passion with others and are kind. I take your words with me. Thank you.

Annie Murphy

Level One / Semifinalist

Alyssa Myers – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Lemony Snicket, Author of *The Bad Beginning*

Dear Lemony Snicket,

I really enjoyed your novel, *The Bad Beginning*. I originally came across the book in our school library. I recognized the title from a book report my friend was working on so I decided to read it. That night I read myself to sleep, like I usually do, while I was thinking how lucky I am to have what I have. The theme of the story is – just because things get bad doesn't mean you won't succeed. Even though the orphans lost their parents, they stuck together and made their way through tough times. This theme was inspirational to me because my grandma died very suddenly because of a disease.

My grandma was a very sweet person. She had a disease that eventually killed her. I felt heartbroken and confused because I didn't understand how someone so nice could die. The Baudelaire children were also saddened and shocked by their parents' untimely death. I could really understand what the three children were going through when their parents died because of what happened to my grandma. As I turned the pages, I realized that your book was not like anything I have ever read before.

Most books are full of happiness and hope, but *The Bad Beginning* is a story of sadness and despair. At times, the story made me feel depressed and alone. However, I kept asking myself, "I wonder what will happen next?" I could not stop reading your book no matter how sad or lonely it made me feel. Your book helped me to understand that I am lucky to have what I have today, and that I should stop taking things for granted.

When I saw *The Bad Beginning* in my school library, I didn't realize how bad of a beginning it would really be or how much I would be able to relate to the three Baudelaire children because of how I felt when someone that my whole family loved and cherished died so suddenly. I did like how the story is different from so many of the other books I have read, and how the theme inspired me to realize that just because someone I love died doesn't mean that everything is going to turn out badly. Thank you for writing this inspirational book. I hope that other people who read your book find it as inspirational as I did.

Alyssa Myers

Level One / Semifinalist

Luke Oxley – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Mary Pope Osborne, Author of *Dinosaurs Before Dark*

Dear Mary Pope Osborne,

I am writing to thank you for positively influencing me. Your *Magic Tree House* book, *Dinosaurs Before Dark*, changed my life in many ways. When I learned how to read in kindergarten and in first grade, I wasn't a fan of reading. However, after reading *Dinosaurs Before Dark*, my first chapter book, I was motivated to read. Eventually, I read every book in the *Magic Tree House* series that was available to me. By reading your books, I gained the confidence that I needed to be a strong student. As a result, I am currently in an accelerated program at my school.

In first grade, my family and I went on a cruise. Before I left my teacher, Mrs. Sanford, assigned *Dinosaurs Before Dark* for me to read as make-up work. Just like Jack was when he saw the T-Rex, I was overwhelmed by the assignment because I had never read a chapter book before. I was upset that my vacation had been ruined by having to read such a big book. However, when I started reading it, I was surprised by how interesting it was. I could hardly put the book down! Before the cruise ended, I had finished the book.

Before reading your book, all I read were elementary picture books. I didn't appreciate reading; I thought reading wasn't important. However, after reading *Dinosaurs Before Dark*, I was very proud of myself. I viewed myself in a better way because I had accomplished reading my first chapter book. *Dinosaurs Before Dark* was so interesting that it motivated me to read almost the entire *Magic Tree House* series. Even though I was only six years old, I gained more self confidence after reading your books. This allowed me to become a better student because I felt like I could handle more schoolwork than before.

I am currently a sixth grader in the EXCEL program, an accelerated program at my school. Now, I realize that being a competent reader helps me in all my subjects. I have to read a lot even in social studies and science! Thanks to you, I learned that reading can be fun, even with long chapter books, and I am not afraid to tackle challenging books anymore.

Before I read *Dinosaurs Before Dark* in the first grade, I didn't like to read. All I cared about was building with Legos! However, reading my first chapter book influenced me in many positive ways. I learned that reading chapter books can be fun. This motivated me to become a better reader which eventually let me to

being in an accelerated program at my school. Thank you for inspiring me to read with your *Magic Tree House* series. I will never forget *Dinosaurs Before Dark* and how much it means to me. Jack might have been surprised when he saw a Pteranodon, but I was surprised by how much fun reading can be.

Luke Oxley

Level One / Semifinalist

Steven Peterson – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Bill Watterson, Author of *Calvin and Hobbes*

Dear Mr. Watterson,

My name is Steven Petersen and I'm a 6th grade student at Zionsville Middle School. I started reading your *Calvin and Hobbes* books when I was in first grade. I really liked *Calvin and Hobbes*. Reading isn't very easy for me, but somehow *Calvin and Hobbes* made it possible to actually finish a book by myself. The books were very interesting, enjoyable, and funny. The things that Calvin imagines are very funny.

Reading about Calvin and Hobbes is my favorite thing to do. To begin, I have learned about friendship and companionship. For example, when Hobbes tied Calvin's shoelaces together and then told him it would be a funny thing to do to someone, the joke was on him because he did not realize that he was the victim. Next, the imagination and creativity of *Calvin and Hobbes* is very entertaining. For example, Calvin pretends that he is an elephant and tells Hobbes and they go and play in the mud. They get super muddy and go inside. Calvin's mom gets very angry and sends him to the showers to become himself again. Another thing I have learned is that it is ok to be different from everyone else. Nearly every strip is filled Calvin and Hobbes doing something predictable yet unique in their own way. How could anyone not enjoy these loveable characters, Calvin and Hobbes?

I would really like to thank you for writing about the adventures of Calvin and Hobbes. I smile and even laugh when I read about what they are doing each day. Your writing keeps me interested in reading. I feel less different than the other kids at school and that is awesome.

Steven Petersen

Level One / Semifinalist

Aiden Ray – Hamilton Heights Middle School, Arcadia

Letter to Neil Gaiman, Author of *Odd and the Frost Giants*

Dear Neil Gaiman,

Your inspiring book *Odd and the Frost Giants* is a great story about a young boy who must face his fears and do whatever it takes to return three gods to their original form. I love your book. It is the best book I have ever read. I think you should make your book into a series, and maybe Odd could become a god. Maybe he could only return to earth once in a while to see his family, and maybe, just maybe, he might have to save Asgard once again.

Another thing I like about your book is that it is a great mixture of fantasy and adventure. I love the way all the gods are trapped in animal form according to their personality traits: Loki-the sly tricky fox, Thor-the strong fearless bear, and Oden-the mighty raven of the sky.

Your book *Odd and the Frost Giants* inspired me to be who I am today. I was never much into books until I read yours. Your book inspired me to read more books and never give up on a book even if it seems boring in the beginning. Thanks for opening my heart and mind to the world of books.

Sincerely,
Aiden Ray

Level One / Semifinalist

Ellison Renbarger – Fall Creek Intermediate School, Fishers

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

Dear Sharon Draper,

This summer I met someone different. It shocked me that someone could stay happy and still have some differences. Your book showed me that everyone can be high spirited and still have differences. Their life is like holding running water in your fingertips for a minute, hard but not impossible.

My dad has a friend whose daughter is like Melody. I went to their house with my family. On the way there my dad was telling me about her. He basically described Melody. He said she has been bullied and that her dad is really upset. I believe if you have been to school to at least fifth grade, you have been bullied. It is hard for people to be bullied, but they can just know that they are probably just having a long day. People that are different and face challenges know they are different, so it is even harder.

Before I read your book, I bet I stared at people with disabilities because they were different compared to me. Your book showed me that you shouldn't stare. I believe if you stare, you owe them a compliment.

I really felt like I was in this book. I wanted to go tell Claire and Molly to back off. I was very upset that they were so mean. I was so glad that Melody stood up for herself. This book is so realistic, like her having her own hidden talent and people not wanting to accept her for her differences.

Talent. Talents are something that everyone has. Talent plays a big role in this story. Hidden talents play a bigger role though. Melody has a very big hidden talent and I am so happy that Catherine helped her find it and she showed it to everyone. If Catherine wasn't in the story, the whole story would have fallen apart. Catherine is one of my role models because she is so kind to Melody. Melody has had very mean teachers and only two nice ones, Catherine and Mrs. Shannon. Ms. V. and Catherine try so hard to help Melody become regular. I say regular and not normal because no one is "normal." Dancers aren't the same as singers, brainy people aren't the same as athletic people. Everyone is DIFFERENT!

I guess what I am trying to say is, Melody is a wonderful person and she wouldn't be the person she is without her mom, dad, Ms. V., Mrs. Shannon, Catherine, and of course, Melody. Your story has changed my life and when I see someone who is different I will know they are the same as you and me.

Sincerely,
Ellison Renbarger

Level One / Semifinalist

Sarah Richardson – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to J.K. Rowling, Author of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

Dear J.K. Rowling,

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix is an amazing story. What I like most about it is the characters. My favorite character is Luna Lovegood. Luna taught me a very important lesson: always be yourself.

Luna Lovegood is a bit different from the other students at *Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry*. She doesn't go out of her way to be like other people. She is just herself, whether others like it or not. Sometimes people laugh at Luna for being different, but that doesn't bother her.

I'm the opposite of Luna. I've never really wanted to stick out. I just do what everyone else is doing, even if I'd rather do something else. Now that I've read *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* I feel more comfortable just being myself. I know that I can do things my way, not the way others are doing things.

Now that I think about it, being your own individual person is extremely important. Would Picasso, or Van Gogh have been remembered if they had done exactly what every other artist of their time was doing? Would Beethoven's music still be heard today if he had written the same music as every other musician? Would your books be read all over the world if you hadn't written an original, unique, individual story?

I've been told before just to be myself, but when people tell me that I roll my eyes and think "Ya, right like that's going to help me with anything." After reading *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* I realized that it does pay off in the end to be yourself. Some people may not like it, but if you are yourself then you'll like it, and that's what matters.

Thank you so much for writing this book. It has really changed me.

Sincerely,
Sarah Richardson

Level One / Semifinalist

Lillian Rogers – Benjamin Franklin Middle School, Valparaiso

Letter to R. J. Palacio, Author of *Wonder*

Dear R.J. Palacio,

I recently read a book written by you, *Wonder*. I just want to say that your book touched my soul in a way that no book has done before. It made me realize how much kids get picked on, and really inspired me to help out any person that is getting bullied. I also would like to say that the book is a gateway between a challenged person and someone that has no idea what it's like to be challenged. It just makes you feel as if all the harm that has ever come to you in your life is nothing compared to the struggles of a bullied kid. So I just want to tell you a tiny bit about how you changed my life.

My parents always tell me that I'm lucky for what I have, friends, family, and money. But I guess I never really acknowledged it until I read your book. It was like seeing for the first time, seeing the world of bullies. After I read your book I realized that all those "bad days" were not so bad. I found out that even someone as tiny as I can really make a humongous impact on someone's life, and that being positive towards everyone can really make a difference in their day. Your work was full of meaning, like an instruction guide made just for showing me the reality. Since I have read this book I felt the need to take care of all my fellow peers, like a mother protecting its child. I felt like I just wanted to go into the book and tell those bullies to pick on someone their own size. Finally I realized what had happened, I realized that I am just one person, but if I can make one person's life just a little better, then I have accomplished something terrific.

You might not think that just a book can make such an impact, but it really can. I really hope that what I shared can explain just a little bit of how you changed my life. So the next time that you are down just look at this letter and think about how much you influenced my life.

Sincerely,
Lillian Rogers

Level One / Semifinalist

Jack Talbert – Park Tudor School, Indianapolis

Letter to Gary Paulsen, Author of *Hatchet*

Dear Mr. Paulsen,

I have read your book *Hatchet* twice and I notice new things about myself and the world I live in each time I read it. I learned that I take a lot of modern conveniences for granted. For example, heating, technology, medicine, refrigerators, etc. I also learned from your book that I have to be prepared to survive in any situation. I realized living in the wilderness would be tough for anyone, but I have a special medical condition which would make it even more difficult for me. Living with type 1 diabetes has never been easy, but until reading this book, I never realized how good I have it. I use a high-tech insulin pump that requires batteries and has to be charged every three days. Where ever I go, I always have plenty of food, drinks, and medicine. I have never imagined life without the resources I need to survive. Now I see that there are places in the world where people are not as lucky as I am. In some places it is hard to find food and water, let alone insulin and definitely not an insulin pump!

When I was reading the book *Hatchet*, I tried to put myself in the place of Brian Robeson. By the end of the book, Brian realized that the hatchet saved his life. I've learned from this book that I need to always be prepared and carry an emergency kit. In this kit I would need food, water, sugar, insulin, batteries, and pump supplies. These supplies could easily fit in a small backpack that I could always have with me. This backpack filled with supplies could be my hatchet. This book helped me realize that in a crises situation, I need to be better prepared than the average kid.

Mr. Paulsen, I'm glad you wrote this book. It was fun for me to read and it encouraged me to set up an emergency kit that we now keep in our basement. I'm also talking to my parents about what we can do for other kids with diabetes that aren't as fortunate as me!

Sincerely,
Jack Talbert

Level One / Semifinalist

Abigail Thielbar – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

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

Dear Sharon Draper,

I have read many inspiring and opinion changing books, but *Out of My Mind* stands out. I have read this book at least three times. Every time I finish reading this book I just want to read it again. The first time I read this book was in fourth grade and I still remember it today, I'm in sixth grade now, because of its powerful meaning. This book has made me change the way I think about special needs people. It shows me just because someone is "special needs" doesn't mean they are dumb or stupid. They are not much different from you or me.

Out of My Mind has taught me that special needs people aren't much different than the average person. When Melody makes the Whiz-Kids Team, to me, is the most inspiring part. This specific part always brings a smile to my face and helps me realize that kids with cerebral palsy (and other special need kids too) are just normal kids too. Thanks to you, now whenever I see a "special needs" kid I smile at them and wave instead of thinking, "Oh, they're different." To me "special need kids" has a new meaning, kids who may have a disease or disorder but are special because they can overcome it with a little needed help. I was able to realize Melody is able to succeed in school and overcome cerebral palsy with a little help from her family, neighbor, and a new friend. Realizing that these kids aren't that different from someone who doesn't have a disorder is not only important for me, but also for the kid who has a special disorder. When the "special need kid" thinks that they aren't able to achieve something you or I could do they most likely won't. Melody's fellow teammates on the Whiz-Kids Team need to realize that. Special needs kids aren't that different from the average person.

Have you ever heard, "Every day you learn something new," Well, the day I finished reading *Out of My Mind* I learned that "Special needs kids" aren't any different than an average person. Your book *Out of My Mind* has changed the way I think about "special need" kids and it has for many others too. Thank you for teaching me an important message.

Sincerely,
Abigail Thielbar

Level One / Semifinalist

Olivia White – Park Tudor School, Indianapolis

Letter to R. J. Palacio, Author of *Wonder*

Dear R.J. Palacio,

While I never thought I was insensitive to people who are different than me, either because of their race or other physical differences, your book *Wonder* helped me see how even in small ways we may unknowingly mistreat people with differences. I always try to treat people the way I would want to be treated because that person could be me...or my sister. I say this because through August's story, I saw parallels to my own life as a sister to someone who has a life threatening food allergy.

As I read your book, I appreciated the changing points of view because it allowed me to see the challenges each person involved with August had to face, either as a family member or a friend. Like August's parents, I have watched my own parents work to both protect my sister and ensure that she's included in all activities. I could relate to Via, not just because my name is Olivia and my family calls me Liv, but because I am the oldest in my family and my little sister has a life threatening peanut and tree nut allergy. I worry about her a lot because peanuts and tree nuts are common in many foods and often people don't know how to handle food allergies or worse, they don't take it seriously. Just like people with physical differences, people with food allergies, like my sister, have the same potential to be bullied or discriminated against. Also, like Via, my life has been affected because I love peanut butter, but now I almost never get to have it and I certainly can't eat it at home. Now getting a peanut butter and jelly sandwich is something special that I can only do when I am out of town on a special trip with my mom or dad. I also do not accept treats many times because there isn't a safe treat option for my sister and I don't feel it would be fair to my sister if I take a treat and she can't. However, now that my sister is older, she is more understanding and accepting when I get a treat and she can't, but I still feel bad for her and wish she could enjoy them too.

Thank you for writing this book because I know it has sparked a lot of conversation about respecting people who are different, which includes people who live with life threatening allergies.

Sincerely,
Olivia White

Level One / Semifinalist

Carly Wiegel – Park Tudor School, Indianapolis

Letter to R. J. Palacio, Author of *Wonder*

Dear R.J. Palacio,

The book *Wonder* has taught me that judging people isn't only wrong, but that you're thinking of a human being. You have to put yourself in their shoes, and think how they feel. After reading *Wonder*, I try not to stare and judge others. Just because someone looks or acts differently doesn't mean that they don't have feelings. It can be hard to not look at others that look a little different. That's because you might not see someone like them every day. I try to think how August felt walking in public and around his school, then I think to myself, "What if I were August?" If I were August, I'd hate how people would judge me everywhere I went, even when they didn't know me. That's why when I see people in a similar or completely different condition than August, I think, *Don't judge, because everyone's beautiful in their own way, and they could be very nice and intelligent.* *Wonder* has many examples of how you could be a good friend. Summer wasn't afraid of August, nor was she judgmental against him. Summer was one of my favorite characters because she just went and sat right with August. She was having a conversation with August, and August actually felt like he belonged. That made my heart glow. Summer's the friend that I would try to be, because I want to accept others the way she accepted August.

After reading *Wonder*, I don't make fun of people, nor do I judge. I have learned that judging is wrong and that if you don't know the person, then you don't have a right to think anything other than say nice things about them. If someone makes fun of you, you know they aren't your friend. *Wonder* has taught me that if you have feelings about someone that aren't work sharing, then just keep them to yourself. Your book has not only made me feel that I have changed, but also it has made me feel like I've been a better person. Hopefully, I am the kind of person people want to be around. In the end reading *Wonder* has changed me forever and has taught me valuable lessons.

Sincerely,
Carly Wiegel

Level One / Semifinalist

Madison Yates – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Corrie ten Boom, Author of *The Hiding Place*

Dear Corrie ten Boom,

Your book *The Hiding Place* really touched me. I love to learn and read about World War II. Hearing your story, feeling your emotions, has given me a whole new perspective to World War II.

The treacherous hours of roll call in the cold each morning in each of the concentration camps is something that I can take for granted when we have heat and warm clothes.

Your story helped me to be thankful for *everything*, even things that you think you shouldn't be thankful for, things like fleas. In my life I can be thankful for things like the cold weather here in Indiana. Even if it's not my favorite, or anyone's, it might be useful, in a way that the fleas saved your Bible. Our cold weather brings a beautiful spring like the one after the wars in the big house with the tall windows and the gardens, and the concentration camps with flower boxes.

I can trust that God will provide in all situations, like when you had that small bottle of Davitimon that lasted until Mien brought you yeast compound from the hospital. God is all-powerful and He *will* provide, all you have to do is ask. One of the ways I can trust God to provide is that he will provide heat during the long cold winters of the Mid-west, or wherever it is needed.

Your story has helped and encouraged me to believe that God will always provide. Whether fleas or winter, vitamins or heat. Thank you so very much.

Sincerely,
Madison Yates

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE
LEVEL TWO

Level Two / First Place

Loralee Potter – Salem Middle School, Salem

Letter to John Green, Author of *The Fault in Our Stars*

Dear John Green,

"That's the thing about pain. It demands to be felt." It's so often the first moment of a sequence that holds the most significance. When my eyes first skimmed over those words, the ball had begun to roll. Words hold an enormous amount of power. Words make an impact; they uncover secrets that have been hidden in plain sight, they build worlds of wonder and tear down walls which have stood for an eternity. They're suckers for love, but they can kill with the turn of a page. Words have built nations and torn down empires. But your words have done even more. They found the lost soul of a young girl, and they rescued her. Augustus and Hazel saved me.

Isn't it odd how tragic memories seem to linger in our minds more often the euphoric ones do? It all happened over a year ago, but I still remember the details. In 2012 my close friend K was diagnosed with Restrictive Cardiomyopathy. That's basically a really complicated term for a simple, yet rare, health condition where the heart cannot stretch properly. At the tender age of 13 she was placed on the waiting list for a heart transplant, but the longer she waited the worse her outlook became. Aside from her immediate family, I was the first person to find out about her condition. I'm a self-proclaimed "know it all" so when I found out I did a lot of research. It was very frightening to see the cold hard statistics of her illness. I felt like it was my job to protect her, and the whole situation was very confusing to me. We cried together a lot, because it was too early to try and sort out our feelings through words. Although it was all happening to K, I was right there with her. So even if I didn't suffer through the physical pain, I shared a substantial amount of her mental torment.

Nine days after we learned of her terminal condition, another close friend of mine recommended *The Fault in Our Stars* to me. I was skeptical at first, and honestly only opened the cover out of sheer boredom. I immediately connected with the book. Every word I read, and every little detail I uncovered about Hazel Grace, Augustus, Isaac and every other character in the book, helped me understand. I realized that K wasn't alone. And I realized that I wasn't alone either. It was such an important thing for me to be able to feel what those characters felt. It gave me the perspective of a person in K's shoes, and multiple perspectives of those surrounding her. I had been so lost and confused, but the deeper I dove into *The Fault in Our Stars* the more I understood.

I made one huge mistake when reading your book. I chose to read it in public. As the story came to an end, I broke down. I saw Gus's fate as a highly likely event in K's near future. I couldn't even fathom losing her. Things had been getting worse for K and with her constant hospital visits and road trips to

doctors all over the tri state area it wasn't unreasonable to think of the inevitable. I've never been so emotionally torn by words. I screamed and yelled and kicked the walls. I punched anything I could get my hands on, and cried until I had no tears left. I was so angry at the world. I was angry at the unfairness of K's struggle. She didn't deserve the pain. She didn't deserve the need for the surgeries, the medicines, and the counseling. In the literal heart of Jesus, those who were sick had cycled by death and sickness. They prayed for help, they prayed for release, they prayed for the aid of their savior. And yet they cycled, and cycled, and cycled. Their prayers were seldom heard. *The Fault in Our Stars* made me question everything I had been told. I discovered more about myself through the words you, of a man whom I had never met, never even heard of, than from the legacies of wisdoms and truths which I had inherited.

K is a fighter. She is more than a simple statistic on a sheet of paper. And *The Fault in Our Stars* is more than a collection of words. It's a beautiful, powerful symphony that has played on repeat in my mind from the moment I first heard its tune. It's hard telling where my mental state would be right now if not for your words. Innumerable assortments of things have influenced my life and have contributed to the person that I am today. *The Fault in Our Stars* is high upon that list of things, especially when it comes to K.

Gratefully and sincerely yours,
Loralee Potter

Level Two / Second Place

Gabriella Eck – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to Dr. Seuss

Dear Dr. Seuss,

My name is Gabby, I speak for the three. Three generations of Seuss lovers, you see. Your wonderful books have been a part of my family since I can remember. From my grandparents to my sister and me, the imaginative worlds you've created have impacted our lives, in more ways than one.

The stories have kept my family close together. I remember my mom and dad reading *Hop on Pop* and *Are You My Mother?* late on a school night. I would beg to hear the story again, and then I'd rest my head, imagining the lumps on my bed were a lion-like Zeep who was dozing off near my feet. And after school, my sister Liesl and I would have tongue twisting battles in the living room, reading the words from *Fox in Socks* as fast as we could until we passed out on the rough carpet floor, laughing at each other's silly attempts. Even to this day we still try the tantalizing twistlers, with my sister always coming out triumphant.

When I was little, your stories taught me certain lessons in life, some I didn't realize were there until I was older. Before reading one of my favorite books, *Green Eggs and Ham*, I was always particular with trying new things. But when I read your book, I was interested in new ideas and things, especially objects that were green! (I started to like the color green so much, that it's still my favorite color even to this day!)

When I reached my teens, I found more lessons that were harder to see in your books. I have always thought that *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*, was a book to help little kids learn their colors and to count, but when I looked at it again when I was older, I found another, deeper meaning. On the first page of the book there is a little strange guy with a star on his belly; underneath him are the words, "From there to here, here to there, funny things are everywhere." I now think that this book shows diversity, and how all the strange, colorful creatures are different, yet they all can live and thrive together in these pages.

From the kind, careful elephant in *Horton Hears a Who* to *The Lorax's* pompom like Truffula trees, your books have inspired imagination. It seemed the words and the colorful pictures popped off the pages to create new worlds of endless possibilities for me to probe at in my dreams. They led me to think of creative, out of the box ideas in the classroom and sparked my imagination and fascination of the world. And happily, I can share your amazing creations with

my little sister, Melody. She is now in love with your books, and for a present, my mom and I bought her one of your stories, and she carries it around with her in her backpack, an imaginative world of her very own.

Thank you for sharing your whimsical imagination,
Gabriella Eck

Level Two / Third Place

Amanda Briggs – West Lafayette High School, West Lafayette

Letter to Rick Riordan

Dear Uncle Rick (Rick Riordan),

I am 13 years old, and just your average girl who loves shopping, boys, and all of that! Not! I have a secret that most people don't know about. I have Dyslexia and ADHA, and honestly, I wouldn't be writing this letter if it weren't required for my English class. I'm not the smartest or brightest in my class, which is very hard for me because there are a slew of Asians in my school who are the "smart nerds," and I happen to be Asian too. Every day I hear, "Aren't you Asian? Shouldn't you have straight A's?" It gets extremely old, more than the words in my brain can express. Your books helped me get through it; I just told myself that I could do more than they thought I could. I also told myself that there are other people like me who have the same problem.

A few weeks after *The Lost Hero* came out, my friend and I found your books. I did not want to read them; they were just too long. So, I told her to read them and tell me about them. A few weeks later, she was obsessed. She kept telling me to read them; she said the characters were like me, they had Dyslexia and ADHA. I decided to try your books and after *The Lightning Thief*, I was hooked. I love how you made the characters have disorders. Your books also gave me an interest in Greek (and Roman) mythology, which helped me last year in Social Studies.

Now that I have read both *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* and *The Heroes of Olympus* (up to *House of Hades*), I have a new perspective of the world. It is a world of one time chances, we have to decide to take it or not. This world is also full of one time chances, we have to decide to take or not. This world is also full of choices with many different situations and different obstacles. And a big part of *The House of Hades*, involves crossroads. We just have to decide which choice, crossroad, or path to take.

After reading your series, I realized that I am not at all what people think. I am just different. And different isn't so bad. It is just that people do not like different. Your books have given me strength and knowledge that I am not the only one in the world going through this.

I am so grateful and thankful for your books that have given me the strength to keep going.

Sincerely,
Amanda Briggs

Level Two / Honorable Mention

Jade Green – Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis

Letter to L. Jane Smith, Author of *Night World*

Dear L. Jane Smith,

Hello, my name is Jade Green and I'm a young woman, who from time to time enjoys spending time visiting a world that was created by the mind of an author. Sometimes, I will spend time in a back room in front of a computer succumbing to the blissful world of my own, absently letting my fingers tap a beat on the keyboard. My inspiration does not come from the first books that grabbed my attention written by Judy Blume, but from *Night World*, with the face of Poppy across the cover, given to me by my mother.

When my mother handed me her own copy of *Night World*, she smiled at me. Gently telling me I would like this book if I read it. I hesitated after taking it, not because I hated reading like a typical 3rd grader, but because I was not used to being introduced to long novels. At the time, I had a speech impediment and I was in my 4th year of speech therapy. I was a young girl with a lot of things to say, but with a tongue too quick and tangled for me to get my thoughts across. So in an attempt to sneak more literature into my life, and urge on my young fascination with writing short stories, my mom handed me your book.

The first few days after being handed that book, I found myself not worrying about coming across words that were difficult for me to pronounce. I just read the story, finding that in the quietness of my mind, stories are easier to read through without stopping and stuttering. Though I had a speech teacher, I had my times from my own private lessons of the tongue. I was more than happy, my confidence increased and I stopped being the shy little girl who hardly talked. I talked to people who didn't know I had a word to say.

From that point on, I found refuge in your stories of Poppy and James, Ash and Marylynette, and Keller and Galen. I remember reading out loud once or twice from your books, and finding my own characters to make laugh or cry. My reading level skyrocketed within 2 years to that of a freshman or sophomore in high school. I was in 5th grade. I'm currently now in 8th grade with a reading level post high school.

While you may have written a few stories in the 90's thinking nothing of a yet to be 9 year old with a speech impediment, I think of you on more than one occasion. Now I have more confidence while I speak with a smoother tongue. I can now read from a book aloud without anxiety upon coming across a word with *ash* or *the* in it. I can now capture the attention of my fellow students with my stories and not my speech.

Sincerely,
Jade Green

Level Two / Honorable Mention

Cooper E. Smith – Silver Creek Middle School, Sellersburg

Letter to Sean Covey, Author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*

Dear Mr. Covey,

As a famous author, you must receive lots of mail. I'm sure teenagers all over the world flock to your PO Box to compliment your book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. (Wait a minute, maybe not that many teenagers take time away from texting, skateboarding, and hanging out at the mall to write letters to influential authors, but they should). So why would you want to read this letter from me, a seventh grader who you don't even know? Well, I'll give you SEVEN reasons why. It all boils down to this. Reading *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* has completely changed my views about me and the world. I have read your book twice and have applied the habits to my everyday life. I would love to share with you seven examples of how you have affected my personal relationships and transformed my thinking from the inside out.

First, let me explain that I'm pretty good at math. It's a subject that has always been easy for me. I started seventh grade thinking that because I've always gotten A's, I wouldn't need to study for Algebra. My big-headed thinking influenced me into laziness. Sadly, my first test score was a C. After my initial panic, I remembered your Samuel Smiles quote, "Sow a thought, and you reap an act; sow an act, and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny." I realized that my thinking was leading me to form habits that would eventually impact my destiny in Algebra and possibly my future career. Instead of thinking I knew everything, I needed to realize there would be challenges in this new subject. Simply changing my thinking helped me to actively study and create the habit of diligence.

My second and third examples are summed up in two words: little brothers. Recently, I came home from school ready to start practicing my drums. I grabbed my drumsticks and began to play loudly. Right away, my younger brother walked in upset with me. He said he wanted to watch his TV show for the next hour. I was about to tell him that it was too bad, and he was going to have to deal with it. Then I remembered the fourth habit, "Think Win-Win." I told him that he could watch his show for thirty minutes, and then I'd play my drums. He was satisfied with that. Thinking win-win helped me avoid an argument. The same thing worked with my other brother when he wanted to play video games while I was watching a movie. I've noticed we haven't been fighting as much. Those are two relationships that have been positively affected.

The fifth habit, "Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood," was hard for me to learn. However, I have found ways to practice it with my parents. Call them examples four and five. One day my friend asked if I could spend the night. My mom said, "No." My first thought was to argue with her and give

her a list of reasons why I should be allowed to go. After all, I did bring up my math grade and have been getting along well with my brothers, right? Luckily, however, I remembered to seek first to understand. I respectfully and politely asked her what her reasons were for denying my request. She told me that she was planning to take us to the movies, something I had wanted to do for a while. This was a much better option for me. Listening to her first and not arguing allowed me to enjoy a great time with my family. I had a chance to practice this habit with my dad too when we were arguing about having a TV in my room. I monitored my own body language while I respectfully and genuinely listened to his reasons why I could not have one. Because he felt listened to, he was then open to hear my point of view. I still don't have a TV in my room, but we have a plan for when I might get one and what viewing rules would apply. My relationship with my parents has never been better. I have learned to genuinely listen to them; they actually do have good insight.

My sixth example happens to be your sixth habit, "Synergize." I've learned that $1+1$ really does equal 3. My friend and I could not agree on how to do our science project. He wanted to focus on the scientific aspect, but I was more interested in being artistic. We brainstormed, and together we came up with an even better solution that combined both of our ideas and more. Our teacher complimented us on our teamwork and creativity. The final project was better than what either one of us could have done alone.

Finally, I have learned to avoid procrastination. Before I read your book, I didn't use a calendar or planner, and as a result my schedule was hectic. I would relax through the week, and I would freak out Thursday night when I realized I had two tests the next day. You taught me in habit three, "Put First Things First," that I was procrastinating and was going to be extremely exhausted from trying to catch up. When I got an iPhone for Christmas, I began using alarms, a calendar, reminders, and notes to prioritize and plan. Now I am prepared and organized and have plenty of time for the important things and the extras.

Thank you for writing such a meaningful book that has impacted my life. I want you to know that this book has improved my relationships, grades, and attitude. You have shown me ways to create good habits by changing my thinking about myself and others. I know these habits have affected my character and are paving the way for a successful future.

Sincerely,
Cooper E. Smith

Level Two / Honorable Mention

Sheena Tan – Klondike Middle School, West Lafayette

Letter to Jack London, Author of *White Fang*

Dear Jack London,

I met Evelyn when I was in sixth grade. I had just transferred schools and didn't know many people. Evelyn was sitting by herself at an empty lunch table quietly eating her ham-and-cheese sandwich. I remember starting to walk toward her and feeling somebody pull me away, telling me that she was the one person I didn't want to be associated with. "Trust me. She's really weird. No one likes her." So, of course, I went to talk to her. We soon became really good friends.

Later in our friendship, I found out she suffered from anxiety issues and fought depression. She would cut to relieve her stress, let the demons inside escape; feel a pain she could actually control. She would then dress to cover up her scars by always wearing long-sleeved shirts, even in the summer. People would judge her by her outside appearance and bully her about it. They thought that she was disgusting. They told her that she cut just because she was trying to find an excuse and that she wanted attention. They told her she was pathetic; a little less than dog poop. These taunts and insults wrapped around her, completely surrounding her world. She thought her life really was pathetic, disgusting, and useless. She contemplated committing suicide.

"Until you came along," Evelyn said to me one day. "You were the only person who didn't judge, didn't notice, and didn't care. You saw me for who I am." After a while, I helped her learn how much she was worth and how important she really was.

I never would have been able to help her had I not read your book. *White Fang* allowed me to realize that every life is worth saving. I realized that I should treat everyone fairly while I still had the chance because I would never know how my actions could affect them. After all, if maybe Gray Beaver had shown White Fang a little compassion and love, White Fang might have turned out to be caring and kind. If Lip-lip had never existed, White Fang might have learned to trust other dogs. If White Fang had never met Beauty Smith, he might have learned that laughter isn't something to be afraid of. But these things never happened. The world molded White Fang until he became what he was. The book says, "He was unloving and ferocious. He was an enemy of all his kind."

I learned that I can't judge anyone. I don't know what they're going through in their lives. You, Mr. Jack London, helped me realize this important truth. Thank you for this. It taught me a lesson that I will always remember.

Sheena Tan

Level Two / Honorable Mention

Sally Wagner – Greensburg Jr. High School, Greensburg

Letter to Frances O’Roark Dowell, Author of *The Kind of Friends We Used to Be*

Dear Mrs. Dowell,

Everyone has had a best friend at one time or another, you know, the one you do absolutely everything with. I have been really lucky in having two really close friends, Brooke and Zoie. We were like that knot you get in a necklace chain, the one that you can't get untangled no matter how much you pick and pull on it. Then we went off to junior high...

We had absolutely no classes together and our lockers weren't near each other. Slowly we began to drift apart and I didn't know how to stop it. I read some books about friendship trying to find something I could relate to. After about three books I was over it. All of those books were about how happy the friends were together and all the great adventures they had together and that was the exact opposite of what was going on in my life at the time. I was about to give up on the whole idea when I spotted your book, *The Kind of Friends We Used to Be*, out of the corner of my eye and decided to give it a try.

Just by looking at the title I was hooked and I finished the book in three days. I was so glad to have a book about friends that actually wasn't about how good of friends the main characters were. Every day I would escape into Kate and Marylin's world just to see if they would solve their problems. It made me feel better to know that there was someone else who had lost a friend and was just trying to find a way through the situation, even if they were fictional.

After I read this book, I just knew that things would get better between my friends and me. I began to make more of an effort to keep in touch with them. Then Brooke moved away to Tennessee. I felt like a huge part of me had just left and again I was left not knowing what to do. I decided to read the book again and see if there was something new I could learn from the book this time.

As it turns out there was and it came from Kate. I felt connected to Kate ever since the first time I read the book. I felt connected to Kate because we were both trying to accomplish the same task, get our friends back and she also always tries to see the positive side of things like I do. One of my favorite things that Kate says is "Different is better. Different is much more interesting." because I believe that to be true. I also liked a lot of Kate's views on friends like "Maybe cracks could make a friendship stronger. Cracks said we don't fit together one hundred percent, but that's ok." What I learned this time from Kate was when things change and don't go your way, don't give up trying to make thing better.

I decided to try and get closer to my other friend Zoie. As it turns out, she was feeling the same way I was about our friendship and about how Brooke moved

away. We started talking more and we became a lot closer. I could not be happier. I only wish that I would have done something to fix Brooke and my friendship earlier.

The Kind of Friends We Used to Be has helped me a lot over the past two years. I'm glad I read the book and now I own it myself. If I hadn't read this book, I don't know where I would be with relationships with Brooke and Zoie.

Sincerely,
Sally Wagner

Level Two / Semifinalist

Safia Alim – Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis

Letter to John Green, Author of *The Fault in Our Stars*

Dear John Green,

It was a real pleasure to read your book *The Fault in Our Stars*, and I must say, there was much to be learned. This book was very meaningful and has taught me life lessons that I will take with me for years to come. Additionally, I learned so much about myself as person and this book has influenced me entirely on how I see life.

After reading about a 16-year-old girl that was suffering with a terminal illness, it really made me appreciate life and see it in a whole other perspective. This world is a gift, life is a gift and many people sadly take it for granted. Your book is definitely not the typical book that I expected it to be. Most cancer books are the same and the main character's entire life revolves around their cancer but Hazel's didn't, she had a life outside of the cancer and lived her life to the fullest in the time she had been given with Augustus. As you said, they had a "forever within numbered days."

I think that for the most part this book made me realize that some people, myself included, need to enjoy life, realizing that there isn't just one picture. We are all looking at the world wrong, we're not looking at everything, and only the things that we think matter even if they're frivolous and unnecessary and that's what we don't see. This novel was very meaningful to me because I can really relate to how Hazel's perspective on life was. Also, another thing I realized in these books was that Hazel and Augustus could have hypothetically been really self-centered and only cared about themselves because they had cancer. They cared more about each other and their friends and family than anything else.

Your work definitely influenced me a lot; I've always been really big on reading and writing. After I read your book, I noticed myself caught up in reading even more. This is definitely my favorite book and I'm thrilled to see it become a movie.

DFTBA,
Safia Alim

Level Two / Semifinalist

Madison Allen – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

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

Dear Sharon Draper,

Your book, *Out of My Mind* has changed my perspective on disabled students. Before I read this book, I did not realize how left out disabled students felt. For example, I did not realize they were just like us, and all they wanted to do was fit in. Honestly, I had never attempted to talk to anyone who was disabled. I was kind of afraid of them. I was afraid someone would make fun of me for talking to them. I thought that if I talked to them, I would not be as popular.

As a result of reading your book, I realized I was doing everything wrong. I found out that I should talk to them, instead of turning my shoulder. Also, when I do talk to them, I learned that I should talk to them like they are normal. I realized if I talk to them like they are disabled, they will not feel like they fit in. I also realized that my friends would not make fun of me for talking to them. If they were true friends, they would talk to a disabled student too. If they do make fun of you for talking to them, they are probably not true friends. Another important thing I learned is, if I see a disabled person in public, do not stare. It makes them feel uncomfortable. I also learned that I should realize that they do not have the easiest life. Being in a wheelchair is not that easy. It is also hard for them to talk to other people. They do not know if they are going to be judged or not. I also learned that if I feel like they are not listening to me, I should not be alarmed. They might have trouble keeping their attention, and they cannot help it. Not only did you teach me to talk to disabled students, but you also taught me how to talk to them. I learned that I should keep eye contact with them. I also learned not to treat them like they are special. I should treat them like I would treat my best friend. Overall, I learned to treat people the way I would want to be treated.

This book was very meaningful to me. It has changed the way I do things exceedingly. Whenever I see a disabled child in school, I say hi instead of avoiding them. I also help them by opening the door or carrying their books. I did not realize how much they appreciate the slight gestures we do for them. Maybe everybody should be more like them.

Reading your book was a pleasure. You have influenced me to step out of my box and make a difference in someone else's life. I have recommended this book to numerous people. I hope everybody was as influenced as I was after

reading your book. Some questions I have for you are, how were you influenced to write this book? Did you write this book about somebody you know? What other books have you written? Have you been writing since you were little? Thank you so much for writing this book. I really enjoyed it.

Your friend,
Madison Allen

Level Two / Semifinalist

Jinan Ayub – Fishers Jr. High School, Fishers

Letter to Sharon Draper, Author of *Forged by Fire*

Dear Sharon Draper,

Racism, stereotypes, drugs, and abuse, as we all know, are horrendous things that are part of our ever-changing world. There are many people in this world who think it is okay to judge someone against their prejudice. We have all heard of these nasty stereotypes and abusers, and they should not, by any means, ever be used. Your book, *Forged by Fire*, imparted me, and many other aspiring students, a truly astounding story.

I have constantly refused to believe that anything is possible. But reading about Gerald and his fraudulent family taught me otherwise. Just look at how far Monique has gotten from her past. She was a drug addict who continuously manipulated her son into thinking that she truly loved him. But eventually at the end of the book, Monique apprehended to who Jordan really was, and turned her life around.

Also, I learned to prove others wrong. When someone tells you that you cannot do something because of who you are, show them that you can, and do not let anyone stop you. Similarly like the time in your book when the doctors told Aunt Queen that she could not take care of Gerald because she was in a wheelchair. Aunt Queen did not let that stop her from raising Gerald, and look how brilliant he turned out to be. Along with this, Rob Washington's family is an impeccable example of how the color of your skin should not lead you to think that you cannot be successful. Do not hang on to stereotypes because that is just what they are, stereotypes.

Adding on to “proving others wrong,” your book exhibited a universal trait; stand up for what you believe in. Angel was molested and abused both physically and mentally by Jordan. Gerald and Angel were petrified of Jordan, but they still took the situation into their own hands and took the problem to court. Jordan threatened them both, and Monique could not even look at Gerald or Angel throughout the whole process. On top of that, Monique was very delusional; she thought her own kids were lying to her, and worst of all, she alleged that Jordan was the “good guy.” Through all of that, Gerald and Angel got justice, once and for all, and were able to throw Jordan in jail.

At the same time, never fall into peer pressure and start doing drugs. Monique and Jordan were both alcoholics and/or drug addicts. Drugs and alcohol will ruin your life. Even though Monique went to rehab and recovered, there were still bumps on the road ahead of her. Sadly, Jordan chose the alternative path, and continued drugs and alcohol, which never enhanced anything. This just shows to prove that falling into peer pressure crumbles your life immensely.

Family is essential. Angel and Gerald may not have had their parents to support them at times, but they had each other. Angel wanted to dance, and Gerald took her to classes. Meanwhile, Gerald wanted to play basketball, and Angel came to every game. Occasionally, Gerald would even skip practices and parties to guard his sister. It was unquestionably difficult to see Gerald and Angel struggle throughout your book, but I was pleased to see that there was a character that always lifted up everyone's spirits, Mr. Washington. Even though Mr. Washington was not directly related to Gerald and Angel, he helped them through everything, from filing charges against Jordan, to helping them with school. Nevertheless, just having someone there for you is an uplifting feeling. *Forged by Fire* reminded me of how DNA does not make a family, love does.

There have been several times in my life where I had to keep this in mind: never lose hope. When Aunt Queen passed away, Gerald thought that his life had been terminated. He knew how corrupt his biological family was, and he was in a depressed state because he missed Aunt Queen. Gerald would have been able to avoid that "depressed state," but he lost hope. He was appalled of the idea of living with Monique again. However, at the end of your book, Monique changed and Jordan was no longer an issue to anyone anymore. At the end of the day, there was still hope.

One thing I need to remember as long as I live my life is to always stay strong. Thankfully, your book taught me exactly how to do so. I always look back at how Gerald and Angel handled everything they went through with such refinement. From physical to mental abuse, drugs, alcohol, violence, and so much more, Gerald and Angel kept each other going. Everything will recover, sometimes it just takes time. To end off my statement, I just want to say thank you for sharing with me an unforgettable story about family, love, courage, bravery, and hope.

Jinan Ayub

Level Two / Semifinalist

Sophie Ball – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to Natalie Babbitt, Author of *Tuck Everlasting*

Dear Natalie Babbitt,

Love is not accurately defined in the dictionary. Nor can it be. Love is not easily defined. Is it a feeling? Is it an action? What is it? Can you tell me? Have you ever felt the way Jesse did for Winnie? Or was that just something you concocted to sell books and make your publisher happy?

When I was just a wee little girl my parents divorced. And before you begin to think oh, you poor thing, don't. I lived the same childhood, maybe even a better one than that of those whose parents stayed together. But the one thing my parents' divorce did do to me is make me doubt. Doubt the existence of love. I believe parents can love their children, but I am not sure two strangers can love each other.

My parents were madly in love; they did what those madly in love do. They got in front of every person that matters to them and promised to love each other forever. And to my knowledge the both of them honestly believed they would. But their love, if it ever existed, ended. No tragedy occurred. No one had an affair. They just simply stopped loving each other.

Even though they made me doubt love because of your book I have hope. Ever since I have had my doubts about whether or not what they promised can be promised. The thought crossed my mind that maybe love is just an urban myth created, so we all can just keep going. And keep searching for it. Maybe every *I love you* is a lie. Maybe we aren't capable of loving the way Jesse and Winnie did. I shouldn't say it like that. Jesse loved until the moment he saw Winnie's tomb stone. Even then he never stopped loving her. But Winnie didn't. When she became of age she didn't drink the water. She saved her toad. And why? I ask. Could it be that even in a fictional world no two people can love each other for their entire forever?

But maybe she did love him for her forever. Whether or not Winnie really loved Jesse I think she did. I think that Winnie loved Jesse so much she couldn't understand it. Her mind couldn't wrap around her heart. Even though she didn't drink the water, she still loved him. Winnie wanted to be with him, but it scared her too much. But then again maybe she just loved that toad more. Whether or not Winnie really loved Jesse I think she did.

Growing up I watched every single princess movie over and over again. But it wasn't until one day in the fourth grade when I picked up your book *Tuck Everlasting* that a hope seed was planted in my heart. Hope that maybe love is real. All those perfect love stories never touched me the way Jesse and Winnie's imperfect yet everlasting love did.

Even though they made me doubt love, because of your book I have hope.

Sophie Ball

Level Two / Semifinalist

Kerrington Bigsbee – Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis

Letter to Charles Dickens, Author of *A Christmas Carol*

Dear Charles Dickens,

A few years ago I read your book *A Christmas Carol*. I really enjoyed it and it taught me life lessons I still live by today. The book covered a lot of issues people have today such as not being able to give, but will receive. Many people in the world don't understand the concept that if you give you will receive. Your book really changed my perspective on the way I do things today.

The story you wrote really relates to the person I have become today. Your story talked about a man named Scrooge who never gave to those who needed it, but soon he seen how his actions affected others by giving. I used to never help my community, and I would never donate to the army. I thought it was a waste of time. I was in my school library walking around and I seen a book on the ground called *A Christmas Carol*. I decided to read the book and finished the book the same day. I learned three different lessons. The book taught me that no matter what happened in the past you can always push past it and become a better person. You should always give and if you give you will receive. The last lesson I learned from your book is that you are always benefiting another life when you give. It never matters how big or small, you are always benefiting causes and lives.

The book you wrote relates to me on a very personal level. It relates to me because it molded me into the person I am today. It showed me that you should always give in everything you do especially in school. You never know what you are capable of unless you give it your all. You may be the next person to solve a problem that could save peoples' lives. This still follows my statement that if you give your all in everything you will receive. You can be the next person to change the world all because you give in everything you could. Your story really showed me to put all my hard work into everything that I do like going to school, serving in the community, and helping others in need. I would have never known if I hadn't read your book when I was younger. I probably wouldn't put all my effort into school and helping the community. Your book taught me that I need to give back and help others because many people don't have the same opportunities I do. Thank you for writing this phenomenal book and teaching me life lessons.

Kerrington Bigsbee

Level Two / Semifinalist

Laurel Clark – West Lafayette High School, West Lafayette

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

Dear Mr. Riordan,

A lot of people look at the world from a very basic standpoint. We believe that what we can't see isn't really there. I used to look at the world like that, too. I didn't believe in myths, legends, or folktales. I didn't see why people were so interested in them. I figured, "They're just stories, so what's the big deal?" Not anymore...

When people started raving about your series, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, I thought they were all crazy. I didn't really like fantasy at the time, and I didn't understand what was so compelling about it. Therefore, when people told me that I should read the book, I thought that I wouldn't like it very much. I thought it would be very child-like and wouldn't really be interesting. However, I wanted to see what all of the craziness was about, so I did read it. The book opened up a whole new world of possibilities for me to explore.

The Lightning Thief completely changed my mind about fantasy books. It showed me a whole world of things that I never even considered. I never thought what the gods would be like in modern times, or how their children would survive in modern society. I thought all of that died when ancient Greece did. I continued reading the series and now that I've finished all five books, I don't think I'll ever be able to see the world the same way again. I will forever be looking atop the Empire State Building for a city in the clouds, for hippocampi in the ocean, and wondering if the Bermuda Triangle is really the *Sea of Monsters*.

While I was reading *The Lightning Thief* I started changing. I started pondering things that I had never considered before. I started looking at people from a new perspective. I speculated, "What if a lot of us really are demigods?" It probably isn't realistic to think that there may be monsters lurking in places that we wouldn't expect, but your book makes us fascinate whether or not it really is true. The book made me, personally, look at the world a whole lot differently. I try to see through the mist sometimes, and puzzle about how many ballpoint pens really are swords.

After reading *The Lightning Thief*, I realized that I really do enjoy fantasy, just not fairies and goblins (as I used to believe most fantasy was about). I found out that fantasy can bring me out of my normal life, as realism can't. I discovered that fantasy books were a way to relieve myself of everyday problems, because I got to explore situations and relationships that normal mortals don't get to explore. I realized that when I read fantasy, I can pretend, like I am a kid again. I can wonder about what it would be like to literally ride a wave, or fight a fury. I never thought that I would really lose myself in a book like I lost myself in your fantasy book.

Your work has really meant a lot to me. The books have changed my perspective on the world. I no longer look around and see the people around me as what they are from the outside, I look at them and think about what they really are on the inside. *The Lightning Thief* helped me to broaden my horizon to fantasy books, and it helped me to imagine more. If I had not read your book, I would still be reading realistic fiction every day, instead of a mixture. Also, I would never have had the chance to look at the world and think, “Hey, maybe I’m a demigod.”

Also, by reading *The Lightning Thief*, I opened up my mind to writing in different genres. I never really thought about writing fantasy or mythology. I realize that writing fantasy might even be more fun than realistic fiction (as I normally write). I now understand that with fantasy, the options are wider. There aren’t as many boundaries, because if you hit a problem that you need to solve with something that isn’t exactly “possible,” you can just make up the solution. Plus, it usually works into the rest of the story because it doesn’t have to be a real-world solution. It can be something that can’t really happen!

In conclusion, your work has really influenced me to read different things, write different genres, and imagine more. Now, when I see a fantasy book, I don’t ignore it and think “that is probably just childish.” I don’t have to limit my writings, and I can write stories that completely defy the laws of “what can really happen.” I can write a story about a duo that has never touched the ground because they float! Plus, your work opened up the inner child in me that says “Look at that volcano! Maybe there is a monster inside of it!” I look at life differently now, because I can joke about being a demigod, and dream about visiting Mt. Olympus. I see the world through different eyes—the eyes of a believer, an imaginer, a demigod.

Laurel Clark

Level Two / Semifinalist

Emma Dickson – West Lafayette High School, West Lafayette

Letter to Erin Morgenstern, Author of *The Night Circus*

Dear Ms. Morgenstern,

I've read your book *The Night Circus*, and although it was extremely enjoyable, I wouldn't exactly call it life-changing—I'm not going to lie. But I continue to think about the story even after I finished it some months ago. I started the book during a time when there were big changes occurring in my life: puberty, starting at a new school, and entering junior high. This was the first "adult" book that I read, and I was very impressed by the way you developed the characters, described the circus, and arranged the plot. After I left this magical world that you had created, I realized that there were some things going on beyond the story itself. I've gained new insights about dedication to one's dreams, about friendship and love in its many forms, about responsibility and maturing enough to make one's own decisions, and about the dangers of blind ambition.

In your story, Chandresh Christophe Lefèvre has a vision about something extraordinary and is brave enough to risk everything he has—money, fame, and reputation—to make it happen. He believes in this seemingly impossible task so much that he convinces others to believe in it, too. Chandresh taught me to think big, and always to stay true to my goals and dreams.

I also learned that love and friendship can come in a variety of forms: the romance between Marco and Celia; the closeness of siblings like Poppet and Widget and the Burgess Sisters; the doomed relationship between Tsukiko and her lover; the ties of community within the rêveurs; and how the bonds of relationship survive the passage of time. After reading *The Night Circus*, I value the relationship with my friends as well as with my family more. I'm encouraged to make new friendships in the hope that they will grow to be as strong and lasting as those of Bailey and Poppet and Widget.

Just like Bailey is faced with growing up and thinking for himself, I too feel like I'm at a point in my life in which I will be met with important decisions. Bailey is conflicted between staying in his safe, familiar world or taking a big risk and turning his back on it. Bailey's dilemma made me realize that sometimes it's better to leave my comfort zone and do things I've never tried before, such as joining different clubs, volunteering more, standing up for my beliefs even if they're unpopular, and speaking up more in class.

Every day in school, I see all these kids (the jocks, the princesses, and the academic overachievers) trying to impress each other with the clothes they wear, the sports they play, the expensive technology they own, and their grades. They're so blinded by the things that they have and their overinflated egos that they lose sight of what's important, such as being genuine, appreciating others,

and being thankful for what they have. Prospero is so self-centered that the only important thing to him is winning, even at the cost of his relationship with his daughter and eventually his own existence. In the end he's invisible and powerless. Now I know the importance of creating memories instead of obtaining material things.

Your book is kind of like the Night Circus itself: unique, imaginative, magical, and mysterious. It made me see many possibilities in life. In the same way that the circus changed and evolved over the years, I feel like my life and my views are doing that as well. I hope that I too can dream big like Chandresh, take risks like Bailey, love deeply like Marco and Celia, and avoid the fate of Prospero. I hope to create my own Night Circus, with tents filled with good memories and a community of “performers” with whom I can share love and friendship.

Emma Dickson

Level Two / Semifinalist

Haley Dyar – Greensburg Jr. High School, Greensburg

Letter to Emily Dickinson, Author of *Hope is the Thing with Feathers*

Dear Emily Dickinson,

Your poem “Hope is the thing with feathers” talks about hope as if it were a bird. When I read this poem, I felt like I could relate. In spring 2013, my grandpa was hospitalized. When I found out he was sick I felt like all my hope was drained from me. I felt like a truck hit me, I was stunned. In 2013, I also lost my idol. Her name was Talia Joy. I found her on YouTube, I instantly fell in love with her personality and how happy she was even though at any time she could be in the hospital because of the cancer she had called neuroblastoma, a childhood cancer. She died at thirteen in July. In the same year, two people I looked up to had died. Hope was hard to have.

Months after my grandpa’s funeral, I came upon this poem. At first it was just another poem, but then I really thought about what was going on. I realized what you were saying about hope. I realized you were saying “Hope really never goes away, that even when you feel like all hope is lost, the little birdy is still in you singing the little song of hope. Your poem also says that hope is best heard during the worst times. While everything with my grandpa was going on, I felt like I had no hope, but when I read this poem months later, I realized my hope never left. I just assumed that everything was going wrong and would stay that way so, I blocked hope out.

Out of this whole poem, I remember the lines “Hope is the thing with feathers/that perches in the soul/and sings the tune without the word/and never stops/at all/.” I will remember this part because it reminds me that hope is always with me and never leaves. After reading this poem, hope has a bigger meaning to me. Hope is something that keeps me strong when I feel like I can’t and I wish I would have known this in my past. Hope helps people get through rough days and makes people think of the brighter side of things.

When my grandpa and Talia died, I felt like there was no way to have hope. I was thinking how could this get better? I know that everyone has to go, but I just didn’t understand, why him? Why Talia? Your poem taught me that in all that time I felt like everything would stay bad and I didn’t have hope. I now realize if I would’ve kept hope getting over their losses would have been so much better. Even though I still wish they were here, I realize that I have to accept it and live my life. They wouldn’t want me grieving so long after they died.

Thank you so much. I know you will never read this but you have changed me through this poem. When things are bad I always believe that the problem will get better.

Haley Dyar

Level Two / Semifinalist

Margaret Fornes – Klondike Middle School, West Lafayette

Letter to R. J. Palacio, Author of *Wonder*

Dear R.J. Palacio,

I am as normal as anyone. I ride my bike, do my homework, and feel self-conscious about lots of things. That last one is mostly just a stage that all teens pass through. For example, I think my hair is too frizzy, and my friend thinks her nose is too big. Everyone has their own insecurities about themselves, but we keep going about our business. All of these things are little imperfections that we notice only when we think about ourselves, and we don't realize that we almost always think about ourselves in the back of our minds. When people are out doing something normal (eating ice cream, shopping, going to the movies) and someone like August walks in, everyone temporarily forgets their own shortcomings. People concentrate all of their energy into trying not to stare at August's imperfections, and in doing this, they stop thinking about themselves. We shouldn't need people like August to teach us that we are not as important as we think. People like August make us feel good about our appearance, and we shouldn't get that vibe from him. Also, if people realized that we are all equal and one person is not more important than another, we would be more accepting to all the geeks, nerds, and people like August who are out somewhere in this world.

I know that theoretically there is no such thing as perfect; but if there is no such thing as perfect, there is no such thing as normal. Everyone's idea of normal is different, so what is really normal? For all we know, August may look normal, and we all may look strange. Also, I think perfection is found on the inside. When I find someone that I want to be like, it is not because of what they look like; it is what they act like. To me, perfection is achieved when at least one person looks up to you. As well as that, perfection is one small, golden, quality that people see in you. The quality does not have to be anything that anyone did; it could be someone's hair, or that they helped a sixth grader pick up their books. Perfection is not all on the inside. Sometimes, there are elements of perfection on the outside. August has received perfection so many times, that he is my ultimate vision of perfection.

On a similar note, even though August's face is not exactly normal, he goes about his business like he is the most normal person on Earth. His distorted face is normal for him, if not for other people. If we have a bad hair day, we will make a big deal about it and try to hide it; any of us would feel self-conscious about it, but for August, a bad hair day is no big deal. Once again, if we were not so focused on ourselves, we would be more accepting of the unexpected things that come our way. August has learned to go with the flow and live with what life throws at him.

This book touched me, in that now I don't care as much about my hair as I used to, but I care more about my personality and what people see in me. I never have seen many of the imperfections my friends point out in themselves, and I won't ever try to find any of them. *Wonder* has taught me to look past the shortcomings in everyone (including me) and to stop thinking about imperfections, but to start looking for perfections.

Margaret Fornes

Level Two / Semifinalist

Hudson Gorup – West Lafayette High School

Letter to Roald Dahl, Author of *James and the Giant Peach*

Dear Mr. Dahl,

I know it seems childish that a boy the age of mine (12) would still be reading children's books like yours in this generation, but every time I read a story of yours, I began to immediately have a burst of creativity and imagination. It is as if my thoughts are entwined with one of your novels to give what I see around me or my city a new meaning. The book that really got the wheels turning was *James and the Giant Peach*.

A prelude: before I was the boy I am today, who some say has a bright personality others say annoying, I was a shy five year old. First grade, although not a challenge for me academically, was very hard for me socially. But the first time my teacher read the first chapter of the book *Matilda*, my imagination began to hop wild like a kangaroo. Something had triggered me and I wanted to hear more and more. I begged and pleaded for my mom to get me more of these fascinating books, and she gladly went to the store and bought me the first two books of my collection. These books were *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *James and the Giant Peach*. Every night I would come into my parents' room begging for more and more chapters and day by day I would listen to these books without a sign of boredom. By the time the first semester ended of school, I had read through your most awarded books. I was two books ahead of my teacher and would still happily reread the parts of the books my teacher and classmates had not read. And at the beginning of the new semester, I was the Roald Dahl kid, with a completely new personality. Kids began to talk to me more and I created friends that I still have now.

Throughout the next three years I was no longer the shy boy, I had made my mark on the school, then it happened.

I was again the shy boy in class in fourth grade. It seemed as though I had gotten amnesia and lost all creativity. I was quiet and I didn't like it. Things weren't changing, but I did manage to finally get on the path by rereading many of your books. Again I had the same old personality.

Now that I'm in the seventh grade, there have been a lot of changes. I have noticed that most of my friends have bland personalities. They only care about three things during school: girls, sports, personal assets. Yes, I may be a little hypocritical, because if you generalized what I care about, it would probably resemble what they like. The difference is the way they show it. Many of my friends will say they are so great at something (personal assets) and for some reason they care about my opinion. I don't like bragging unless it's about stupid stuff.

The way I talk about sports is almost similar except I don't like stressing it as much as they do. I show my competitive nature and talent on the field. And I won't get into that.

Now you may wonder what this has to do with your writings, and I guess that the books changed how I react to those things. There is a true side to most of your writing. You started from pretty small beginnings like most of the protagonists in your books. You have also had many rough patches and antagonists in your life like many of the characters in your stories. It has really made me conscious about life around me. Any chance I get I will donate money to charities. If allowed to go, I will attend events to help many shelters or underprivileged children.

Finally, I would just like to thank you, I hope that recipients of this story can enjoy this letter and give it to your family.

Hudson Gorup

Level Two / Semifinalist

Nicole Hoffman– Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis

Letter to Nicholas Sparks, Author of *The Last Song*

Dear Nicholas Sparks,

Your book *The Last Song* changed my life. It changed my life by showing me the meaning of family and however you feel you should always spend your time with your family. In *The Last Song*, Ronnie is a troubled teenager who doesn't exactly get along with her father. She has to spend the summer with him, but what she doesn't know is that he has cancer. So she struggles with spending time with him and when she figured out he only has a few months to live, it really hurt her.

In this book, it reminded me of when my grandpa was sick. I never realized how serious it was until he was on his death bed. The book changed my life by showing me how important it is to spend your time with your family. You never know when they are going to be gone. My grandpa was very unhealthy and by the time I realized, it at such a young age, it was too late. I remember coming home from school one day saying my grandpa was about to die and all I could think about it how I barely knew him. It wasn't fair that I was the youngest, so I never got to really know him. I felt like Jonah in the book he was around my age when my grandpa died. He only got to know his dad for about a summer, maybe a little longer when he was really young, but not long. It amazes me how much your book ties into my life. I may not be a troubled teen, but I have those moments and the general story of the book really goes to my heart. I mourn with the Ronnie and Jonah because I know that feeling.

It changed me as a person by making sure I don't live in the rough patches of life, and that I never hold a grudge because in the end that kills more than death. Also if you never stop hating someone, how can you be happy? You may not realize how much you'll miss them until they are gone. Your book taught me some many things about life, like being who you are and what to consider in life. It is amazing that you can do that. I learned to be myself and not get lost in the crowd, to not always expect things to be perfect because they won't be, and to not get lost in your own world, but to be a part of others too. I am so thankful for this book. It really has changed my perspective and I don't know what my life would be like now if I hadn't read it. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Nicole Hoffman

Level Two / Semifinalist

Aidan Horan – Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis

Letter to John Green, Author of *The Fault in Our Stars*

Dear John Green,

Last year I read the book you wrote, *The Fault in Our Stars*. It was a very good book that I found I could relate to strongly. The two main characters in the book, Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters, both had cancer. However, they never let this control them or restrict them from doing what they want to do, especially Augustus. They even travel to the Netherlands, a foreign country on a different continent, without complaining, even though they are teenagers.

This quality reminded me of two of my aunts. My Aunt Kerry had a tumor in her brain and she was blind. But, she never let this hold her back. She was always going out and doing things with her three teenage daughters. Every year she took a vacation with her family as well as with all of my family, and she was able to do everything that anybody else could. She never complained about it. She died from cancer two years ago.

My other Aunt that is just as amazing as the first is my Aunt Cathleen. She had a tumor in the back of her brain. However, with her two children (one girl and one boy), she has never been restrained from going to see his band play or go to her college graduation. Once a week she goes to a cycling class at the YMCA and not once has she had to take a break or sit out from the class. She has undergone chemo-therapy and is now living happily and healthily with her family.

These two are two of the most inspirational people I have ever met. When I think about your book, these are the people I think about, remembering my Aunt Kerry and thinking about my Aunt Cathleen. It reminds me how fragile life really is, how the people you love can just be taken away from you like that. I feel like that is what you were trying to convey in the end of your book, how there wasn't really an ending, it just stopped. It illustrates beautifully how abruptly life can end. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Aidan Horan

Level Two / Semifinalist

Claire McCance – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to Ann Brashares, Author of *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*

Dear Ann Brashares,

My long distance friendships are just like the traveling pants. Two years ago, I moved from the big city of Atlanta, Georgia, to the small town of Jasper, Indiana. I currently live more than seven hundred miles away from three of my very best friends. It was a difficult time leaving my friends, but I knew moving was what I had to do. At first, leaving was nerve-racking because I thought I would lose all contact and relation with them, and I would never see them again. I feared I would become a lurking ghost to Jade, Jaynie, and Maddie, my very best friends. Throughout these two years, we have stayed very close through social networking and texting. When I first moved to Indiana, Jaynie sent me the book, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. As I started to read the book, I found lots of similarities between the girls you wrote about and some of my best friends from Atlanta. The book convinced me that I could keep in touch with my friends; therefore, I could have long distance friendships that were as strong as our friendships were when I lived back in Atlanta.

Reading the book, I could compare each one of my friends to each of the girls: Carmen, Bridget, Tibby, and Lena. I could compare Maddie to Bridget: athletic, courageous, and daring. My friend Jade was similar to Carmen: thoughtful and always there when you need her. Tibby was similar to Jaynie; a tad rebellious and very sarcastic. Lena was similar to me: shy, quiet, content, and artistic. As I read your book, I felt that I was a part of it. The girls in the book were just like my friends and me. I was living somewhere completely different, but I still had those three girls as my best friends. We were continuing to make memories, but I was not physically there with them. I, like Lena, was the furthest away, and could still keep the strongest friendship ties with the other three girls.

While reading your book, I figured out that I could think of living in Indiana as a long distance vacation, coming back to Atlanta very soon, and keeping the friendships strong. Your book allowed me to parallel my feelings with Lena's and embrace the distance, and use it toward the better, ensuring our friendships grew stronger. The text messages are like the letters, a sacred thing to each of us, keeping our friendships strong. The pants are like cell phones, the one huge thing keeping our friendship unbreakable. Jade, Jaynie, Maddie, and I consider our friendship just like a pair of pants, traveling the test of distance and friendship, one day at a time. "Remember: Pants = Love. Love your pals. Love yourself."

A girl wearing the traveling pants,
Claire McCance

Level Two / Semifinalist

Carly Morris – Salem Middle School, Salem

Letter to Laurie Halse Anderson, Author of *Speak*

Dear Laurie Halse Anderson,

I am a thirteen year old book fanatic. Over the years I have noticed how mean kids are. I haven't experienced bullying, but my brother has. I learned that my brother had even thought about suicide at one point. He has told me all about how mean some kids are and how he just can't seem to fit in. But, he found someone who accepted him and he hasn't thought about it since. His story somewhat reminded me of *Speak*.

My brother used to be popular, until he got to high school. Now he has only a couple of good friends. Because of this, he reminds me of a male version of Melinda. He seemed to tell me about all of the bullies right after I had read *Speak*. If it wasn't for your book, I probably would not have known what to do. I tried to help him with my knowledge from the book, and it seemed to help a little. But it didn't help enough. He started to become depressed.

I tried to think of something that could help him, so I kept going back to *Speak*. I remembered how nobody ever really cared about Melinda so I made sure that I was there for him if he needed to talk to somebody. He would come into my room late at night and just talk to me. I would try to give him advice and eventually it would work.

Almost every day he would ask me to help him find somebody for him, and every day I would name somebody. This lasted about a month or so. Finally, my brother had listened to me and started talking to one of the girls I had suggested, and now they are happy together. Kind of like how Melinda had found David.

He is still bullied, but he ignores it now. All he cares about is his girlfriend. I'm glad that he is happy and, with the help of my advice I had learned from *Speak*, has learned to ignore the bullies. He actually has gained more friends and confidence which has made some of the bullies actually stop picking on him. He may still be an outcast, but he is a happy one.

Thank you,
Carly Morris

Level Two / Semifinalist

Cy Orentlicher – Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to George Orwell, Author of *1984*

Dear George Orwell,

Your book, *1984*, made me realize that watching everything other people do is wrong. You should not do it. The only way it would really work out would be if the government could get rid of anyone who complained, which is what happens in the book, except that they arrest the people just for looking like they were thinking something wrong, because nobody really says something wrong out loud anymore.

Anyone and everyone could betray you to the authorities. The kids have an organization that teaches them to rat on their parents, and I guess the principles continue throughout life. The thing is, sometimes it feels like that for me. My parents and teachers watch me like a hawk and I get the feeling there is a secret youth club that teaches spying and tattling, and at least one of my classmates belongs to it. Of course, I would get a classmate in trouble, given the chance. However, that would be revenge for them getting me into trouble. The question I get from that is: does revenge count as an excuse?

If it did then I would prefer for the other person to realize that we are even and leave it at that. If he did not, then I would like it if my revenge would die with me. If the desire for revenge somehow got passed on to my kid, I would not be around to tell him not to pass it on, so it would turn into a blood feud. So, I guess revenge is not an excuse.

What is the excuse for this craziness then? Maybe it is a “the authorities have all the power and I am just going along with it so I do not get killed” type of thing. Or, maybe the spies have something to do with it. They brainwash everybody with the principles of “Ingsoc” until everyone is just like a herd of sheep, with the leaders as the shepherd. That would normally last until someone sheds a light and breaks the brainwashing. It doesn’t look like that will ever happen, as the only people not brainwashed are dead or getting their power from the brainwashing.

In reality, everybody is brainwashed. We are all brainwashed by our parents, teachers, and colleagues to have a particular set of morals, to live a particular way, to know what good is, and the definition of evil. Depending on how you were brainwashed, you may have morals that are different from other people’s morals. If you have morals that clash with most of society, tough luck. You might be locked up, or killed, or even rebrainwashed so your morals do not clash. In *1984*, everyone is brainwashed to believe in Ingsoc and if they show signs of not being brainwashed they are taken to the Ministry of Love and “reeducated”.

I would definitely need to be reeducated. My beliefs are nowhere near Ingsoc, and that is the way it will stay, even if other things change. One of those other things that could change is my level of religiousness. I am lucky to go to a Jewish school, in a Jewish community in Indianapolis. The Judaic subjects are taught by Orthodox teachers, who have beliefs different than my own. They teach it to me the Orthodox way, which is how they learned the Torah, and how they practice the Mitzvot, and I try to filter it and not get brainwashed, because I have my own beliefs, and my own way of doing it. Thankfully, they do not have a Room 101 to force the brainwashing on me.

Sincerely,
Cy Orentlicher

Level Two / Semifinalist

Kendall Russ – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to E. B. White, Author of *Charlotte's Web*

Dear E.B. White,

Your book *Charlotte's Web* was truly extraordinary. It showed me that the world is not as fair as many try to make it. I had never noticed that people discriminate against others just because of a disability or little issues that they were born with. When I was young it was hard to believe how terribly the other animals treated Wilbur. I also found out that there are good people in the world like Charlotte that can help you, and according to the book just one friend can change your entire life.

I recognized that that I was exactly like Wilbur in comparison. Firstly we both got mimicked and picked on because we were peculiar from everyone else. Secondly we were both lonely until we found a marvelous friend, a friend who was affectionate and considerate to others. This book made me realize that I was not one to deserve this harsh treatment even though I was more petite than the rest of the kids in the third grade.

I hope that every kid reads this book. It is one of those books that is something that you just have to read to believe. It is valuable to victims and bullies alike. It teaches to be kind and generous to those who have been emotionally hurt. *Charlotte's Web* showed that the world can be unfair and that there can be both unkind and kind people in this world.

This work is meaningful to me because I can now aid the kids like me and Wilbur who have little issues, disabilities, or even just bad habits that others criticize. After reading this book I can now teach the children that pick on the other kids, who are different, to understand that it is wrong and a sin to make fun of somebody because of race, habits, problems, or anything else. Whether you are the kid getting picked on or the kid picking on the others this is a fabulous book.

This book changed me in ways I did not think was possible and the best part was that my mom and dad saw the change in me as well. I was quiet and lonely in the beginning, but in the end I went out and made friends and began to be much more talkative. This book was the beginning of my renovation and because of *Charlotte's Web* I was changed.

I know that this book changed me. I know this because I have enjoyed life much better than before. I have learned to ignore the kids that criticize me and I have begun to persuade my brother to do the same. It is a complete life

changer and if you had before and afters of me, you would also see the difference. Also I have begun to accept the little injustices of the world. Your book changed my ways and my views, and I thank you for that.

Sincerely,
Kendall Russ

Level Two / Semifinalist

Aiden Shen – Klondike Middle School, West Lafayette

Letter to R. J. Palacio, Author of *Wonder*

Dear R.J. Palacio,

Who knew that a fifth grade boy with a facial deformity could touch someone's heart so much. *Wonder*, the thought changing and heart-lifting book that you, R.J. Palacio, wrote has changed me for the better.

Inspired by my mother and fellow classmates, I picked up a book I thought would just be another one of those "ok" books, but boy was I wrong. I have read it over and over every day in my school, just maybe not in the same way. We tease each other and take each other's pencils or paper. Those things may seem small but small things can add up and can create big things.

When little kids see a person with a disorder or deformity, they tend to stare. Maybe I don't fully understand how August feels when he is getting picked on, but I have bit of second hand knowledge. My dad has a kidney disease and even though his medicine helps him stay healthy it causes skin growths. Adding glasses and hearing aids, he doesn't look the most normal to kids, so they stare. I don't know exactly what it is like but I know it must be hard. Once I read *Wonder* I had two stories of people getting stared at and picked on. I began to realize how hard it must be for people who get that finger pointed at them day after day. After all, people like August are pretty much just like us.

Just by reading this book it has impacted my life. "Kind words do not cost much. Yet they accomplish much" - Blaise Pascal. This is one of Mr. Browne's *Precepts* in the back of the book. These words contain the key to putting a smile on a person's face. There is usually always something nice to say. You just have to look hard enough. Just small acts of kindness like this can really stand out to someone with or without a deformity, and it can make a difference. At my school if you walk down the hallway, you will hear many criticisms and very few compliments. Your book made me search for these small things, and now seeing it in my own school has changed me.

So many people only see the bad and so many people only look for the bad. If people could just look for the good, then imagine the smiles that would be on so many more people's faces. The teasing and pointing that August has to go through really makes me think, but I don't want to just think. I want to do. After reading *Wonder* and making some observations of my own, I found inspiration. Starting at the six-week camp, my dad asked me to find one thing, for everyone in my cabin, that they are good at and tell her that they are good at that every day. After a while, I got tired of saying these things, so I stopped for a while. Later I started again and noticed that almost every time I complimented my cabin mates, they smiled.

Now, back to school, I try to compliment someone new every day. It is not something that is hard to do or that takes up a lot of time but it sure puts a smile on someone's face. That is why *Wonder* has helped me in ways that will help me and others. This book has taught me a valuable lesson, so I thank you for writing the heart-lifting book, *Wonder*.

Sincerely,
Arden Shen

Level Two / Semifinalist

Frances Shook – West Lafayette High School, West Lafayette

Letter to R. J. Palacio, Author of *Wonder*

Dear Mr. Palacio,

I loved your book *Wonder*. It really made me think about the people around me. My name is Frances Shook, I'm twelve years old and in seventh grade. I love water skiing, snow skiing, tennis, and canoeing. My favorite subjects are math and band. I also like realistic fiction.

I read this book was because I got it for Christmas. My mom had taken me to the bookstore, she read what it was about, and thought I would be interested. It didn't interest me at all until I learned that it was worth 135 RC points. RC are tests you take about a book you read, and they are all worth points. Every nine weeks I had to make a certain amount of points, so I was so excited I had your book. I thought it was going to take forever though. So I read the description slowly, thought about what it was about and decided that it would be good. It only took me two days to read it! I absolutely adored it. *Wonder* made me really interested in realistic fiction about people with disabilities, and people who are different from other people, just like me.

Now I'm writing you this letter, because this book you wrote, *Wonder*, really touched my heart. One reason it touched my heart is because one of the things Auggie has is a cleft lip and palate; well I have a cleft lip and palate too. After I read your book it really made me think about other people who have a cleft lip and palate. People who have something worse. Sometimes I get upset about my lip, but after this book I realized I don't have the worst challenge, there are people like Auggie who have it worse than me and that really made me think how lucky I am to have my doctor and parents who are able to afford the surgeries I need. There are people who can't afford these surgeries, and that makes me feel so lucky. Luckily Auggie was able to get surgery, so it looked better than before but still it doesn't look normal to people.

One part about this book that made me think was when you put challenges in different perspectives and not just Auggie's. That made me consider of how people think about others and I who have a different face. I have a twin brother and an older sister, so when you included Auggie's older sister, Via's point of view, it made me think about what my sister and brother feel about my lip. They love me, but they probably don't like it either, sometimes. Also when you included Summer and Jack's perspective, it made me think what my friends thought about me. From my perspective, they seem to not mind, but what if they do?

After I read *Wonder* I really thought about myself and how lucky I am. I'm not the only person in my school that has a cleft lip and palate. Also there are people in my town and even more around the world who have to deal with

worse every day. If I didn't have this nothing would be scary, special, or exciting about me. I get to feel proud everyday about my lip, because you made me really think about those people around me. I could just be one of those people staring at others that look like everyone else, laughing, and not hanging out with them. Now watch those and think about people of how their being rude.

Wonder makes me want to do something special when I grow up. I would like to want to create a charity or become a specialist in cleft lip and palate. Also help those in need of food and a place to sleep. This book is so meaningful to me, I want to read it over and over again, so it stays permanently in my mind, it's that special and good.

So to end this letter, I want to thank you for writing this book. It really made me love my lip and not hate it. Your book was a message to the world that no matter how different you look, we are all the same, and we all have friends, maybe we have just one or two but we all have friends. It's not that hard to make a friend every day. All you have to do is be nice and don't care what they look like. What's on the inside really matters. You wrote a terrific, fantastic, heart-warming, spontaneous, wonderful, and OUT OF THIS WORLD book. I absolutely LOVED this book and it will always have a special place in my heart. Thank you again.

Sincerely,
Frances Shook

Level Two / Semifinalist

Isaac Siegel – Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to Gary Paulsen, Author of *Hatchet*

Dear Mr. Paulsen,

As I was reading *Hatchet*, I kept on imagining myself stuck in the middle of the woods, just as Brian was. How would I react? Would I survive as long as Brian, finding food, water and shelter? Would I be eaten by a bear? What kind of skills would I need to survive?

Your book taught me that feeling sorry for myself will get me nowhere. It seemed obvious to anyone reading the book that Brian shouldn't be wallowing in self pity, but to him it was not so obvious. I can tell a fictional character that crying will not get him anywhere, but I have done the same thing many times. Whenever I have what seems like hours of homework to do after school, do I just start plowing through the work to get it all done? No, I sit back and feel sorry for myself, not getting anything done until the last minute, if it even gets done at all. Although that isn't quite as extreme as Brian's situation, I truly feel that I can relate and learn these valuable lessons with Brian, no matter how different we are.

Your book also taught me determination and to never give up. If Brian could survive for that long all alone and find food, water, shelter, and much more, I can do far easier things. I noticed that no matter how many challenges Brian faced, he just kept pressing on. I learned that this is the kind of drive I need to move forward, to succeed in school and also in my career, whatever it will be. I have to keep studying and trying hard to succeed. After reading the book, I noticed how too many times I just turned back when faced with a challenge. Only until recently did I play on my school's sports teams, because, frankly, I'm not very good at sports. But after reading your books, I've gained the courage to try out for and succeed on both my school's soccer and basketball team.

Your book makes me feel limitless.

My entire life I have struggled to live up to the expectations of my family. I have quite a lot to live up to as well, with a mother who graduated from Yale, is a lawyer, and also has a PH.D. in Chemistry. I have always felt that I haven't lived up to her expectations. No matter how good my grades are, no matter how much I accomplish, I always feel like I haven't lived up to what has been expected of me. But, after reading your book, I know I can succeed, just like Brian.

So, would I be able to survive in the difficult environment that Brian was in? If I was asked the question before reading your book, the answer most certainly would be no. Maybe if I try hard enough, do not quit, and believe in myself the

whole time through, maybe I can make it. I am confident that I would find a way to catch fish, build a shelter, and find a way to escape just as Brian did. People say the sky is the limit, but if I try hard enough, who knows how far I could get?

Yours truly,
Isaac Siegel

Level Two / Semifinalist

William Sprouls – Silver Creek Middle School, Sellersburg

Letter to Patrick Matthews, Author of *Dragon Run*

Dear Patrick Matthews,

My name is William Sprouls and I would like to tell you how your book, *Dragon Run*, influenced my life. Reading was always a chore for me, but when I read your book I was rooted to it. It also made me think about conquering some of my fears and influenced me to try new things. I realized that there are lots of new things to try in the world. I recognized that I'm not "a puppet on strings" being controlled by others, but rather I'm in control of my own strings.

My "dragon" has always been stage fright and public speaking, but after reading this book, I realized that I don't need to be afraid of that "dragon" and that I can stand up against those fears. Your book has inspired me to be a one of a kind person, to be me, and to face my fear of public speaking and theatrical arts.

Before I read *Dragon Run*, when I would stand up in front of an audience to speak, my forehead, palms, and back would sweat like the "fierce, nonstop winds of a hurricane." I would feel like everyone had their gaze fixed on me, the "eye of the hurricane." My thoughts would abandon me and my words would get caught in the back of my throat, struggling to come out by failing miserably.

During my first theater tryout, I was told I had to sing a capella in front of only one judge, but when I arrived I had to sing in front of four judges and in front of seven of my classmates! Now I am a nervous wreck and can't remember the words of the song. So, much like Al facing the dragon, I took a deep breath and made myself focus on what I had to do for the audition. I started singing like I had practiced and I blocked out all my surroundings so that I felt like it was just me in the room.

I made the cut and was now part of a musical, my first, but most certainly not my last.

Sincerely,
William Sprouls

Level Two / Semifinalist

Ariana Stepro – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to Diana Lopez, Author of *Choke*

Dear Diana Lopez,

Your book *Choke* inspired me and touched me in a way I will never forget and live by. The way your book conveys how Nina gradually pressured Windy into doing the dreadful almost torturous game reminds me of the bullying that takes place every day and that I was afraid of. Nina was using peer pressure on an impressionable girl who wanted to fit in.

I have always wanted to be the popular one everyone liked. I tried changing my clothes by seeing what the popular girls wore. I changed the way I wore my hair so it looked like theirs. Sometimes I would converse with them and befriend them – or try to. A few of them were warmhearted and talked to me, but some were cold and arrogant.

Windy gave into the popular kids' influence, and was even embarrassed by her best friend! I thought that was as cruel and unspeakable action someone could ever do to a person. That is, until I started to feel it too. When cool peers gave them funny looks, I would feel so scared they would judge me based on the way my friends looked or acted.

Sometimes I would want to cry and hide so no one would hurt me emotionally or even physically – like the choking game. Like Windy I was so insecure and vulnerable. I still am, but back then I wanted, yearned so bad to fit in, to try everything possible to get there. Windy reminded me of myself and my unnecessary need for a higher school status. A measly little position that I know I will not reach. Like me, Windy did everything in her power to get up in the system. Though she did not feel comfortable doing the game, she yielded just because someone popular asked her to.

While reading it I cheered Windy on saying, "Be strong! Do what I would do!" Looking back, I know that is not what I would have done. I guess I was a pushover. Do what everyone told me, no question because if not, there would be me, an outcast. Now I am like Windy at the end of *Choke*. She embraced her true self and got her friend back. Windy even brought Nina under her wing when she got afflicted. Everyone rejected her because she had no way of communicating and she embarrassed them. The old me felt rejected too.

As a result of your book, I realized something. Look at all I have! My friends are awesome. They are their own person. I have a lot of things that some people don't have. I went through a change. I'm proud of who I am. Like

Windy, I don't need to do anything to prove myself. My friends like me and it doesn't matter what anyone else does or thinks. I am the me that I want to be and your book, a book, inspired me. I will always remind myself to be Windy.

Sincerely,
Ariana Stepro

Level Two / Semifinalist

Megan Stiles – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to David Pelzer, Author of *A Child Called "It"*

Dear David Pelzer,

Thank you for telling me to never give up. You taught me that even though life may be rough to never let anyone bring me down. I never knew how bad child abuse could get until I read *A Child Called "It"*. You normally do not hear about parents burning their child on the stove or forcing them to inhale or drink cleaning chemicals. Your book inspired me to do something about child abuse.

Your book provoked many different emotions. At times I felt rage towards your mother and I could not help but throw something across the room. When your mother stabbed you I could barely function for the rest of the day. The image kept popping up in my mind and I could not get it out. That is a sign to me that the book is terrific! When you were forced to throw-up that hot dog I felt so sick to my stomach that I could not read on for a while. Also, I got choked up a few times because the torture that was described was so horrific!

You had to be a very strong and hopeful person to fight against her and move past the neglect of your family. I could not imagine my own mother neglecting me and doing those awful things to me. I am glad today that there are many more abuse hotlines than there were back then. I cannot stand when I hear on the news or see in the newspaper that some child was abused or even killed. Thanks to you, people who have read your books or even just heard about them want to make a difference in their community and wherever else they may go.

Despite all of the gruesome actions by your mother, the book really touched me. It taught me things that I did not know before. One thing it taught me was that parents/adults can be so horrible to children. *A Child Called "It"* also taught me more about child abuse.

Not only did the book teach me something, but also it made me think of some questions like, why did your dad not stand up for you? That sprung to my mind because I know my dad would stand up for me. Another question was why was your mother so nice to your brothers and not you? Was it because you were the weak one? My mom loves my sisters and I the same. I would not know why she would love one of us more than the other.

I want to thank you for writing *A Child Called "It"*. If you would not have written it my life would be totally different. Thank you for being strong and fighting through the gruesome torture you were put through. Something I

realized about myself after reading this book was that I am capable of doing more things than the things I set my mind to. You have shown me to stand up for myself and never let anyone put me down! Again, I want to thank you for all you have done. May God bless you and your family.

Sincerely,
Megan Stiles

Level Two / Semifinalist

Abby Stoner – West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

Letter to Nicholas Sparks, Author of *The Last Song*

Dear Nicholas Sparks,

Have you heard the saying, “If you love something so much, set it free”? Well, something along those lines. I have and I had to set it free. Your book, *The Last Song*, taught me that even when you want to give up on someone or something... DON'T! When Ronnie stopped playing piano, it made me realize that there are some things that I could have kept doing, but didn't. I know she had reasons for her actions, but still I felt like she had a dream and just let it slip through the cracks.

Ronnie's relationship with her dad at first seemed real tense. It made me wonder how many people in the world have that same relationship with their parents. I still wonder if she would have changed her attitude if she would have known about his cancer. Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to be in Ronnie's situation. It made me feel like it captured the essence of a struggling teen's life.

Ronnie and her brother's relationship remind me of my relationship with my sister. We fight and get along just like Ronnie and her brother. In the book Ronnie's brother takes it hard when he finds out his dad has cancer, and it made me think of when my great grandma was in the hospital after having a heart attack. I took it hard too, because I didn't want her to go.

The book influenced me to always cherish the time that I have with my family. I learned never to exclude myself from my family, because you never know when something can change in a minute's notice. Just like Ronnie learned when she spent the summer with her dad, never give up on family. Always cherish life's precious moments, and never give up on family. Thank you again for writing this book. I will take the lessons I learned and apply them to my life.

Your reader,
Abby Stoner

Level Two / Semifinalist

Koby Tavel – Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to Rick Riordan, Author of *The House of Hades*

Dear Rick Riordan,

I have read all of the previous *Percy Jackson* books plus the *Kane* chronicles, which are bursting at the seams with intensity, but none of them could have prepared me for what I was about to experience.

When I first started reading *The House of Hades*, it was like I was being transported. Not to a movie theater showing what happens in the book, but instead right to the scene of all the action. This is the first time I have truly enjoyed a book so much that I could see it in my mind. I could see Percy and Annabeth, weak to the point of passing out, facing the god Tartarus together. I could see Frank going on a rampage and facing hundreds, maybe even thousands, of manticores and slicing them all to dust for one friend who meant more to him than the world.

I could even see Jason finding out one of Nico D'Angelo's greatest secrets: His crush on Percy. Everyone thought that Nico was sad because Annabeth had fallen into Tartarus, but instead it was because Percy had. When Jason found out, he didn't blab and tell his friends the gossip. He gave Nico respect, kept his mouth shut and let him be in charge of his own life. This shows true friendship and the fact that you can never judge someone prematurely.

It occurred to me that this book isn't just about the killing of monsters and giants, but it has a much deeper meaning that I can learn from. Frank faced an almost impossible task. He had to kill thousands of manticores to save his best friend's life. Percy and Annabeth had a bigger challenge: facing the god Tartarus, one of the most powerful gods anyone could ever fight. They came together to give it one last try, and the message that they ultimately sent was that friendship is the key to winning any battle.

After reading your book, I reflected upon my own friendships. Do I have friends that I am willing to risk my life for? Do I have friends who would be willing to risk their lives for me? I think about each of these questions trying to find the answer. Then I realize that I don't know. I don't know who I would be willing to risk my life for and who would be willing to risk their lives for me. What I do know is that not only is friendship one of the most important parts of life, but respect and acceptance are pretty high up on the list, too. My whole

life I have judged people because of their appearance or how they act when I should have gotten to know them and what they are like on the inside. I would have a lot more friends that I could really count on if I was more accepting. Much like Jason, this book taught me that I can't be friends with everyone, but that I should try.

Yours Truly,
Koby Tavel

Level Two / Semifinalist

Maya Vanderberg – Klondike Middle School, West Lafayette

Letter to Louisa May Alcott, Author of *Little Women*

Dear Louisa May Alcott,

Sometimes when describing the women of my family, I like to say they are almost just a quiet configuration of Beth and Jo. All of them are kind, very sweet, and, to be frank, moderately socially awkward. However, I sometimes see myself, in contrast, as a talkative amalgamation of all your characters in *Little Women* (sometimes including Demi). It has been said more times than once that I was a chatterbox, that I was kind, took a leadership role often, was adventurous, and, though I am not always proud of it, girly. I do think, despite the fact that one trait usually shines through more than the others; every person in the word is a big lump of each trait.

My father and my mother are divorced, and though I have a strong relationship with both of my parents, my dad lives far away. I'm not talking about an hour away, or even on the other side of the state. He lives in Georgia and I live in Indiana. Big difference. My stepfather also has other kids, including two college-aged twin girls and three sons differing wildly in personality. I don't get to see much of them, on account of the boys living in Texas, and my twin stepsisters living in other parts of Indiana. This is not a plus of my life so I guess I just always saw my family "setup" as not something to be proud of. Then I found *Little Women*.

Reading about the sister's father and how he was at war really made me cry. I could not even begin to think how it must feel to never know if your father was even alive. I may not see much of my father, but I do talk to him an awful lot on the phone and webcam, and I see him in the summers and winter breaks. It really reinforced my love for who I was in the context of a family, seeing how in the story, no matter how hard times got for the Marches, they always found a way to be happy and joyful. I also have experience in not being the richest of people. Though I am not dangerously poor, we have had times where every penny we had was crucial for paying bills and buying groceries and things. Things like money for a dance became secondary, so I learned not to ask for them much. This was really after I read about the girls and Christmas, and how even though they didn't get much, they were still really happy.

I think reading *Little Women* really made me not only grow as a reader, but as a human being. The book made me change the light I shine on the book that is my life. Thank you for that.

Very Sincerely,
Maya Vanderberg

Level Two / Semifinalist

Grace Werner – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to John Green, Author of *The Fault in Our Stars*

Dear John Green,

The sickly disease that narrates *The Fault in Our Stars* has come to greet my family. It has jumped off the pages of your fiction piece and into the young soul of my cousin. Although your book is just another story out of the billion others out there, it meant more “than just another story” to me. It was a love at first sight when I was introduced into Hazel and Augustus, but what ties the book together is what adheres it to my heart.

Cancer did not narrate the adventures of Hazel and Augustus, but cancer was what told the story for me. My cousin was diagnosed with cancer at an early age and gave us all a fright. However, he fought, without knowing what the outcome of his battle would be. To be honest, I didn’t know what “cancer” was. I knew that everyone was scared of it, but to me, it was just another bad case of the flue. However, after reading your book, I knew that I was miles away from the mark. *The Fault in Our Stars* taught me that cancer is not just a terrifying disease that gives a scare to everyone. Yes, cancer is a word that sets off an alarm in everyone’s head, but cancer is not a word that defines. Your book taught me that cancer is an unconditional love. It’s a love that brings us closer in order to achieve that up-hill battle; it’s a love that makes us thankful for each other. It’s the paralyzing feeling that makes us all love each other that much more.

While I was reading, I knew that the relationship between Hazel and Augustus would be one that I would remember. However, the love they displayed in their little conversations, expressions, and short glances was a love that numbed me. It was a love that made me stop and think; it was a love that I yearned to show and have. It was a love that was passionate.

If I was to get one thing out of your book, it would be to love and to be loved. If it is used correctly, love is a powerful word that can work miracles. Hazel and Augustus’s relationship truly opened my eyes and opened me up. Thanks to you, I have learned to love. I have learned that the up-hill battle is going to come and it’s going to be challenging. It will push me to my limits and will put me to the test. But in the end, that test will be so much easier with the power of love. Thank you for writing this breath-taking novel. I will never forget your story and will always feel that powerful meaning of love.

Okay?

Okay.

Grace Werner

Level Two / Semifinalist

Dennis Yoo – West Lafayette High School, West Lafayette

Letter to Linda Sue Park, Author of *When My Name Was Keoko*

Dear Ms. Linda Sue Park,

Hello. I am Dennis Yoo, a 7th grader at West Lafayette Junior High School in Indiana. I am originally from South Korea. Last year, I came to America to study English and will go back to Korea in December.

Over the summer break, I read *When My Name was Keoko*. A Korean teacher at my church introduced your book to me. Honestly speaking, I was reluctant to read it because of the cover which showed me an old picture of a Korean school girl in black and white. It looked old fashioned and I thought, “This book must be boring.” As I started to read it, however, I realized that my first impression was completely wrong. I was drawn in and I couldn’t stop reading until the story was over.

Your book showed me about what the life was like in Korea during the Japanese occupation through the eyes of Tae-yul and Sun-hee. I never thought about losing my name or any language and culture. Although I had learned about Korean history when I was in a Korean elementary school, I knew a little bit about the Japanese occupation. I did not know a specific person’s feeling or what it was like in that time to be controlled over by the Japanese.

Now, after reading this book, I discovered more about the occupations affect on Korean people and what their life was like in that time. You showed me the strengths of Koreans and what they endured during Japanese occupation through Sun-hee and Tae-yul’s powerful stories. Because of Tae-yul and Sun-hee’s story, I learned what real courage is and would like to have the courage that Tae-yul had. I wasn’t sure I could risk my life to protect my family like what Tae-yul did. Because of your book, I also learned the importance of my name, my language, and my culture.

Reading this work was meaningful to me because it taught me how important it is to maintain my own language. I cannot imagine what it is like to lose my own names, language, and culture. While I was reading, I felt strong anger toward Japanese rulers for changing Korean people’s names and forcing them to give up their language and culture. For me, it is like losing my identity. I am proud of my Korean name and I also want to let other people know the importance of maintaining language and culture.

Also, most of the books I have read were told by one main character, but your book was told through two main characters. I thought that telling the story from two people’s viewpoints was unique. It was really new to me so I was kind of interested in the organization of the book. It was awesome that I could

know more than two people's thoughts, but sometimes it was hard to tell which one was talking in the middle of the chapter.

Until I read *When My Name was Keoko*, I hadn't seen many books concerning Korean history and culture, so it was great to find your book about my home country. I appreciate your work and it was a great honor to write a letter to you. Thank you for changing my views and my language, names, culture, and identity. I hope you keep writing interesting books that can change reader's lives.

Sincerely,
Dennis Yoo

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE
LEVEL THREE

Level Three / First Place

Mason Hooper – Portage High School, Portage

Letter to Che Guevara, Author of *The Motorcycle Diaries*

Dear Mr. Guevara,

I'm writing you today to let you know how much your writings have affected my views on the world and human interaction. Throughout my experiences in literature I have come to realize that the stories that stick out to me the most have not been works of fiction, but rather the biographical and auto-biographical stories of some of history's most prominent figures. From the Roman Emperor Tiberius Claudius to Thomas L. Friedman, reading about people's personal struggles and how these great people have dealt with said struggles are what have aided in shaping my view on the world as well as my life. The tales that I believe have taught me the most would be your set of four diaries.

From what is written in newspapers and spoken on television in the United States, one would be led to believe that you were an insurgent with extremist beliefs. Buzz words like "extremist", "murderer", "homophobe", and even "terrorist" are all attached to your good name, and cause you to be seen as an enemy to the American people. Even I believed these tales as true until I read your first diary. *The Motorcycle Diaries* chronicle your travels across Latin America after your graduation from medical school, when you first encountered the extreme poverty of South America.

The single most important message I picked up from your writing is to be vigilant of wrongdoings being perpetrated by governments and not to turn a blind eye to injustice. Once I saw the world through your eyes, I realized that you could have easily stayed in Argentina and lived a very comfortable life as a doctor. I asked myself what would cause a person to leave so much behind for a foreign land? I found the answer in one of your most memorable quotes, "At the risk of sounding ridiculous, a true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love." Once I read this I understood your true motivation for your actions; your love for all people, understanding of one's poverty, and hatred for injustice.

Another admirable trait I've taken from you through your writing is how humble your actions truly were. I find it interesting that once the Cuban Revolution was finalized and Fidel named you the Minister of the Interior of the new Cuba, you required all journalists wanting to interview you or even take your photograph to work on a farm for at least 2 weeks. I believe you also worked at the Havana docks and local meat markets on Sundays, for no pay, as to assimilate with the Cuban people. This humble nature found in you, Mr. Guevara, has inspired me to remain humble and remember that I am no better than my neighbor and my neighbor is no better than I.

The extreme poverty that you witnessed through your travels was the creation of despots. These men sought to rob their bountiful countries of their natural resources and pocket all of the profits that they could. I respect your choice to fight and not lay down to thieves. These corrupt dictators were, as I see it, the inspiration of your revolutionary spirit and the reason for your affiliation with Fidel Castro. Reading the firsthand account of your remarkable journey and the revolutionary stories spoke to me in ways no other literature ever had. Your books are the reason I plan on traveling the impoverished countries of the world and to aid those who are truly struggling to survive.

Because of you I intend to become a medical professional like yourself. I have been inspired to pursue a career in medical grade orthotics and prosthetics to help impoverished people. I, myself, was born with bilateral club feet and was fortunate enough to be born into a country where the proper treatment was easily available. Those who are born into impoverished countries with similar conditions, who do not have any access to these medical advances, will be forced to walk on improperly developed feet and live a life of incredible pain. These are the people that I seek to help. I may not be derailing trains and assaulting military outposts as you did, but the revolution I will fight is a medical aid revolution. I will fight a revolution to get the needed funds and treatment to the same kinds of oppressed people that you fought so willingly to free. This drive in me, this fire, was ignited by you Mr. Guevara and your eye-opening stories. I will do all that I can to succeed in this goal. People are in need, and it seems to me that we the fortunate don't do enough to help those who need it.

Thank you for all of your wisdom,
Mason Ivan Hooper

Level Three / Second Place

Dominic Rossi – Zionsville Community High School, Zionsville

Letter to Sara Dorow, Author of *When You Were Born in China*

Dear Sara Dorow,

The word “Mei Mei” means “little sister” in Chinese. My little sister, who was adopted from China in 2004, goes by “Mei Mei,” and although we’re not related by blood, I can’t possibly imagine how incredibly different my life would be without her in it. I stumbled across your book, *When You Were Born in China*, while in the process of stealing candy from my sister’s room and decided to look through it. Your book made me reflect on how much of an impact China’s one child policy has had on my life and that of others.

I still remember going to the UPS store with my mom to run copies and mail documents that were apparently incredibly important, though I didn’t exactly understand the significance considering I was all of five years old at the time. I remember going downtown with my parents to be fingerprinted and fill out more paperwork. I recall picking up the phone to listen in on the call when we were told they had matched a baby to our family. But most of all, I remember receiving the package from the adoption agency. Vividly, I recall standing around the kitchen counter as my parents sliced through the tape on the envelope. Contained within was an immense stack of papers, a doctor’s report, and most importantly a picture of my sister. It was just the beginning of our lives together.

China’s one child policy is a necessary yet unfortunate law for the people of China. The country is extremely overpopulated, and the government attempts to limit the exponential population growth by only allowing a family to have one child. The policy can tear families apart in china, yet it brought our together. Without the one child policy, my life would be entirely different. Your book really made me ponder what would have happened had this policy not existed and Mei Mei was not a part of our family. It amazed me when I realized how very different both of our lives would be. Had the one child policy not existed, Mei Mei would not be a member of our family. I would probably be an only child, and I’d have nobody to blame my messes on, nobody to noogie, nobody to pull elaborate pranks on, nobody to steal candy from, and nobody to call my sister.

Mei Mei’s life would most certainly be different, too. Here in the United States she has a violin, computer, lives a fairly modern life, and resides in a free country governed as a democratic republic. It’s hard to tell what her life might have been like in China, but it most likely would not have included any of those things. She might not even have had a real toilet. Most families don’t have their own car, computer, or telephone in China. There would likely be nothing to fuel her addiction to watching craft videos on YouTube or a way for her to completely dominate my high score in Solitaire. She’d most likely have to bike

to violin lessons (if her family could even afford them), and she's probably have to share a room with one of her family members. Instead of my parents working to support her and all of her endeavors, she would in all likelihood be doing all she could to help support both herself and her entire family.

Had the one child policy no existed, my sister would most likely have another sibling. Because of the culture in China in which the son cares for the parents when they get old, boys are much more common than girls. The girls go off to live with their husbands, leaving nobody to care for their parents. Therefore, boys are generally preferred, leaving many girls to be abandoned as babies. Mei Mei probably has a biological brother, but we will never know. I wonder if he knows that he has a sister. How might his life be different? Until reading through your book, I had never really put much thought into it. It had never really crossed my mind at all.

Your book also makes me wonder how much of Mei Mei's personality is from her birth family or is influenced by us. Is her musical gift genetic, or has listening to all my music and being dragged to my piano lessons been an influence of that? Is she naturally stubborn, or was it influenced by her having to outwit me? Is she naturally good at math, or is it something that she picked up here? How would she be a different person had she still been in China?

Is Mei Mei a "Mei Mei" to more than one brother? Though I will never know the answer to the question, I do know that Mei Mei is the greatest sister anybody could ever ask for. As you said in your book "Your story began in China, and it is very special." Mei Mei is very special, and my life is very special because of her in it.

Sincerely,
Dominic Rossi

Level Three / Honorable Mention

Brianna Havics – Covenant Christian High School, Indianapolis

Letter to Sharon Creech, Author of *Walk Two Moons*

Dear Sharon Creech,

Sometimes I wonder what would happen if Cinderella, Belle, Ariel, Aurora, and Jasmine didn't exist. There would be a lot less Halloween costumes for sure, but what would happen to the foundation of a girl's fairy-tale-craving mind? I'm not a Disney princess fanatic, but that doesn't mean I never wanted to live in a fairy tale. Recently, I have become conscience that I make decisions, sometimes without realizing, in order to try to mold my life into a fairy tale. And I had to ask myself, why am I trying to change my real life into a fake one? *Walk Two Moons* showed me that just because my life isn't a fairy tale, it doesn't mean it can't be an amazing and worthwhile story. Salamanca doesn't live in a fairy tale, but her story is precious and exquisite; Phoebe doesn't have a fairy tale ending, but her story is still powerful and exciting. In fairy tales, we expect a happy and completely smooth ending. No loose strings. No messes. *Walk Two Moons* doesn't have a perfectly smooth happy ending. Phoebe's family has to figure out how to accept an awkward new family member, and Salamanca ends up moving back to her home which was nowhere near her friends. But that doesn't mean it isn't a *good* ending. Mrs. Creech, your book taught me that a *good* ending can (and maybe even should) have messes and loose strings. Sometimes those strings are what keep the story alive after it's over. After all, once Cinderella moved to the castle, her story was finished. There were no messes left to clean up and no loose strings left over for her to sort out.

I seem to have strings trailing around behind me from all over the place. I went from home school, to a public high school, and then to a private high school. Both times I moved I thought, "I can be a new person here, because no one knows about me or my past." It's not that I've had a bad history, it's just that I don't always know how to make lasting friendships. Both times I moved to a new school, I wanted to change that. But it didn't really work. When I saw it from a third person perspective in *Walk Two Moons*, I understood why. Moving to a new place doesn't change who I am and it doesn't change my past: it's who I meet and the experiences I have that change me. Salamanca doesn't tell anyone about her mother for a long time, so no one knows her past, but she is still the same person. Slowly, she begins to change because of her friends. At first she hates to be touched at all. If someone tries to hug her, she flinches. By the end of the book, she can actually hug her dad again. She doesn't change because of where she moved, or who she wanted to be, she changes because of the people around her who loved her.

I get this idea in my head about fairy tales, that in order to have a life that I want, I have to get rid of my past. In almost all the princess stories they leave their past once they get the prince. Sleeping Beauty wakes up a hundred years after she falls asleep and consequently her past was virtually gone. In the fairy

tale life I wanted to live, I tried to get rid of my past because I thought it defined me. I now understand that it never really had a hold on me; I was holding onto it. I am who I am. And even though I do wish I could change some of my mistakes, it won't be a new situation that changes me, it will be the people who matter to me and come into my life.

Sometimes accepting things that have happened in the past can take awhile. Belle took an unrealistically short time adjusting to the fact that her host was actually a beastly monster and accepting that he suddenly and magically turned into a prince. Fairy tales often teach us that when something happens, we have to accept it instantly and keep going. There's a plaster cast in society that dictates what I am supposed to believe and reject. If I don't conform, I break the cast and lose everything, or so I've been told. Ms. Creech, you have showed me a burdensome expectation that I put on myself. Once you pointed it out, I was able to take it off. There's no one here forcing me to accept things that I can't handle yet. Salamanca takes a long time to accept her mother's death and a consequent move across the country. She taught me that it's OK to take time and think things through, it's OK for the hurt to last longer than I expected, and it's OK if I need coping mechanisms. She copes by telling everything as a story to her grandparents and writing it down in her journal. I cope by writing letters that I never plan on sending. Some things take a long time to come to terms with and that's part of life. It's not something I'm doing wrong. I can still function even without completely accepting whatever it is that I'm struggling with. *Walk Two Moons* has given me a new way to look at what I assumed to be true.

Mrs. Creech, your book has changed so much about how I see my life. I've stopped chasing fairy tales and started living. *Walk Two Moons* has given me hope that even though I don't live in a fairy tale, I can still live a brilliant and admirable story. Sometimes there is no prince, sometimes there is no palace, and sometimes there will be really messy endings. But everything is a story in itself, and my life will be a valuable one. The more I idolize fairy-tale princesses, the more I become disappointed and frustrated with my life, always seeking the P's: princes, palaces, and power. Salamanca's life story made me step back and take a look at my own. What are my priorities? What do I demand from myself?

I've decided that if my life was a fairy tale, I would look at the lives of ordinary people and be jealous. If my life was a fairy tale, it wouldn't be worth living because I'd already know the entire plot ending would be stale. I've decided that the stories worth living are the ones that I see every day, all around me. I've decided that my life is worth more than a fairy tale.

Thank you so much,
Brianna Havics

Level Three / Honorable Mention

Ireland Mitchell – Homeschooled, Indianapolis

Letter to C. S. Lewis, Author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Dear C.S. Lewis,

My name is Ireland Mitchell, and I am fifteen years old. I am writing to you today about some of your works that have shaped my thinking and influenced me, and the ways I was introduced to them. I'm sure you get told quite often what exceptional books you have written and the ways they have influenced the theology of the 21st century, but I hope to be different. I hope that from a fifteen year olds standpoint, the perspective changes a bit and you can see a different side of influence.

I was first introduced to you through your wonderful book series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. My favorite of the series was *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The words seemed to leap off the page with every turn, the characters were so vivid and real, and the imagination displayed brought me to a level I have never attained at my young age before. My mother first read it aloud to me, but several times after that I read it on my own. The writing style captivated me, and as I got older, I began to realize the hidden meaning beneath the pages of the book, such as the deeper theological themes occurring within the story. I could almost see and understand the battles going on between good and evil, the representation of the White Witch and Aslan, and the way everything boiled down to true Christian life and faith in Christ and His sacrifice. Lucy, who was my favorite character, also enthralled me. Her simple faith and belief in something so impossible and the way she influenced others' lives also influenced me to some degree. I wanted to have innocent faith like her and be kind to everyone. I wanted to believe the way she did. Even now, I can easily see times where I've also had innocent faith and belief and hope in things often rationalized. Her character is the epitome of what Christ calls a "child-like-faith", the wide-eyed, innocent, yet firm faith to believe in Christ's sacrifice without rationalizing it to a tee. This book gave me a different perspective on Christian life that, even as I get older, I continue to find. This, indeed, was how I became introduced to you and influenced by your other works.

Just last year, I read *Mere Christianity*. This was a book my family had sitting on the bookshelf, and, being already introduced to you, I picked up and began to read. There was so much to learn and think about within every paragraph that sometimes I have to re-read them a few times just to make sure I could grasp what was being said. Your writing was so thought provoking and intellectual! The theological ideas proposed even helped me shape some of my own.

You see, I also love theology and enjoy writing, especially writing about theology. It is so interesting to me, and as I've grown older and grown in my faith, theological issues and ideas seem to jump out to me more. I love writing about some of the matters you have also discussed, and your book was one of

the influences that got me to start writing about them so much. Your writing style jumped out to me as one slightly similar to mine, and one from which I could easily gain thoughts and ideas, as I did. I would read a chapter and dwell upon the things being said, the analogies made. I love analogies, as they help me correlate and grasp things in a different perspective. Then, often times, I would pick up my own notebook and start writing about the ideas and thoughts that your own arguments and analogies gave me, and started creating my own analogies from those thoughts. It was like a jump-start to a theological world of writing I could call my very own. My grandpa, just a few years ago, told me something I don't think I will ever forget. He said, "Ireland, I believe one day you could write a book." I hadn't read *Mere Christianity* at that time yet, which was one of his favorite books too, but the book helped give me a love of theological writing I didn't even know I had. I feel like one day I really *could* write a book.

Your book gave me an honest look at basic principles surrounding the Christian life. It seemed to help me grow in my faith more, too, as things being said I could feel God using as fuel. He seemed to use it as a means to grow deeper in my faith, for often times I grow deeper through writing, and the thoughts given helped me do just that. Your persuasive apriorisms regarding atheism and Christianity gave me a clearer look at the two religions, and the reason there is no reason to believe there is NOT a God. Many other chapters were full of bits and pieces of basic Christian principles such as growth and pride and being a follower of Christ, but written in such a way that I gained a new perspective.

I look forward to reading other works of yours, Mister Lewis. Thank you for writing in such a compelling style, and so honestly, openly, wisely, and intellectually. Your books were the first to open me up in a new world of thinking, and especially in theological understanding and writing.

Sincerely,
Ireland Mitchell

Level Three / Semifinalist

Andrew Armstrong – New Tech Academy at Wayne High School, Ft. Wayne
Letter to Aron Ralston, Author of *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*

Dear Mr. Aron Ralston,

Upon completion of your book, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* I have come to realize that in order to secede from an unfortunate occurrence we must put ourselves through ghastly actions. Your book has motivated me and I now know what it is like to be trapped in a situation where the only exit involves something that nobody longs for...pain. I have an extensive medical history and over the past years, I have not been able to escape a medical situation without going through some sort of un-pleasurable feeling. In no way am I comparing our two situations but I can relate to your story and the way you strived to survive while jammed in that crevice.

While reading the book, I witnessed that I am not the only person in this world that goes through extremities that are not necessary. As a child I was in and out of the hospital due to a numerous amount of reasons. This book has revealed to me that one can overcome a series of mishaps if they put their mind to it and follow their plans. In my case the plan was to become healthier (even if I didn't have the capability to) and move on from downfalls. I am now a junior in high school and ironically, considering going to college to become a doctor. Along with the previous statements I have come to realize that nothing will happen to initiate your ideas if you don't put forth the effort and work into it.

This book spoke to me because I have been in certain situations where extreme decisions must be made in order to accomplish a task. The content alone was meaningful to me because it presented another person's story that has seen the same point of view. It told me that I was not alone in the battles that I have fought. By reading this book I have also learned that every story has its different background and how they affect the outcome. I can say that my story comes nothing close in comparison but in perspective we have each faced our own battles in the war. After reading your story I now understand more clearly that when people say their situation was in no way similar to anyone else's.

Your work was very influential to me because of the passion and truth you put into your writing. It is also believable because of the movie. However, I might add that I enjoyed the originality of the book over the movie due to the fact that everything in the book was first hand. In no way did I not enjoy the movie but Hollywood added a lot to your story, which (in a good way) added to your book. The story you have left me has influenced me by two things: staying positive and being thankful. How ironic is it that I finished your book the week of Thanksgiving? If I were you, I would be beyond thankful for what my God has left me with, not a limb lost but a story gained. I look at my story the same way, I have gone through so much and even when I feel down and out I remember that I have been given a story that is not like anyone else's. Coming

off of this I would not hesitate to share my story with anyone, which you have already done through writing a book. Thank you for writing this book, because by doing so you have inspired me to continue on in my life even when catastrophes happen.

Once again, I would like to thank you for creating such a touching story through an activity that you are very passionate about. Without reading your book, I can't imagine feeling the same because now I know for sure that other ordinary people have gone through trying mishaps.

With greatest thanks,
Andrew Armstrong

Level Three / Semifinalist

Moe Moe Aung – New Tech Academy at Wayne High School, Ft. Wayne

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

Dear Suzanne Collins,

Love is not only physical but also mental. Picking up *The Hunger Games* has revealed a new door showing me that love does not have to be the small kisses from mom before school or the warm embraces for good grades. Love is not just kissing your crush on Valentine's Day. Love takes you further than open arms and friendly smiles. It goes further into the mind. Deeper. Katniss Everdeen proved to me that love does not need to be what everyone expects it to be. Her love went into providing for her family and protecting them. It didn't matter to her how she did this, she just did it. I never realized there was a different perspective on love until the day I opened *The Hunger Games*. Opening your books changed me into a different person. One who knows what love is.

I cannot define what love is, but it is something that everyone can attempt. Your character Katniss has taught me that being what everyone expects you to be is not being yourself. If I am wasting my time trying to perfect the image that everyone want me to be, I am wasting the time that could be put into loving who I really am. I will never be the girl who stands on a chariot wearing flaming clothes. I will never be the girl who killed with a bow and arrow if anyone threatened her chance of coming home. I am the girl who feels like she is teetering on the edge of a cliff when she has to speak in front of the entire class. Who sprays spiders with Windex while balancing on top of chairs. The one who has to open closet doors slowly in case a clown decided to jump out at her. I was never in love with this girl. I always found her weak and defenseless. When I started reading your books Ms. Collins, I realized that there were people just like me. The ones who weren't so brave, but wanted to be.

When I read about the parts where Katniss was fighting for her life against the Career Tributes, the gears in my head started turning. Our society can be cruel. When Katniss was cornered in the tree and the Career Tributes were preying on her from below, it made me think of how our society today 'bullies' people who are considered weak and can't stand for what they believe in. Some people in our society today believe that they are more superior to others when in reality, they are on the same level as us, if not under. However, Katniss showed her strength and confidence when she dropped that tracker jacker next down on the Career Tributes. In result of that, she earned herself a bow and arrow. Reading this from the perspective of how our society runs today, it changed my mind about people like me. If the people who were considered weak and defenseless stood up for what they believed in, they would earn something in return right? I have concluded that when Katniss earned her bow and arrows, those bow and arrows in our society can be called respect. If we stood up for what we believed in, the ones who consider themselves 'superior' will see that we are not so weak after all.

I was never known to be a girl who stood up for herself. I was always described as the shy quiet girl. While I was surrounded by people who were bold and outgoing, I sat in my seat with my mouth glued shut and mind racing. The words that were threatening to spill from my mouth never did. They were always held back by the invisible barriers. I never said what I wanted due to the fact that the people who were ready to judge me were everywhere. That is why I have never come to love myself for who I was. I saw myself as weak, for not being able to speak my mind or raise my hand when I wanted to counter argue during a Socratic seminar. I felt like society was waiting for me to make a move, to make that mistake. If I never made my move, I would never make that mistake. That was my one mistake that I will always regret because I never share my thoughts and ideas, I will never get anywhere in life.

Suzanne Collins, you have helped me realize that I am not weak. I have just fallen victim to the sneers and jeers of the world around me, like many others. But no more. You and Katniss gave me the strength to stand up for what I believe in. To say what is on my mind. To love myself. I have transformed from the quiet shy girl into a confident woman. I will never regret the day I picked up a *Hunger Games* book. I will never regret standing up for myself. I will never regret the day I truly started loving myself for who I am. Thank you Suzanne Collins, thank you Katniss Everdeen, for showing me that love isn't just physical, but also mental.

Most Sincerely,
Moe Moe Aung

Level Three / Semifinalist

Danielle Boneff – New Tech Academy at Wayne High School, Ft. Wayne
Letter to Erin Dionne, Author of *Models Don't Eat Chocolate Cookies*

Dear Erin Dionne,

Your book, *Models Don't Eat Chocolate Cookies*, made an impact on me because I have always struggled with keeping my weight down and resisting eating everything and anything that included chocolate or sugar. Your book *Models Don't Eat Chocolate Cookies* is my favorite book of all because it definitely relates to me and my life. Like the main character Celeste, I have been bullied for many reasons including not being a skinny Minnie like all the other girls loving chocolate cookies, and not being cool enough. I dreaded exercise because I wasn't near being athletic, and I also tried diets like eating fewer portions or those crazy drinks! I never liked to style my hair so I just left it or put it up in a ponytail and never wore perfect fitting clothes. I felt like everyone was staring at my body and not looking what's on the inside and who I was, rather they looked at the outside and judged me.

My family always said I wasn't fat, which of course I appreciated their comments but, I know I wasn't getting any smaller by eating a lot and sitting around. I saw my cousins in my family and how they were perfectly fit and toned, while for me, I was squishy and big. That's when I began to eat less, or smaller portions of food. When I started, I felt like I couldn't do it because I saw so many good foods, especially on the holidays. I began to cut off sweets and try crazy diets. I felt like nothing worked and that I would just stay the same. I saw models in magazine posing with their perfect bodies and it just made me more depressed. I researched how others lost weight and most of the things I saw were exercise.

I swear that word followed me day by day telling me, "You're going to have to exercise to get what you want." That's when I read your book. I began to read about Celeste and what her thoughts were and they were the same as mine. I know I was tall for a girl and Celeste was shorter but she had the desire to lose weight like I did. Mostly her reason was to get out of the pageant but mine was to be healthier. Finally, after freshman year of high school ended, I decided to work out for the whole summer. I began to work out on my backyard by doing jumping jacks, running laps, sit-ups, jumping rope, etc. I told myself I would exercise for at least half an hour every day for five days a week. I began to see results and saw my fat melt away.

I began to eat the good foods and I couldn't believe how good I felt. My clothes were not as tight and I went down a dress size, pants size, and shirt size. My dad helped me build muscle after I lost the weight and helped me make the right food choices. Now, it's not a challenge for me not to eat sweets and I eat a good amount of food needed for my body to have energy. I am now down to a normal weight and am keeping my weight the same. I didn't feel so judged by

others anymore and my parents said no matter what, I was beautiful, and they were proud of all the work I did to lose the weight.

Your book, *Models Don't Eat Chocolate Cookies*, made an impact on me because today, I am a sophomore and I still love your book. It has inspired me to work for what I want and to never give up. Your book taught me to not always judge yourself and pick on yourself all the time, rather pick yourself up and try again. It also taught me that you are beautiful no matter what size you are and to not be someone else and to be you. I wanted to thank you for making the book so relatable in every way and putting a little comedy in it also. I am looking forward to reading your other books and I hope you never stop making more. Thank you so much for inspiring me because I couldn't have done it without you and the book.

Sincerely,
Danielle Boneff

Level Three / Semifinalist

Kenny Echols – Logansport High School, Logansport

Letter to William Golding, Author of *Lord of the Flies*

Dear William Golding,

I'm sure when you were a child, you thought about running away from home. Almost everyone I've talked to has, at least once! Maybe not, but I think that was your main motive to write *Lord of the Flies*. Some people have very weird inspirations, but I believe you had an interesting one. Unfortunately, I'll never get to ask you because you passed away in 1993, five years before I was even born! That doesn't matter though, because your spectacular novel has immensely impacted the way I see my peers.

When in the book, they elect a leader, it reminded me so much of school, and all the groups. If you know anything about school today, you know that most groups of friends have a "leader" that they all respect or look up to. Eventually, another leader rises up from the group and is the new dictator of the group. After reading your novel, I realized having a leader isn't always the best thing to do with a group. Eventually, there will be rebellions, and you can see that repeated multiple times through history. It's mostly in dictatorships, which is never a good idea! You have to know that one person can NOT control a group of people forever. I believe that *Lord of the Flies* really opened the eyes of an immense amount of people, and they finally realized that while everyone might like the leader they have now, not everyone will like that person later on!

Also, I think it helped people realize that children are not always innocent and cute, as society falsely proclaims today. I'm not saying that children are bad and need to be always watched and punished all the time, but just to be prepared for everything that could happen. Obviously, I wasn't alive when this book came out in 1954, but I can imagine the reaction of the people reading the book! Probably a mixture of shock, sadness and anger at what the big group of kids had done to themselves around the island. If he would have written that today, with more updated theories and different children's reactions, he would get a lot of critics. I, alone in my room reading this book though, would silently applaud him for having the courage to write the novel, to show just how ruthless we can be to society without the correct parental care and punishment.

One quote that really affected me in a way that is unexplainable unless it happens to you, is, "Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy." What does it mean to be at the end of innocence? Well, if you've ever heard that you're not so innocent anymore, it means you've done something wrong or horrible. If you've read the book, you know that his only true friend, Piggy, was killed toward the end of the novel. That ended the innocence of all the children on the island, even if they weren't involved with the killing, because I'm sure they at least saw it. The darkness of man's heart pretty much explains itself to

me. I believe that in every human's heart, no matter how good they are, there is just a hint of evil or madness. In some people, it's more noticeable than other people. That is where we can tell the difference between madness and a normal person, in the darkness of man's heart. Now the fall through the air of true friend pretty much means that he has fallen, or been killed. And as I already stated, Piggy is killed by a couple of other children! The point isn't that he died, it's about who killed him. Other children killed him, because of the loss of care, love, and punishment.

The last quote that really made my stomach turn is, "The thing is – fear can't hurt you any more than a dream." It's honestly simple, if you think about it. Have you ever had a dream where you're falling, and falling down a steep side of a mountain or off of a cliff, and right before you hit the ground, you wake up? You wake up and realize that you're not really falling, and you're not really going to die, so you breathe a sigh of relief. That describes fear! Fear doesn't hurt you, it's the thought of what makes you fear that makes those shadows in your room come to life in the dead of the night, and makes your closet door squeak so you wake up in a cold sweat. You're scared out of your mind and you are frozen with terror, so you just close your eyes and try to go back to sleep. In the morning when you wake up, you look over at your closet door and realize it's still shut, and that all the shadows are gone, so you breathe a sigh of relief. It sounds a lot like your dream, doesn't it? That's because fear is a dream, and dreams can't hurt you!

I would love to meet you if you were alive today. I feel like we could talk about your story for hours upon hours. Don't just summarize it, but so I could ask you the motives and inspiration you had to write this story! I have yet to find a book that really inspires me the way *Lord of the Flies* does.

Sincerely,
Kenny Echols

Level Three / Semifinalist

Lexie Parrott – Northwestern High School, Kokomo

Letter to Shauna Niequist, Author of *Cold Tangerines*

Dear Shauna Niequist,

I was at summer camp when I first heard the chapter “Cold Tangerines” from your first book. My counselor was reading it to us as a bedtime story, and after the first sentence, “I believe in a life of celebration,” I knew I was hooked. I listened to these words carefully, and they promised a new way to live. They promised a life of celebration and whimsical abandon, and that’s exactly what I wanted. It’s what I craved during that part of my life. I soon had my own copy of *Cold Tangerines*, and I tore into it. The introduction made me giddy, as I knew this book was just what I needed. The first chapter was totally unexpected. Your words described my life perfectly and with such clarity that I could begin to understand what was going on in my life. “On Waiting” made me realize that while I’m waiting for my life to begin, it’s swirling all around me, better than anything I can ever imagine. I realized that I was ready to stop waiting. I was ready to begin a life of celebration.

Even after I read all of *Cold Tangerines*, I continued to reread different chapters as I needed them. I read “Hook” when I was having trouble forgiving a friend. That chapter gave words to all the feelings in my head I couldn’t understand. It helped me work through those feelings of jealousy and hatred and find a way to overcome them with forgiveness. “Basement” was read to me at camp the next summer. It was the main part of my cabin’s devotion. My counselors read the story, and then we all shared our own basements. I was inspired to share my own deep, dark basement, even though it was maybe the scariest thing I’ve ever done. I was told that what I thought was a mistake was actually just how God had made me to be. That night gave me so much healing. “Basement” convinced me that letting people into the deeper parts of myself is completely okay, maybe even good. For the first time ever I was told that the parts I don’t like about me don’t even matter to my friends.

I reread “Red Tree” during one of the busiest seasons of my life so far. I had just begun my first high school sport, and I only saw the homework to do, the practices to go to, and the friends to keep in touch with. The quote, “But underneath it all, the month was a greatest hits album, a collection of stories, one after another, of the rich and gorgeous ways that God tells his story through our lives. What looked like a shower or a dinner or one more night to clean up after was actually one of God’s best gifts, worth celebrating, worth seeing,” made me see the beauty underneath the busy. Suddenly, I saw all the lessons I was learning, the team I got to be a part of, and the friends who were making time for me, as well. I just about missed it, but that chapter opened my eyes to the overwhelming beauty daily life truly is.

“Blessings and Curses” is a chapter I reread whenever I’m going through something difficult. This chapter reminds me time and time again of God’s unending love and kindness, and how it “burns through the deepest betrayals.” This chapter taught me how to truly celebrate everyday life, and that I can’t celebrate only when life is perfect, because it never really is. I learned that true celebration happens in the midst of trial and sadness.

Meanwhile I read “Cold Tangerines” over and over again. This chapter is a pick-me-up on bad days, when I forget to celebrate. These words make me want to jump up and down and laugh and dance. It makes me believe that this world is good, that my life is good, and that God is good. This chapter inspires me to live my life according to my faith every single day. My plain, ordinary, go-to-school-go-to-practice-sleep-and-repeat life is actually something extraordinary, a gift from God worth celebrating, and *Cold Tangerines* is what made me realize this.

Sincerely,
Lexie Parrott

Level Three / Semifinalist

Baily Rassavong – New Tech Academy at Wayne High School, Ft. Wayne
Letter to John Boyne, Author of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

Dear John Boyne,

For the past 16 years of my life, I have witnessed many situations where many people have called me names because I am Asian. Many times when I was younger, I was hurt and confused when they called me names or made fun of me. For example, they tried to act as if they knew how to speak Chinese by saying, “ching chong” and other words like that. The funny thing is I am not even Chinese. Which is why I was confused. However, when I grew up and became older and wiser, I knew the reason why they kept thinking I was Chinese. Your book, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, has taught me that it was just ignorance. They just did not know their cultures and races.

I read this quote by Benjamin Franklin, “The only thing more expensive than education is ignorance.” To me, it seems that not a lot of immature people take the time to pay attention in school to learn the different races of Asians. They could at least research it on their own time before embarrassing themselves in front of me by not knowing what they are supposed to know. Your book helped me realize that I don’t need to waste my time listening to them bullying me with wrong information. They are just ignorant and it is actually amusing. This happened many times in my life where someone asked me if I was Asian or Chinese. This did not really hurt me, but I always became annoyed by the question. Chinese people are Asian! That question is so irrelevant but also amusing. The event where Bruno had little knowledge of the camps reminded me of this situation in my life. His ignorance led him to death which tells me that ignorance will get you nowhere. You need to keep adding more information into your brain so that you have more knowledge and become more intelligent.

Now that I am older, I understand their struggle with knowledge of different cultures and races. I can help them out by providing them with my knowledge so that they can be more educated. I should be the bigger person and help them while they are trying to hurt me. This can also get them to respect me more by helping them out instead of arguing with them. Arguing will get you nowhere in life. You need to compromise and spread out positive energy. Creating negative conflict will never get you anywhere. You always need to be positive.

To me, positivity is the key to success. Just like how Bruno was always a positive and kind person. He became friends with Shmuel easily because he was always positive and kind which made him seem friendly. I love being surrounded by positivity. In addition, I hate being surrounded by negativity. Every time someone says something negative about me, I feel angry and it messes with my head. I get discombobulated and I do everything wrong, which makes me even angrier. Then, it takes me a while for me to get back into a

normal setting because all I think about is what they said. I want to do something about it but I just don't have the strength to do it. That is why we all need to be positive because positivity builds confidence. If you don't have confidence, then it will be ten times harder for you to get the job that you are trying to do done.

Your book has made me think a lot about the ignorance of people. Not a lot of people know the different races of Asia. It is my job to inform them with new knowledge so that they can become more intelligent. I can spread this new knowledge to everyone so that they will know not to assume before they ask what kind of Asian someone is. I need to dig deeper inside myself to find the strength to spread this awareness so that racism can stop. One person can make a difference, but it won't be enough to stop this big crisis. I need the whole world to agree with me so that this world can be filled with positivity and build up our confidence. I am thankful that I read your book because this book has taught me a life lesson.

Sincerely,
Bailey Rassavong

Level Three / Semifinalist

Abigail Torress – New Tech Academy at Wayne High School, Ft. Wayne
Letter to Pamela Muñoz Ryan, Author of *Esperanza Rising*

Dear Pamela Muñoz Ryan,

Before reading your book *Esperanza Rising*, I could never pick up a book and read it from cover to cover. When I was younger I thought reading was boring I never found any joy in reading books. But for some reason I could with *Esperanza Rising*. I just could never put it down. Books like yours inspire me; although it was a historical fiction book it was realistic and I had something to connect to.

My family is from Mexico and they were also wealthy landowners before they came to the states as well as Esperanza's family. I guess you can say the reason I enjoyed reading *Esperanza Rising* is because I could connect with the main character Esperanza. I can just imagine how hard it was for Esperanza to lose her father to bandits just for being a wealthy land owner. After my parents were no longer married I missed the way my life used to be. I had everything. I loved my family, the way of living, being the only child. I had my parents' full attention and I guess you can say they spoiled me very much. Every now and then I think of all the memories I had with my father although they feel like they are fading away, you can never forget them.

So for me when Esperanza had to make a great change in her life leaving her comfortable home then fleeing to California and having to work for the very first time to support herself as well as her mother must have been a great challenge. For me it felt very similar after my father left, since I am the oldest child I had to take more responsibilities and take care of my mom and it almost felt like we were starting a whole new life having to make changes and get comfortable with my father not being there.

As well as Esperanza I am very close to my mother and grandmother, I can't imagine my life without them. They have seen me grow up, make mistakes that have taught me lessons in life. Both have been a great inspiration and blessing in my life. This is why *Esperanza Rising* had a big impact on me because Esperanza's grandmother gave her hope and encouraged her that everything was going to be all right especially when her mother became ill. Her grandmother may not have been with her but everything she told her became true.

This novel also helped me reflect on a lot and really appreciate what we have. Just like Esperanza sometimes we may not be prepared for life changing experiences but we have to know how to take them and still go on in life. Surely, Esperanza never thought her father was going to be killed by bandits, nobody would want to receive that kind of news. As I was growing up I always heard the quote "You never know what you have until it is gone," and I have

learned that this is very true. It also taught me that you should never take what you have for granted because it can be gone tomorrow. Just by observing I see how some people have everything and don't appreciate it, so it makes me even more so that I at least have my mom and other family members to support me, and how every day I should be thankful for having them in my life. Just like the name Esperanza means "hope." I also have hope and faith that I will achieve and make my dreams come true, without letting anyone or anything stop me!

Sincerely,
Abigail Torres

Level Three / Semifinalist

Austin Yarbrow – New Tech Academy at Wayne High School, Ft. Wayne

Letter to Claude Brown, Author of *Manchild in the Promised Land*

Dear Claude Brown,

The book *Manchild in the Promised Land* connects to me in many ways. I have been through much more than people may suspect of me. When you look at me, you may believe that my life has been perfect. That assumption is very far from true. When I read this book I felt as if Sonny, the main character in this book, was the only person that would understand me. I read your book while I was going through one of the worst times of my seventeen years of living. To be honest, I never liked reading. Reading was very monotonous. You would very rarely see Austin Yarbrow reading anything. My dad made me read the book as some sort of “punishment” because he thought it would be beneficial to me. His assumption was true. The second I started to read this book I couldn’t put it down.

Sonny and I have been through a few of the same experiences. I was also influenced by the older crowd rather than the younger crowd. As an early teen, I never felt comfortable around other children my age. That age group always seemed a little “childish” to me. Growing up in the neighborhood that I grew up in, I saw multiple objects that the average twelve or thirteen year old hadn’t seen. I saw marijuana for the first time at age twelve. My godbrother used to smoke and get high all the time and with me looking up to him I tried it too. My godbrother was the influence of me doing most of the stuff I did, but without him I would not know what I know now! Just like Sonny.

My eighth grade year was the worst year of my life. That year I really got carried away with selling marijuana. I was profiting about three hundred dollars a week. To someone that doesn’t have to pay any bills or anything that is a lot of money. I was buying a pair of shoes every week, no worries at all. I was so slick that I knew I wouldn’t get caught. One day I slipped up though and that changed the rest of my life. The night before, I spent a night at my friend’s and I forgot some of my substances at his house on accident. I got home and forgot all about it. He told me to come get it but I never found the time to come get it in my day so I just told him I would come get it after school. He said he was too busy to do it after school so he just brought it to school.

When he said he would do that I knew something bad would happen but I went along with it. I never thought I would get caught. Somehow people heard that I had marijuana on me and I guess they told the sheriff that worked at our school. That day I got arrested and was locked up for the whole Christmas break until my court date. It was horrible! The reason I mentioned this experience of mine is because Sonny also went through a life changing experience. He became more and more religious. Moral of the story is, he grew up! Just as well as I did. He started to worry about his younger brother though,

that is one of his life changing experiences. His brother had gotten shot so he had to grow up. Not just for himself, but for his younger brother that looked up to him. I had to grow up because that guy that did all that stuff in eighth grade wasn't me at all. I finally realized that while I was incarcerated. Now I'm a changed person and so was he at the end of the book. This isn't the end of my book though! I'm still living and striving to be better and better. If I have a son, I will make him read this book also. Maybe it'll change his life how it did mine. I thank you for writing this book Claude Brown, I really do!

Sincerely,
Austin Yarbrow

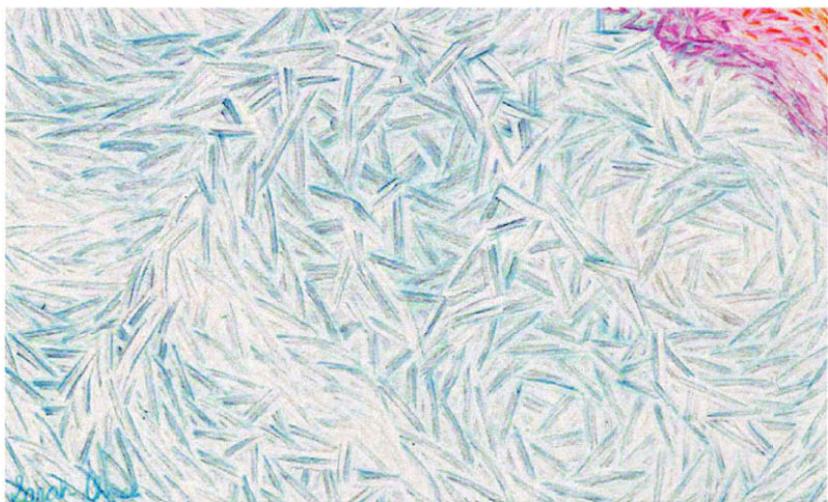


Water

By Renee Patton

We would die without you
 All the animals and ocean life
 would die without you
 I need you
 The animals need you
 Everyone needs you
 You are life
 You are water!

First Place, Junior: *Water and Sunrise*
 by Renee Patton, Hammond



First Place, Senior: *Whirlpool* by Sarah Chase, Carmel

