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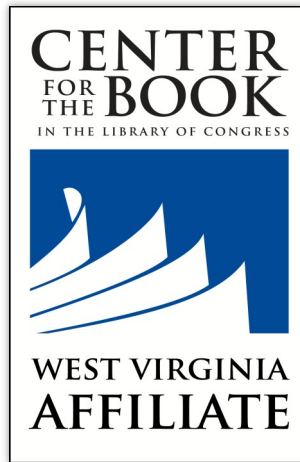


**WEST VIRGINIA  
AFFILIATE**

**Letters About Literature  
2017**

# LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

**2017**



**West Virginia Center for the Book**

A program of the

**West Virginia Library Commission**



1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East

Culture Center, Building 9

Charleston, West Virginia 25305

(304)-558-2041

[www.librarycommission.wv.gov](http://www.librarycommission.wv.gov)

# — 24TH ANNUAL WRITING CONTEST —

## READ. BE INSPIRED. WRITE BACK.

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE IS A READING AND WRITING CONTEST FOR STUDENTS IN GRADES 4-12. STUDENTS ARE ASKED TO SELECT A BOOK, POEM OR PLAY AND WRITE TO THAT AUTHOR (LIVING OR DEAD) ABOUT HOW THE BOOK AFFECTED THEM PERSONALLY.

LETTERS ARE JUDGED ON STATE AND NATIONAL LEVELS. THE CENTER FOR THE BOOK IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS SELECTS A PANEL OF JUDGES TO AWARD NATIONAL WINNERS AND NATIONAL HONOR WINNERS. TENS OF THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS FROM ACROSS THE UNITED STATES ENTER LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE EACH YEAR.

### LEVEL 1: GRADES 4-6, LEVEL 2: GRADES 7-8, LEVEL 3: GRADES 9-12

THE 2016-2017 LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE CONTEST FOR YOUNG READERS IS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GENEROUS GRANT FROM THE DOLLAR GENERAL LITERACY FOUNDATION, WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM GIFTS TO THE CENTER FOR THE BOOK IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, WHICH PROMOTES THE CONTEST THROUGH ITS AFFILIATE CENTERS FOR THE BOOK, STATE LIBRARIES AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS.

LETTERS THAT MEET THESE CRITERIA ADVANCE TO STATE LEVEL JUDGING. JUDGES SELECTED BY AFFILIATE CENTERS FOR THE BOOK CHOOSE THE TOP LETTERS IN EACH COMPETITION LEVEL FOR THEIR STATE AND COORDINATE RECOGNITION CEREMONIES AND AWARDS. THE FIRST-PLACE STATE-LEVEL WINNERS ADVANCE TO THE NATIONAL LEVEL JUDGING.

#### ROUND 1:

**AUDIENCE:** IS THE ESSAY WRITTEN IN LETTER FORMAT AND WRITTEN TO THE AUTHOR?

**PURPOSE:** IS THE CONTEST THEME ADDRESSED AND DOES IT INCLUDE PERSONAL REFLECTION?

#### ROUND: 2

**GRAMMATICAL CONVENTIONS:** IS THE ESSAY WRITTEN IN A CLEAR, ORGANIZED MANNER WITH SPECIFIC DETAILS TO SUPPORT THE ESSAY'S MAIN IDEA?

**ORIGINALITY:** IS THE ESSAY CREATIVE, UNIQUE, AND HAVE A POWERFUL POINT OF VIEW?

#### AWARDS

- 1 Top Honors, 2 Honors, Honorable Mention, and Notable Mention Awards in each competition level. Top Honor and Honor recipients receive cash prizes from the West Virginia Humanities Council. Top Honor recipients in each level advance to national level judging.

The Library of Congress announces all national and national honor winners and awards and lists all state-level winners on its website. National Winners in each competition level will receive a \$1,000 cash award. National Honor Winners in each competition level receive a \$200 cash award. Visit [www.read.gov/letters](http://www.read.gov/letters) for details on state awards and ceremonies.

*The response to this project is so great that the West Virginia Center for the Book is able to publish only the essays receiving Top Honors, Honors, and Honorable Mention Awards. Names are withheld by request, or in the event that documentation permitting the release of a student's name is unavailable.*

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# DIRECTORY

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## LEVEL 1: GRADES 4-6

**TOP HONORS: KIERSTON LAUERMAN**

**HONORS: ELIJAH CAMPBELL, BRENDEN MOORE**

**HONORABLE MENTION:**

**DALTON DEJARNETTE, NATALIE ELGIN, OLIVIA HAUGHT, JAY HUFF,  
OLIVIA KIGER-CAMILO, SUMMER LIVELY, SAMVAT YADAV**

## LEVEL 2: GRADES 7-8

**TOP HONORS: ANNABELLE BLOSSER**

**HONORS: ANA GAYTON, ISABELL ROOP**

**HONORABLE MENTION:**

**LILY BANFORD, KIRAN BOGGS, JULIA CONNER, SYDNEY GLESSNER, EMMA GREEN,  
AVA REED, ADESH URVAL**

## LEVEL 3: GRADES 9-12

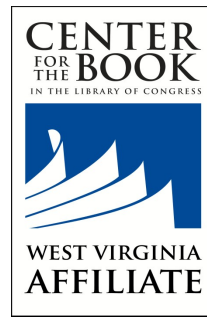
**TOP HONORS: SYDNIE KNAFLA**

**HONORS: JAKOB HENDERSON, MARY LASWELL**

**HONORABLE MENTION:**

**CASSIE ADKINS, ALISON GRALEY, HALEY MCKOWN, SARA NELSON,  
ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN, COREY SHORTE, HALEY STEPHENSON**

**NOTABLE MENTION -- PAGES: 39-43**



Dear *Letters About Literature* writers,

**Congratulations** to all of you who entered the contest this year. It takes courage to write down your thoughts and feelings, and to share those feelings with others. However, it is important to do so, for it is through this sharing of ideas and feelings that we find common ground with one another. As the author John Green said, “Great books help you understand, and they help you feel understood.” Your teachers and parents are proud of you, and we at the Library Commission are proud of you too. You should be proud of yourselves.

The message of the *Letters About Literature* program is clear – Books Change Lives. However, the things we read do not have a lasting impact on our lives unless we take the time to think critically about what we have read, and to reflect on the ways the things we read relate to our own life experiences. When we are able to combine reading with critical thinking and personal reflection, there is no limit to the benefits we can enjoy from reading. I commend you all for taking the time to think about the effect reading has had on your lives, and I thank you for sharing your thoughts with all of us.

This anthology contains the letters distinguished with Top Honors, Honors, and Honorable Mention awards by our local judges. If possible, we would print the letters of all 117 students whose letters were chosen for state level judging. Ideally, we would print the letters of all 723 West Virginia students who had the courage to enter the *Letters About Literature* contest.

Since we do not have the means to do this, I want you to know that your efforts are appreciated! Please keep reading. Please keep learning, and please keep sharing the things you learn. Not only for your own good, but for the good of all of us.

Warmest Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen Goff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Karen Goff, Executive Secretary

West Virginia Library Commission



**WEST VIRGINIA AUTHOR  
BELINDA ANDERSON  
FEATURED SPEAKER**

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Belinda Anderson holds a bachelor's degree in news-editorial journalism and a master's of liberal arts studies. She's written for such publications as *The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, *Goldenseal*, *Wonderful West Virginia*, *Book Page* and *Writers' Journal*, among others.

She was a recipient of a professional development grant from the *West Virginia Division of Culture and History and the National Endowment for the Arts*, with approval from the *West Virginia Commission for the Arts*. The West Virginia Division of Culture and History has named her a Master Artist to work as a mentor with emerging writers.

Belinda often presents readings and fiction and nonfiction workshops. In 2004, Belinda was inducted into the ranks of those authors and literary figures who appear on the first official Literary Map of West Virginia. Her collections of award-winning short stories, *The Well Ain't Dry Yet*, *The Bingo Cheaters*, and *Buckle Up, Buttercup* have been published by Mountain State Press. Her most recent book of fiction is a middle-grade novel called *Jackson vs. Witchy Wanda: Making Kid Soup*, published by Mountain State Press in 2013.

Her most recent book of nonfiction is *Alderson West Virginia: History Highlights and Tantalizing Tidbits*, a book filled with interesting events and people from throughout the history of Alderson, W.Va.

On her web site, [belindaanderson.com](http://belindaanderson.com), she writes, "We are enriched, both as children and adults, by the creative acts of reading and writing. Reading engages our imagination and writing gives us the opportunity to connect with one another."

"When I speak in elementary school classrooms, I discuss the differences between fiction and nonfiction and invite the children to tell me about their favorite books. Then I lead them through the writing of a story and am always delighted with the directions their creative minds take."

Belinda has long been a supporter of the *Letters About Literature* competition. She has enthusiastically offered her time to judge the entries many times over the years, but this is the first time she has been a speaker at our awards ceremony. We are happy to welcome Belinda to the ceremony today!

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# JUDGES

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**ERIC FRITZIUS**

WEST VIRGINIA AUTHOR  
LEWISBURG, WV

**TERRI MCDUGAL**

HEAD OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
KANAWHA COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY  
CHARLESTON, WV

**SUZY MCGINLEY**

(FORMER) YOUTH SERVICES CONSULTANT  
WEST VIRGINIA LIBRARY COMMISSION  
RIPEY, WV

**DR. SYLVIA SHURBUTT**

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH  
SHEPHERD UNIVERSITY  
SHEPHERDSTOWN, WV

**ROBIN TAYLOR**

PROGRAM DIRECTOR  
IMAGINATION LIBRARY AND  
EXPLOREWV GEOCHALLENGE  
CHARLESTON, WV

**Kiersten Lauerman**  
***The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green**

6th Grade, Hurricane Middle School  
Hurricane, WV  
Teacher—Rachelle Ochoa

Dear John Green,

My name is Kiersten Lauerman and I go to Hurricane Middle School. I love your book *The Fault In Our Stars*. It isn't just words written down on paper. No. This is a book that has meaning not just words. As I read your book I felt like you were talking to me about my life.

My grandfather, Lee Noble, was fighting cancer, like Hazel and Augustus. Cancer is a scary thing, but I never really thought about it, about how you can't do much of anything, or how you don't know what drug they are going to put you on next, or if you are going to wake up the next morning.

When my day was going bad I didn't want to wake up the next morning because I thought that it would make everyone else happy. But I would always wake up and start a new day, because of your book. It taught me that waking up isn't a privilege it's a choice, and Hazel chooses to wake up every day because she knows that it might be the last day that she wakes up. She wakes up and doesn't let anything bring her down because she knows that if she does then she might die with not getting to do what she wanted because she let one little thing stand in her way.

Cancer is not the only disease that can kill. There are a bunch of diseases out there that can kill you, but cancer is one that scares me the most but only because some of my family has died from different types of cancer.

My grandfather never really talked about his cancer, well to me anyway, but I could see what the cancer was doing to him. He had bruises all over him. All he really ever said was keep wishing, wishing that he will get better. It actually gave me hope, I knew that he was going to get

better, he had to! So I kept on saying that every morning until I had no hope left. He was getting worse and worse each day.

You gave me hope that I did not have. You put the wonder back in my eyes. You made me want to become an author so I can do that for other people. I have wrote some short stories but none that good.

"Something amazing is going to happen today" is something I like to think of. If you have any disease or you have a disorder and you are constantly in the hospital that might be something that you are told a lot. Nothing amazing has happened yet right? Wrong! you are still alive right? And they are working on a new drug that they say will work. They keep working and working for a cure but every time it only works on a few people. Maybe you are lucky and you are one of those few people and you get better or maybe you aren't lucky and you die because of it.

I wish my grandfather left something for me like a note or even a dead flower, nothing was there for me except memories. They are memories that I will cherish forever

A note is words on paper, but memories, memories are something that you can't forget. A note is words on paper, memories are what you are made of, but then what are books? Books are just notes and memories mixed together. They can make you happy, sad, and even mad sometimes, but they will never be just books. Your book, *The Fault In Our Stars*, isn't just words, my essay isn't either. In a way you could say that this is a short story. But this will never be just words or a note, no, this is me. I am who I choose to be and not what people want me to be, they can't change who I am because I won't let them. I am proud to be me.

Sincerely Yours,

Kiersten Lauerman





## **Elijah Campbell**

### ***Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen**

5th Grade, Melrose Elementary School

Princeton, WV

Teacher—Chelsea Gusler

Dear Gary Paulsen,

I have read your novel *Hatchet* and I have been inspired to be thankful for what I have in life. I also learned that I should keep on trucking no matter what goes on in any situation in life. Last, but not least I have taken away that I can do anything in the entire world!

You have inspired me to be thankful for what I have because when I read about how Brian was in the Canadian wilderness and was struggling and how hard it was, I realized I should be thankful for everything I have. I am fortunate to have my home and every meal I have ever eaten. I realize how good I have it every time I eat now, I think “Man I better be thankful for what I've got.”

You've inspired me to keep trucking because every time anything terrifying goes on with Brian, he keeps on going. It was literally a week after I read your book that I injured my knee in a football game in the playoffs. Our team could not lose their starting defensive tackle (ME!) because we were blitzing and had already lost our best Defensive End. I looked back at Brian when he was being eaten alive by mosquitos. When I thought of *Hatchet*, I kept on trucking and our team managed to go to the state championship.

I've been inspired to take on anything in the entire universe because I believe Brian thought he could do anything after being in the woods for around two months and he managed to stay alive from just a hatchet! I feel like I can do nearly anything after learning what Brian did. In that state championship, our team was winning by only one point and could not let our opponents score. With only twenty-three seconds left, I get in my deep stance, explode nearly off my feet, bulrush the offensive line, and BOOM! The opponent's quarterback was down on the ground, my team had won the game. I now feel like I can do anything because of you.

Mr. Paulsen I have been greatly inspired. You've learned how your book inspired me and most likely many others to keep on going, do anything, and finally, be thankful. I have been inspired,

Elijah Campbell

## **Brenden Moore**

### ***Wonder* by R.J. Palacio**

6th Grade, The Linsly School

Wheeling, WV

Teacher—Jennifer Loudermilk

Dear Raquel J. Palacio,

Your book, *Wonder*, was a good and fun book to read. It helped me understand a lot of things. *Wonder* helped me learn to be open minded with people who have disabilities.

*Wonder* helped teach me to understand that it is okay to be friends people who are different. What helped me learn this was how Chris and Jack both had a great friendship with Auggie. After I read your book in fourth grade, I signed up to help the special needs class at my school. They all became my friends, and they were really kind. I taught them how to do things and in return, they taught me how to do things. On the last day of school I

brought them all a present.

*Wonder* taught me how hard it could be for people who have disabilities or deformities, or even differences. Auggie has had to go through all of those surgeries. Auggie also had all of those people stare at him. It is not just Auggie who has to go through those situations it's a lot of people, and I feel bad for them all.

*Wonder* showed me not to be scared to try new things. When Auggie started school he was scared. At the end of the year he loved it. After I read that, I've tried tons of new things.

All in all, I thank you for writing this book, it has impacted me in a lot of ways.

Your friend,

Brenden Moore



**Annabelle Blosser**  
***Dumplin'* by Julie Murphy**  
8th Grade, The Linsly School  
Wheeling, WV  
Teacher—Maggie Allison

Dear Julie Murphy,

I am fat. This isn't me degrading myself or feeling sorry for myself. It's a fact. Every time I go to the doctor's office I get the "eat your fruits and veggies" talk, and my weight percentile is way above my height. I used to love to go there and see my mom at work, but now I feel like the doctor's office is a place where all they do is state the obvious. I play three sports year round, eat better than a lot of my friends and I push myself, but I'm still stuck in the same place. I want to change, and I know that one day when I'm older and out living by myself, I will. I try to make healthy choices, but it's hard when I'm not the one who drives to the grocery store to pick it up. I dream about having a body that reflects me and having a healthier mental and physical lifestyle. I used to beat myself up about how I looked, and I would cry when I went shopping with my mom when the size six dress didn't fit, and I would cry even more when the eight didn't fit. I was breaking myself over one dress when so many others looked beautiful. I've never told anyone, but your book, *Dumplin'*, was one of the major things that helped me on my road to acceptance.

The girls at my school don't really understand. They drop subtle hints about weight. My weight in particular. They always ask each other if they are making fat jokes about one another, and it builds up this little bubble of anxiety that I carry around until I can pop it at home like a zit and rebuild it again. Most girls compare themselves to the women in magazines, but I compare my

self to them. I know I'm better than that, and I know that I am better than what they do. I know that I should be waiting for them to realize that we all are equal, My dad used to have a job embalming people and he always told me that, "Once you're dead, It doesn't matter who you were because now you're the same as everyone else." That is one of the most important lessons I've learned. I've always been bigger, the "self-proclaimed fat girl," like Willowdean, but I've changed to a school where 90 percent of those girls look like Ellen, an All-American beauty. I have found a few girls who look like Ellen and have so much kindness in their hearts. Those are the girls who I could tell anything to and they would empathize without any connection to what I was ranting about. Personally, I just lost

one of those people, but I determined to make her believe in our friendship again. As Dolly Parton said, "storms make trees take deeper root." I hope my roots grow deep so I don't become shallow.

When I began reading *Dumplin'* I thought it would be a cliché "feel good about yourself"

book. She wins the pageant. She gets the thin boy. All while being fat, but I don't quit on a book, and when I kept reading, I realized that Willowdean is so much more than I thought. I realized that *Dumplin'* wasn't shallow. It had layers and a twist, and it really did bring the feeling that anyone can do anything (without being cliché). This boy is important to Willowdean, but her best friend is important too. She decides that she will walk Ellen down the pageant runway, despite the criticism she may get, and that is such an amazing quality. I would be afraid of comments racing at me like bullets afterwards. As Will learns to accept, she also learns her own insecurities, and she has to learn to accept again. I feel like I'm still in the learning to accept process, but one day I hope that I can feel good in



whatever I wear or wherever I am or whoever I'm with.

One of my favorite quotes from *Dumplin'* is, "There's something about swimsuits that make you think you've got to earn the right to wear them. Really, the criteria is simple. Do you have a body? Put a swimsuit on it." I first joined the swim team two years ago in sixth grade. I was so embarrassed when I walked into the natatorium in my tight one piece for the first time. I felt awkward, and I thought everyone would judge me, but they didn't. Then I knew that no matter what happened, swim practice was my safe place. The place where I could be obviously fat and push myself at something. I could have a good workout everyday and feel great after each one. This summer I wore the first bikini I have wore since I was six or seven, and I felt good because I have a body. Why not put a swimsuit on it? Now, there are days when I can look in the mirror and think I look pretty. There are days when I feel awkward like the only way to fit in is to be thin, but I know that's not true. I know that shouldn't be true.

Are boys on every teenage girl's mind? Obviously there's one on Will's mind. Bo. I'll let you in on a secret. There's one or two on mine. I only wish that at the end Will would realize that she didn't need Bo because girls don't need guys. If anything, guys need us. Without us, who would be there to remind them where they put their belt the day before? I try to dismiss these thoughts in my head because I know that one day, I'll get my guy. It won't be today, tomorrow, next week or even next month, but that is one thing I can accept and totally be fine with. I know one day it will happen, but my fairytale isn't gonna be happening anytime soon. That's okay.

Now that I have read *Dumplin'* I have a different outlook on life. I feel empowered and a need to try something new and interesting and unexpected, but most of all I felt normal. I felt like my inner feelings and my thoughts were normal. They weren't outrageous. I was some odd kid who didn't know how to feel "correctly." I was normal with normal feelings and normal aspirations. It felt good. I felt normal, but I also felt different. Special. Unique. I felt like I could do anything. I thought I already knew this, but obviously I didn't. I was getting the acceptance I needed from myself and others. I felt confident. At the end of your acknowledgement you wrote, "The fat kids, the skinny kids, the tall ones, the short ones, and everybody in between: I am so thankful that not a single one of us is the exact same.

What a boring world that would be." I'm thankful too. I'm thankful that I can be different. I can be unique, and that's okay.

Sincerely,

Annabelle Blosser



## Ana Gayton

### *Gathering Blue* by Lois Lowry

8th Grade, John Adams Middle School

Charleston, WV

Teacher—Mary Frances Williams

Dear Lois Lowry,

It's been a year since I last wrote to you. Since then I've read many books. I've read fun books, scary books, and adventure books, but your books are about people's lives and help us understand the world. That's why I decided to write to you again. You write books to help young readers understand others and appreciate differences in the world.

I recently read *Gathering Blue*. Even though it takes place in a community after the world is destroyed by the war, it is different than the community in *The Giver*. In *The Giver* community everyone is required to take a pill daily. No one questions why, they do it because it's always been that way. The pills keep people from thinking and having emotions. When someone is different or they can't contribute to the community anymore, they are "released." Differences are not tolerated. In *Gathering Blue* those with deformities and other differences are sent to the fields to die. Knowledge is limited and girls are not allowed to learn to read. In today's society, in a lot of countries, females are not able to have the same education as males. In the book, and in today's day and age, people live in fear of being hungry, sick, or being rejected and/or not good enough.

However, in both books you created characters who have a desire to learn, who think, and question the rules. They don't understand why things are the way they are and try to change them. Even before he is assigned the role of the Giver,

Jonas sometimes sees color, has feelings, and realizes something is wrong in his world. Kira in *Gathering Blue* realizes she's different with her deformed leg. When her mother dies suddenly, she fears being sent to the fields to die until the Guardians name her the Weaver because she has a special talent weaving and stitching with colorful threads.

It's then that she starts to question why things are the way they are.

When Kira has to learn the names of all the plants and what color dye each will make, she accidentally learns to read even though it is forbidden. Then Kira learns there are no beasts and sees the Singer's legs chained so he cannot run away. She realizes that the Guardians stay in power by keeping the people fearful and in poverty, lacking the

knowledge and education they need to question them.

In our own country today many people are fearful for many different reasons. They fear they will not have jobs and be able to earn money. They fear war in many countries. They fear people who are different than they are. They fear change and blame their problems on others. Fear and lack of knowledge bring out the worst in humanity. When people blame others for their problems, it makes them helpless to solve their own problems, unlike Kira who realizes it is her job to reshape the future as she adds new scenes to the Singer's robe.

My favorite part of *Gathering Blue* is when Kira's young friend Matt gathers plants that can make blue dye and finds out Kira's dad is not dead. When he leads Kira's dad to her, he is wearing a blue shirt. He is blind but still manages to unravel his shirt so Kira has blue threads to



weave into the Singer's robe as she shapes the future so it will be a better place for everyone. As threads to weave into the Singer's robe as she shapes the future so it will be a better place for everyone. As young readers, it is our job to shape our world for a better future.

You have taught me that fear and ignorance can create many problems in our world, but appreciating each other's differences makes the world a better place for everyone.

I hope you keep writing!

Sincerely,

Ana Gayton

**Isabell Roop**  
***The Glass Castle***  
**by Jeannette Walls**  
8th Grade  
Beckley, WV  
*Letter submitted individually*

Dear Mrs. Jeanette Walls,

Through reading your book, *The Glass Castle*, my eyes have been opened to a new perspective of life. Life is a journey. Each journey leads down a different road. Each road follows a path which composes the network of our being. At points in life, we are at the wheel controlling our destinies. Other times, we become the passenger. We have no access to the wheel and therefore lose control of our fate. I see you living the early years of your life trying to take hold of the wheel. You experienced hardships that could have scarred your heart. You lived life trying to grasp the idea of love from two parents failing to meet the basic needs of their children. I appreciate this book because of your tenacity. You finally persevered and took hold of the wheel. I love to see someone rise from "ashes to glory."

We all experience scars from the past, some deeper than others. After reading your book, I

can better understand the backgrounds of some of the students that attend our school. Many students have similar stories like, *The Glass Castle*. They struggle in areas like you did. One friend is being raised by his older sister because his father is deceased and the mother is a drug addict. Some of my friends have had to relocate due to the decrease in the coal industry here in southern West Virginia. Just recently, tragedy struck our school. Our friend lost one of his brothers in

an automobile accident, while the other still hangs on by life support. Growing up in southern West Virginia has opened my eyes to the real and cruel world. However, you embraced your scars as a passenger on the road of life. As children, our hope rests in responsible parents who supply our basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Yet, you and your siblings were deprived of your

basic needs. You knew hunger. You knew what it was like to be homeless. You felt the literal pain of physical burns. You experienced the pain of seeing your brother molested. You felt guilt. You knew shame. Your parent's love couldn't measure up in spite of their attempts at loving. The idea of a normal family was a vanishing desire. The wounds of heartbreak, disappointment, and rejection ran deep. Yet, I was inspired by your drive to press on. I was challenged by your ability to look beyond the present and what was considered to be normal.

We are all products of our past. We can become prisoners to that past also. However, I appreciate your ability to overcome the circumstances. You could have grown bitter, but instead, you grew better. You were able to detach yourself from the situation and view matters from an outside perspective. In doing so, you were able to analyze and examine the current condition. You were wise beyond your years. Moving to New York



allowed you to take hold of the wheel. You were able to supply your basic needs and those of others. You could now control your destiny. I applaud your drive and fortitude.

Our hopes and dreams can be shattered. The promises of living in a "Glass Castle" can become an afterthought. Through your story, I have been challenged to value my roots. I have a deeper appreciation of my family, the stability and security of my home, the love of my parents, and the values they instill in my life. I cannot forget

where I come from which is the same place you was raised, in southern West Virginia. Although my circumstances are different, I now recognize that I am blessed to have two college educated parents. Yet, I understand that my ticket to the future is not punched. I cannot hang on to their coat-

tails all my life. You knew that your ticket to the future was based upon your desire to persevere and start down a new road. You managed to break the cycle of poverty and neglect. As I reflect, I am reminded that we must not forget the struggles and the hardships of our life today. I work very hard at school. I push myself to a high standard. I am dedicated to the tasks at hand. Yet, I still struggle. Often times, my hopes and dreams are crushed. However, I now understand that this is what makes me who I am. Without challenges, we would not grow and mature. We would not gain wisdom for the next challenge that comes our way. Not only can I grow, but I can help others grow and mature through their struggles. They may differ from mine, but I can listen attentively. I can show them compassion, and encourage them for the future. I want to be someone who helps to pick up the broken pieces, because this path is the one that will be remembered as it composes the network of our

being. Thank you for opening my eyes to this new perspective of life.

With Sincere Fondness and Appreciation,

Isabell Roop



## Sydney Knafla

### *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher

10th Grade, Washington High School

Charles Town, WV

Teacher—Jason Smith

Dear Jay Asher,

One day while I was browsing through Amazon for something that might catch my eye, I stumbled upon your book. It was amongst the things that Amazon had recommended for me. I found this weird, because I hadn't really bought many books from Amazon at the time. So, whatever force brought your book to me, the world may never know. Your title, "13 Reasons Why", is what originally drew me in. 13 reasons why, what? So I ordered your book, just like that. Afterwards, I did a bit of research on you and the book, because I was curious. No amount of research could have possibly prepared me for the impact your book had, and still has, on my life.

Before I read your book, around age 14, I was not having a good time. I lived with my grandparents, because my parents were incapable of taking care of kids, nor did they want to. Both my past and my present haunted me. I tried to take my own life towards the middle of April, but unlike Hannah Baker, I did not succeed. I was able to dodge death like a bullet. I should have been dead. That's what the doctors said. The fact that my body hadn't given in truly was a miracle. In the weeks following, I was doing better. Things were looking up. I had a different view on life, I was pushing through, and I was glad to be the miracle child.

On May 15, 2015, just about a month after my incident one of my best friends, Hunter, passed away. He didn't just pass away though, he died from the same death I had only narrowly escaped just a month earlier. I would gladly tell

you how I felt at the time, but I'm not sure I really could feel anymore. I was dumbfounded, blindsided. In the weeks that passed. I felt guilty, oblivious, and stupid. I was in denial, and those next couple of weeks were the worst weeks of my life. There was an open casket wake and a funeral. You know, everyone is scared of heights, clowns, bugs, or whatever, but not me. The most horrifying image I have ever seen is the sight of my cold, lifeless friend. My biggest fear is ever having to see someone that I love like that again, just gone. When you're dead, that's it, you're gone. It's the people you leave behind that have to keep on living.

You're probably wondering what this has to do with you, or maybe you're starting to under-

stand. Reading your book really helped me put a handle on what I'd gone through in recent months. It helped me put it into words, in a sense. When these things happen to you, it's a blur. I knew why I did what I did, and I knew how I felt when Hunter died, but it's hard to actually make sense of it. It's as if your whole world just spins right off of its axis.

Being able to sit down and read about how these events unfolded

for Hannah and Clay was like looking at my own life through a book. Seeing and reading about why Hannah took her own life helped me put together why I attempted to take mine. It also helped me to understand why Hunter may have taken his. The events that took place in Hannah's life may have seemed miniscule, but they had major repercussions. That's how it always happens. These little things build and build and build until finally, it feels like there's no way things will get better. The thing is, things will, and suicide is not the solution to the problem. It just makes things worse for those who are left in your wake. That brings me to the second way your book affected my life.



When Hunter took his life, I was left behind in a daze, just like Clay when Hannah took hers. There were thirteen people connected to Hannah's death, but hundreds were actually affected by it. When I read your book, I was able to connect it to my life. Hunter may have only had a few friends and a small immediate family, but so many were affected by his death. It's the same with Hannah, and with everyone who passes away, leaving those around them behind. Your book helped me break down the effects of suicide on those around us, both big and small. Whether it was someone who loaned them a pencil or who they smiled at on a bad day, so many lives are truly affected by suicide. Hannah gave 13 reasons why she took her own life, but those around her could have given thousands as to why she shouldn't have.

I still wonder to this day what everyone's lives would be like if I hadn't survived. How many people would have been affected by it? Would Hunter have realized the mistake he was about to make and done something differently? What kind of domino affect would my death have caused?

I'm glad no one had to find out. Every little thing we do affects someone's life, and when we leave this place, it haunts them in ways we never could have imagined. Your book helped me to see that.

So finally, the third and last way that your book has affected my life. The things we do and say, can have dangerous repercussions on those around us. Whether it's something little we say or something we do before we even think about it, it'll get back to someone and back to us. Seeing the way that a simple rumor or a bad party affected Hannah, helped me see how those things could affect others too. Everyone is guilty and everyone does it. We say things and do things before we think about them, things that we regret. Even I still do it, but I'm more

conscious about how the domino effect could impact someone. Life itself is just one huge domino effect. Everything has consequences, good, bad, big, or small.

Your book opened my eyes to that and helped me come to terms with events in my own life. I am grateful to have ordered and read your book, especially at a time in my life when I needed it the most. Hannah was able to give us 13 reasons why she ended her life, and thanks to your book, I can now give you dozens of reasons why I want to keep on living.

Your very grateful reader,

Sydney Knafla





**Jakob Henderson**  
***A Thousand Splendid Suns***  
**by Khaled Hosseini**

11th Grade, Wirt County High School  
Elizabeth, WV  
Teacher—April Petrovsky

Dear Khaled Hosseini,

When I was a young boy about the age of seven, my dad had gave his family news of his departure; he would be serving a military affiliated term on foreign soil in Afghanistan. Being a seven year old boy, who knew his hero was going to a location where guns were being shot and people were being killed was practically my first heartbreak. Ever since then, the bond my father and I have developed has been an unbreakable one. In fact, I feel we may not have ever been as close as we are now if it wasn't for his deployment. Nine years later, my father is still in Afghanistan, just without the immense concern of his son.

Growing up, it had seemed as if all the media showed was the extremely violent attacks going on in the Middle East. One day an explosion would happen, the next day an independent war battle was breaking loose. As the days would go by, it seemed as if these started to dissolve, and the coverage in Afghanistan had started to phase out as the war was ending. I still remained curious to one thing: what family life was like for the civilians of the country.

Then, around the summer of my junior year, I read a book titled *A Thousand Splendid Suns* for our reading checklist in preparation for my English course: AP English Language. As I stared at the cover for what seemed like weeks

procrastinating to read it, the quote from *The Washington Post* popped out at me: "A brave, honorable, big-hearted book." The quote is better interpreted when you read this piece, I soon found out.

When I felt so confused about how the normal, everyday people lived in Afghanistan, this book cleared the water. From the beginning, men were declared the dominant sex in regions listed in the book and more. Families lived in small

homes and women were ranked lower in the caste system than the men. Children were used as a coping skill for the Afghani women, sometimes the only things these women had of their own were children.

Take for example Nana, the mother of Mariam in the book. Nana was living as a divorced and single woman in a kolba located somewhere in Afghanistan and she didn't have a lot to her name. She lived with her daughter Mariam and had a fine china collection which she valued above herself. When Mariam shattered a porcelain piece, Nana was very upset. What had just seemed as a piece of metal to Mariam, was actually the world to Nana.

Another example of the disapproval rating of women in their actions was the section where Mariam wanted to see Jalil Kahn. All her heart desired to do was to be with her favorite person in the world - her father figure. As an aristocratic male in Afghanistan, the only person Jalil had time for was himself and his current family. Although Mariam was determined to be with Jalil, he kicked her to the curb, similar to what he did to Nana.

From scenes in the book where the women were forced to have childbirth at home without the use of medication, to an insult such as "If she



were a car, she would be a Volga,” both of these give detail on the suffering and the reason behind the sorrow. Now, at the age of 16 years old, I better understand more than just what mainstream news is in media coverage.

I understand that women are undervalued in Middle Eastern society. I understand that children are displaced and feel of little value because of some of the cruel actions of adults. I understand that not only does this happen in the Middle East, but in West Virginia, the United States, and everywhere else as well.

The book you wrote has convinced me to continue my support of diversity here at home. In becoming more accepting of those who have descended here from a different nation, we are doing a good deed. I only hope that one day, peace can be given to those who have underwent any kind of struggle. Thank you, Khaled Hosseini for assisting in the discovery of my new aspiration: helping others feel accepted.

Sincerely,  
Jakob Henderson

**Mary Laswell**  
***The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien**  
11th Grade, East Fairmont High School  
Fairmont, WV  
Teacher—Dina Hudson

Dear Professor Tolkien,

The worst words that a person like me could ever hear are "you're not as good as you were - you've lost your touch, your golden touch, your talent, your razzle-dazzle, your ka-BOOM." Granted, no one has ever actually said those

words to me other than myself, but I myself am quite possibly my own worst enemy, and I can be very persuasive. I said those words to myself after looking back at the past several months, when my days had evolved to be marked with due dates, tests, and assignments instead of the days of the week, months in a year, and estimated time frames in which I would finish a book. I had known it was coming; I'd been neglecting my daily self-appointed assignments of Middle-Earth

lore-study for months, years even, if you'd care to count. The final blow to my perfectionist, insufferable, haughty, lore master attitude was sitting in front of me amidst an unfinished family tree of a bunch of your precious elves. To anyone else other than you and I (or any other fan, for that matter) it would have appeared to be utter nonsense, but to me it was the most basic, the most

well-known piece of information of every *Silmarillion* fan's well of knowledge. If one didn't know it, they would after a few hours of immersing themselves in the online sources of Middle Earth history. It was the Line of Finwe, consisting of the top dogs of early Middle Earth. Any self-respecting Middle-Earth fan knows it, and here I was, scratching out names and letters, cursing myself, not remembering the names of certain kings' wives or in what order the Arafinweans were born. It was then that I'd uttered those words to myself.

After at least three weeks of self-loathing and pity, I decided to take some initiative. I sat with a few of my copies of your books and flipped through the pages. I scanned, re-scanned, perused, and persuaded myself to keep going after being distracted for the millionth time. Finally, I allowed myself to take a break. It just wasn't working out. I sat slumped in my bed, and



sulked. I mourned the loss of several years worth of information gathered, and kept as sharp and clean as a knife, nestled in the holster of my brain, ready to be wielded for spontaneous fact spewing, or for times when I needed to fight off an awkward silence.

While going through the thorough ritual one evening of dusting off my bookshelves, I slid a thick, short book out of its place to really put some elbow grease into my cleaning. The maroon cover and gold lettering gave me an amiable hello, asking where I'd been for so long. I set it aside fondly instead of putting it back in its place. Despite its humble appearance and storytelling, it's without a doubt the most important of all of my copies of your books. You guessed it - it's *The Hobbit*, the very reason why I became so engrossed in Middle Earth.

I sit and open up the book and begin to read, and I revisit Thorin and his Company, their adventures, and my favorite hobbit, Bilbo, and his discoveries of all that is out there; it had been so long that I read with an amount of joy I hadn't felt in a long time when reading a book. I didn't anticipate the quotes, character introductions, or the major events; I simply let the book wash over me like a river, and it welcomed me home.

I found that reading about Bilbo's experiences paralleled with my own reading of the book. Just as Gandalf introduced Bilbo to the rest of the world of Middle Earth, he came knocking at my door right when he knocked at Bilbo's, and when I opened it, I opened myself to their world as well. By reading your book again, I realized the importance of the smallest things. Things don't need to be grandeur for them to make a differ-

ence. Bilbo Baggins, a small, unassuming hobbit, emerged from your most humble book, took my hand, had me step through the round door of Bag End and made me who I am. Even the smallest person really can change the course of the future. can't they?

Picking up that book again instead of shoving it back in my bookshelf made me realize two very important things: first, that my worth isn't meas-

ured by how many names I can remember, or the names of those names' children or cousins or grandparents, or who they married, or what kinds of elves lived in what area at whatever given time. All that is important is that you love and respect the book with all of your heart. After all, I knew your books once before, and the information is still somewhere deep in the recesses of my mind, but the book knew how much I

cared. As long as the book knows, there really isn't much else to worry about, is there? Lastly, you and I have something in common, Professor - we both care deeply about your books. We both love them dearly, and they know and feel that love. Your books have given us both something extraordinary, which could only be found within the soft, aged pages of a well-loved book. If a person loves a book, Professor, it will love them back, and give them much more than they could ever ask for, no matter how small it is. You and I know that quite well, don't we?

Sincerely,

Mary Laswell



# LEVEL 1: HONORABLE MENTION

## **Dalton DeJarnette**

***Just Me and My Mom* by Mercer Mayer**

4th Grade, Leading Creek Elementary School  
Linn, WV  
Teacher—Cristina Stout

Dear Mercer Mayer,

My mom has been by my side since I was a little baby. She has taken care of me. Mom plays with me and makes me laugh. Reading your book *Just Me and My Mom* sounds a lot like us.

While reading the book, I started to remember lots of things my mom and I have done. Like when I was a little kid she took me to *The Polar Express* and she let me give the conductor the tickets. My mom took me when I was little to Denver, Colorado to explore the big city. That was my first plane ride and it was awesome. Another time she took me to a museum to see the Dinosaur Exhibit but I never touched anything like the boy in the book. Mom took me to an Aquarium to see the fish, sharks, turtles and whales. There was lots of fish in the tanks. I never ran off from my mom when we watched the sea lions playing. When mom and I are out she likes to go shopping and I always say "can I get a toy Mom?" Mom says "yes" all of the time. Mom has taken me on a train, bus, and airplane but I've never been in a taxi. Maybe one day we can take a taxi ride in New York City.

After reading the book I realized it felt like me and my mom. My mom loves me, takes care of me and makes me happy. I have a happy mommy and I love her. I think more kids should read this book because they can see what their mom has done for them. Thank you for writing this book.

Sincerely,

Dalton DeJarnette

## **Natalie Elgin**

***In Real Life: My Journey to a Pixelated World* by Joey Graceffa**

6th Grade, Hurricane Middle School  
Hurricane, WV  
Teacher—Rachelle Ochoa

Dear Joey Graceffa,

*In Real Life*, what does it mean? I have always wondered, but I believe I understand now. Your book, *In Real Life* gave me hope, confidence, and a greater understanding of the world around me and the things that happen around me each day. I knew the moment I picked up your book that my life and my world would be changed forever.

Emotions, sadness, confusion, vulnerability, depression. A deep, dark hole nobody ever wants to fall into. I know this because I fell in myself. As you can guess while reading your book, and before I first even laid eyes on it I had a disease called depression. I had horrible feelings and felt like nobody cared or understood, because the truth is I didn't really understand myself.

Even though I had depression it was pretty easy to keep in, and as long as I could read your book and find a way out of reality for at least a minute or two I was fine. The truth to the matter is that although I thought I was fine, I was sad and at one point started having suicidal thoughts. I don't know what would have happened if I didn't find your book, even though I don't really want to know what might have happened. There are so many questions I could ask like, "What would I be like?", "Would I still be depressed?", or "Would I even still be here?"

The first time I started to read your book I knew that something was different. Though I didn't know you would forever change my life I knew that the book, the words, the feelings you gave me were changing me. Every time I started to read your story I could feel all my sadness vanish, piece by piece you were changing it to happiness, joy, hope, a life worth living for. Something to hold on to. I just wanted to get away from

# LEVEL 1: HONORABLE MENTION

reality and maybe never come back. Whenever I would read your book I felt as if you were tuning in on sadness and kind of listening to my thoughts and feelings, trying to comfort me as if I was there with you. You listened and, understood what I was going through. In the first time in forever I finally felt like someone cared.

During depression I know I had many thoughts and feelings, and I just wanted to keep them in. Although your book was a way out of reality I still always had to go back each time. Each time changing to getting less stressful, to me actually being happy. I was bullied a lot as well and I just wanted to crawl down a hole and never come out. I am glad didn't give up. If only I knew then that now I look in the mirror every morning and smile and, not a fake smile that I learned to do a while back, a real smile that was hard to accomplish but with your book by my side I knew somewhere deep inside me that one day I would finally be set free.

To say thank you would be an understatement. One day I hope and dream of meeting you "In Real Life" so I can really, truly express to you how you changed my whole world in a way I will never forget. Not even the greatest writers could write down my love for your book and my thankfulness that it was there for me in the roughest time and lowest point of my life. I want you to know that because of your book I am happy, lively, joyful, cheerful, ecstatic, merry, gleeful, whatever you want to call it but now, thanks to you I am living a life worth living for. So all I can say is thank you, for now.

Sincerely Yours,  
Natalie Elgin

**Olivia Haught**  
***Sisters* by Raina Telgemeier**  
6th Grade, Hurricane Middle School  
Hurricane, WV  
Teacher—Rachelle Ochoa

Dear Raina Telgemeier,

I come from a family just like yours. A funny hardworking dad, a crazy loving mom, the best brother you could ask for, and the annoying little

sister. Well by four minutes. We're twins, polar opposites though. You know the stereotypes the world has created for twins how they have the same hair, same eyes, same size, same clothes.... That's not always true. We have different eyes, different hair, she's tall I'm short, I have braces she doesn't and the list goes on and on. We're best friends but as you know there is a downside to having a sister. You have to share everything! Your room, your clothes, and your toys. But your book has helped me see sharing isn't all that bad. Sometimes it means you get more than what's yours and that's cool.

Our arguments are always the same, "It's your chore week!" Or "I was going to wear that shirt today!" or "The dog loves me more!" Trust me I know I've been in all three scenarios! As we get older we've started to realize that being sisters is great you always have someone to play with to talk to (even though they don't always listen), but it's still great. I try to stay positive about all the negative things about having a sister because in your book *Sisters* you would keep your book positive and funny even though some things aren't always great. And that helped me see that there is always an upside to something bad.

When my sister bought your book I wasn't sure about it at first, but we were on a road trip and I was bored. So I read it and loved it. I could totally relate in so many ways. Your book was like a guide line to having a sister. Like those long miserable car rides called road trips? Yeah I bet you know, your big family loading up in a car, your sister in your bubble, your brother's stinky feet in your face, your mom snoring as loud as you've ever heard her snore, and your dad jamming out to his favorite classic rock songs. All that in a mini van for twenty four hours! Joy. But once we get there we have so much fun. Rollercoaster, new food to try, staying up really late, and being crammed in a small hotel room mean you're always with your family and that means talking about old memories, telling funny stories and making new memories. I remember going to Florida and coming home we stopped to get a goldfish well we came out with three. We hold the world record for most killed goldfish. We killed seven. They all had tragic deaths but lived a nice short life. But your family seems to have worst luck with your pets than us.

# LEVEL 1: HONORABLE MENTION

Rest in peace Leland.

My family always supports each other no matter what. We stick together. Friends until the end that is what my sister and I told each other and hey we're still best friends. So always remember keep your friends close and your sister closer and Smile life's great!

Olivia Haught

**Jay Huff**  
***Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt**  
6th Grade, Hurricane Middle School  
Hurricane, WV  
Teacher—Rachelle Ochoa

Dear Natalie Babbitt,

My name is Jay Huff and I am 11 years old. I live In Hurricane, WV. Your book *Tuck Everlasting* opened my eyes to a whole different world. I've always wanted to know more about the afterlife and what it would be like to live forever and when we are supposed to die. Then we read your book *Tuck Everlasting*. My class read it when I was in the 5th grade, my teacher asked us one day a question that I will never forget in my entire lifetime. "If you could have a chance to drink from the spring would you?".

I thought about it, and I asked myself "would I drink from the spring?". I would never get to have a family, I would never get to drive a car. I would never get to tell stories to my kids, or my grandkids , or even my great-grandkids. I would never get to have an accomplished life. I would have to one day even go into hiding because I would never age.

All I would ever get to do with my life is watch my friends and family members doing something with their life. Watch as they have children and grandchildren. While I sit back in the shadows and go to sleep when the sun goes down and wake up when the sun comes up. That is all that I will ever be as a human-being. The book gave me many new theories on life and a whole new perspective on how precious our life is and to not take life for granted.

This book took me to new worlds and on new adventures. It gave me new friends, I got my answer on life. God has a time for everything a time for laughter and a time for sadness. He has a time for all of us, he has plans for our lives he has plans for everyone. As many people through out time have said "life is precious and that we should not take it for granted." Life is a gift, a precious gift, life is short but it is shorter if you waste your life away. We all need to cherish life.

Sincerely Your Favorite Reader,

Jay Huff

**Olivia Kiger-Camilo**  
***The Only Road* by Alexandra Diaz**  
6th Grade, The Linsly School  
Wheeling, WV  
Teacher—Jennifer Loudermilk

Dear Alexandra Diaz,

Your book, *The Only Road*, has affected me in a way that no other book has before. It helped me understand so many things that our culture has told us otherwise about, such as being ignorant to an extent that it's not blissful. People think just because someone doesn't fit into the cultural clique they're alien. But people don't realize everyone is different in their own way and struggling with their own problems. And what people don't realize is some problems are so horrific they have to do everything they can to make them go away.

While reading your book, I realized something; immigrants aren't just coming to the United States because it's "better". Some are coming here because it's a matter of life or death. Immigrants aren't always seen as human, but really, they're just like you and me, trying to get through each day. During some people's days it's just trying to get by without getting killed. Everyone has a story and everyone's struggling with something just like you and me.

This book has taught me everyone goes through hardships. And even though we are human it's hard to relate to people sometimes. Your book showed that most immigrants don't really want

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to leave their home country, but because of their circumstances, they must. I know Jaime and Angela didn't want to leave their family, but it was a life or death circumstance.

Your book has influenced me to be kinder, more thoughtful, and try to relate to people in a better way. I hope your book touches others the same way it did me.

Sincerely,  
Olivia Kiger-Camilo

### **Summer Lively**

#### ***The B.F.G.* by Roald Dahl**

6th grade, Hurricane Middle School

Hurricane, WV

Teacher—Sandra Turley

Dear Roald Dahl,

I have always loved your books. I have always loved all books. However, your book *The BFG* has made an impact on my life bigger than any other book was capable of doing. What is strange about my situation is that I don't very much relate to Sophie. I myself am not an orphan. I have two parents that are alive and well. I do relate to the Big Friendly Giant himself though. I know it sounds like a strange situation at first.

You see I'm relatable to the BFG because we are both the "Black sheep" of our families. We also relate in the fact that we dislike snozzcumpers. Please excuse my horrible book reference. I felt a personal connection to the BFG every one of the three or four times I read the book. Although I feel this connection I must criticize the fact that his jumbo elephant ears can't have two uses. They could work like hang gliders on the side of his head and cause him to glide over land and sea. I dreamed about that one the BFG was using his ears to glide high above me.

I was at first intrigued by your book by its title because I wanted to know what it stood for. *The B-F-G*. When I read it I could hardly put it down. With every witty comment I found myself smiling so much I thought my face would split in half. As I read each twist I found myself gasping with shock. I also made a notebook of predictions. I was almost sad as I read the last chapter. I got

even more unhappy as I reached the last page knowing that after this there would be no more going to dream world and imagining what was going to happen next in the story, or that I was Sophie in Giant Country after she was swiped from her bed in England.

I'm so glad my mom bought me the book *The BFG*, if she didn't I would still be wishing that I was more like my family. Your book showed me that I wasn't that different from my family I just didn't spend enough time with them. Now that I spend more time with my family I see how much they are like me. Thanks to you I have more fun with my family. Overall, I think I have learned that being a little different is a blessing not a curse from reading *The BFG*. Thank you for writing it.

Your friend that hopes you don't have to eat snozzcumpers,

Summer Lively

### **Samvat Jai Yadav**

#### ***If* by Joseph Rudyard Kipling**

6th Grade, Princeton Middle School

Princeton, WV

Teacher—Jessica Morgan

Dear Mr. Joseph Rudyard Kipling,

I am writing to you because I would like to show my great admiration for your poem, *If*. Your great masterpiece can truly be described in only one word; inspiring. However, I would like to broaden my description to portray my true appreciation for your talent of writing such wonderful pieces of literature.

Your poem of *If*, as you know, is in truth (even though you were addressing your so-called son) like a rulebook for anyone guiding how one should be like in order to be a better person. It speaks of aplomb, that people must have confidence in themselves even during the toughest of situations. One must have the virtue of patience, the quality of modesty, the willingness to work hard, the tendency to treat people equally, and much more. If everybody had these wonderful qualities, I believe that the world would be a better place with harmony and brotherhood.

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This poem changed my perspective towards life the instant I read it at the age of ten years. *If* bestowed upon me the wisdom that grows as I age. Even until now, it continues to inspire me to work as hard as I can to achieve my goals and to treat everybody with respect and equality. It taught me that life is what you make it, so make the most of it. It also led me to the conclusion that life can only be made great with effort, determination, and virtues of morality.

I still have many more lessons to learn in life, but reading through your inspiring words makes me take each step wisely. I am not afraid to make mistakes anymore because what doesn't break me only makes me stronger. Life cannot always be a bed of roses, but if I find a silver lining to even the greyest clouds, my worries tend to wean away. And that's what I gather from your work. I am sure you wrote these pearls of wisdom for one of your own, but even with a century passed, it still inspires others and generations to come.

In conclusion, your work of *If* inspired me and many other people to work hard in order to achieve their goals and to possess the qualities of patience, modesty, confidence in themselves, and much more. After all of this, I just have two words to say to you, with deep gratitude and humble regards from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Samvat Jai Yadav



## LEVEL 2: HONORABLE MENTION

**Lily Banford**

***Wonder* by R.J. Palacio**

7th Grade, St. Joseph Catholic Middle School

Huntington, WV

Teacher—Stephanie Hill

Dear R.J. Palacio,

The book *Wonder* exposed me to peoples' emotions. In this book, Auggie has a major facial deformity, this is what truly stuck me. He was treated poorly by many. I cannot imagine how it would feel to be given a side glance, be snickered at as I walk in public, or be treated like an inferior human being. How could anyone be scared of a harmless person because of the way they look? Although now, I realize that I do the same. It is completely unfair that people who cannot help the way they look, are getting treated like they are a monster. I now know that you cannot judge a book by its cover, because if you do, you become the monster.

The character Julian truly struck me as the monster, a cruel human being. Now I see that there is not much of a difference between the two of us. However, I do find that although I would see Auggie differently as I do others, I can usually disguise my thoughts or feelings in a way that is not offensive. However, although it is less offensive, I am still judging. Auggie is a character that has taught me how others feel. Therefore, I need to stifle my tendency to judge in order to treat others respectfully.

I not only discovered the way the prejudice people felt, but also the person who is being judged feels. Auggie described his feeling as being able to tell if someone is silently judging him. Just the downwards glance made him feel uneasy. I often wonder if I do this. I want to be the person who is kind to everyone, but that can be challenging. Auggie was someone who needed some friends. I wonder if I met an Auggie, could I be that friend? It is possible to be the one who would stand up for Auggie. In fact, in the book, Summer did. Summer was one of the only characters that helped me get through the book. I am truly glad she was a part of the book because she gave a sense of

hope that things would turn out well. Summer forgot all the differences and decided to focus on the similarities between her and her new friend. Often times, we become the monster, and find the negative things in others, when we have plenty ourselves. I hope to be more like Summer.

In conclusion, my new goal is to find a new way to view people. You do not always have to see them as they look. Once you get to know a person and have a better understanding as to who they are, you are less likely to be judgmental. I truly appreciate this book for teaching me the value of human feelings. I do not want to be the monster and judge other people.

Sincerely,  
Lily Banford

**Kiran Boggs**

***Homecoming* by Cynthia Voigt**

8th Grade

Huntington, WV

*Letter submitted individually*

Dear Cynthia Voigt,

*Homecoming*, another book, another title for our assigned book for my English class. My expectations were low for the book as the teacher described it as a "classic." I thought in my mind, "Here we go, another mind-numbing English class." As we began to read it, however, my expectations were not only changed but so were my feelings toward the storyline, and the book left me wanting more as soon as the bell rang to change classes.

After reading your book my view of the world changed dramatically especially toward my family. In reality my mind could not begin to comprehend what I would do if I, like Dicey, was left on my very own miles and miles away from a family member I hadn't even known existed until yesterday. As I reached a touching part in the book where the children concluded that their mother had left them, that's when it really hit me. They had no mom, no dad, and they were all alone in an empty parking lot miles away from any

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known relative. They must've been scared, devastated, panicky, all with a rush of fear of being separated if the police intervened. Their father had left them and now their mother had abandoned them in a parking lot with little money and only the clothes on their back! I, however, have two loving parents who would go to the ends of the earth to help me succeed in everything I was involved!

Your story touched me in a way that changed how I thought and acted. I had always thought that every kid had loving parents who would provide for them and support them. After all that's how my life has been ever since I was born. This book was like a cold bucket of water that had been thrown on me. During the trip to find her grandmother, I was shocked at all the menial chores Dicey had to do just so that she could earn money to provide food for her siblings and herself. Now I realize that not every child has the same resources. I am in a school system where 90 percent of the students are on free or reduced lunch. I understand now that hunger can strike so close to home, and that many kids go hungry every day and school meals may be all they have to eat. I really need to be more diligent and understanding of how hard my parents work to provide for all my needs and wants.

Since reading your book, I am also less judgmental of people based on how they look, smell or act. I have misjudged other kids on how they look and smell (as terrible as that sounds) because I never realized that they might not have the best situation at home. They might be physically or mentally abused, and they may be just trying to do the best with what they've got. I never even knew about this until the seventh grade when I met Gail (not her real name). She always wore baggy clothes and her eyes always had bags under them. People called her terrible names, like "pig" and "slob," and I just went along with it. I judged her on her appearance and not actually the person she was. I heard she didn't have a mom and her dad was what others called a "druggie." I decided to find out and she told me that her dad smoked marijuana. I was horrified. She moved away and only later I

learned that her dad had been caught for smoking marijuana. I was honestly terrified of what kind of family she had. She eventually moved back and seemed a totally different person--she wore nice clothes and she said that her grandmother was her legal guardian now. If complete strangers helped Dicey and her brothers and sisters despite the fact that they looked disheveled and dirty, I knew that I could change my attitude toward Gail also. I didn't see her as the girl with the "weed smoker dad" anymore. I treated her the same as I did my friends. She and I got along extremely well after I understood what her life was like, and we ended up having some things in common like the same books and movies.

So thank you Cynthia Voigt for opening my eyes. I am grateful for the many gifts that I am presented with in my life and I don't ever want to whine, grumble or complain (I may be asking for too much here) to my parents. This experience led me to question how I behaved toward others and especially to my family. I need to be more understanding and more appreciative of their dedication to me. They gave up many of life's little pleasures just so I can succeed in everything I do.

Yours sincerely,  
Kiran Boggs

**Julia Conner**  
***Middle School: Just My Rotten Luck***  
**by James Patterson**  
7th Grade, Princeton Middle School  
Princeton, WV  
Teacher—Jessica Morgan

Dear James Patterson,

Hello. I am here to write to you regarding your outstanding book, *Middle School: Just My Rotten Luck*. First of all, I would like to say thank you. Thank you for helping me see the world a different way. I will now explain my feelings.

I am a small town girl, 12 years old. I'm in 7th grade, and in gifted English and Math. I relate to this book greatly. Rafe is a boy who learns

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differently. Who's special. He's put in a "special" class with other "special" kids, other "kids like him". This causes him to feel much worse about himself and makes him subject to bullying by default. I am sure you remember almost every little detail about the book, so you can probably connect the dots from here, your book made me think about all the other kids in the world who are deemed "special" like Rafe and me. All the other kids who are put into categories because they think differently. Because they're "special." It really bothers me how some types of special are considered bad. You can be teased and singled out for simply being different. That's not right.

Everyone's special. Everyone should know that. I knew that. But apparently, before I read this book, I didn't completely understand that. I was one of those kids who gossiped about the not-so-smart kids like Rafe. I'm on the opposite end of the spectrum. I'm considered "one of the smart kids." I bragged a lot. I always made it clear that I thought I was the best, and the mentally ill kids at my school were the worst. I don't think that way anymore. All thanks to you.

I wasn't really teased, just singled out. I felt weird, felt like I didn't belong. Every time someone asked me if I was one of the "smart kids," I died a little inside. Sure, there's pride, but it's crushed by the overwhelming feeling of being isolated. Put in a category. Being "special". I hate being special, always have. It makes me feel horrible inside. I just want to fit in amongst my peers. And with being in special classes, that was out of the question. But I don't feel so bad about being different anymore.

I know the feeling of being special. I can relate to Rafe with other things, too. Like getting a pet, and being successful in things you never thought you'd be good at. But most of all, I relate with him by being special. By being in different classes. By being unique.

This book proved to me that being special isn't always a bad thing. Rafe is actually very successful. He doesn't let his special classes bring him down when it comes to things he likes. He plays

football and even draws and shows it off to the whole school. He knows he is a good artist, and he pursues that. He proves that just because you're special, doesn't mean you're bad. That helped me out.

This book gave me the perspective of someone like the people I used to gossip about. It tells his feelings and how life is for him. That was very enlightening, and helped me a lot. It got me to somewhat feel like Rafe while I sat in my bed and read. I'm praised, he's not. I got to feel that. It was very...odd. Very enlightening.

It changed my view of the world. Made me realize everybody's different, and that's a good thing. I'm more positive about being in "special" classes with "special" people. It makes me feel...special. In a good way.

Sincerely,  
Julia Conner

**Sydney Glessner**  
***The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak**  
8th Grade, The Linsly School  
Wheeling, WV  
Teacher—Maggie Allison

Dear Markus Zusak,

Your book has inspired me into a whole new mindset of how I live my life and how I view the world. Most people take things for granted and don't realize how fortunate they actually are. I was one of those people, but now I have changed. When I first read your story *The Book Thief*, I was just in the 7th grade not too long ago.

I lived my life in a bubble at the time, a bubble protected from the outside world. A bubble that never looked further past my bedroom window, the school hallway, or the room in my dance studio. I was young and didn't have a care in the world about anything other than the little things happening in my life and my little worries. Unmeaningful worries about what type of cereal I would choose to eat in the morning, or what color shirt to wear to school, I was only concerned

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about my stress-free life as a twelve year old little girl, not realizing there are other kids out there in the world just like me, who go through struggles bigger than mine. I followed the same monotonous routine every single day. I would wake up, go to school, go to dance, come back home, fall asleep, and just keep repeating. I didn't care, think about, or even acknowledge anyone or anything else that I felt wasn't significant. Except there was one thing that I've always been interested in and always been ambitious about when it comes to learning it.

My whole life I was never a big reader and never really fascinated by reading. The one thing I always love to read and learn about is The Holocaust. For some reason, which I am not certain of, I have always had a fancy for reading about this serious event. I've read several nonfiction books about The Holocaust, watched *The Book Thief* movie, watched *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, and read that book, and read many articles online. The Holocaust is the only thing that has ever intrigued me so much. I never really found something to read that kept me on the edge of my chair, or affected me on any personal emotional level. That was until I came across your book, my favorite book.

I started the book on an airplane early in the morning. I had opened the book out of boredom, but little did I know that those pages were filled with words upon words that would change me as a person. By reading the book I was able to see children, not too much different from my age, living life in the 1940s during one of the most horrendous events in world history. I had never read a book the way this one was written. I found it touching and chilling to be introduced to Death as a character. I hate talking or even imagining the thought of death. In fact, I have always been scared of dying. Actually I still am, but *The Book Thief* has taken away some of my fear. I learned that everyone dies, no matter who you are. It might not be in the most pleasant way but it happens to every person. Death in the book is more human-like than it might seem. Even he has feelings of sorrow too, which really made me curious.

I can't imagine at all having to go through every-

thing that Liesel Meminger did, and I seriously mean that. Although I do in some ways see myself reflected through her. I too am an older sister just like she was. I am definitely protective over my younger sister and I care and love for her with my whole heart. If something bad ever happened to her, my heart would be broken. I could never envision myself in Liesel's shoes. I could never deal with my sibling dying, living with foster parents, seeing people being discriminated for their cultural and religious beliefs right in front of my eyes, having to hide a Jew in my basement, or any of the awful events a child could have seen during The Holocaust. What an awful thing to know that people could be that cruel, inhumane, and cold-blooded to kill other humans just like them.

Even through all the things that were going on around Liesel, it amazed me how she could still go off in her own mind and find the joy to still be able to do her favorite thing, read books, and play with her best friend, Rudy Steiner. The Mayor's wife, Frau Hermann, surprises me as a character. To me she was a small bit of good mixed in with the evil. She knew Liesel was stealing books from her collection and Rudy was helping her. She never turned the two in and she let Liesel read at her leisure, This shows me that no matter the situation, there's always a good heart somewhere. Rudy is my favorite character in the story, because I am always amused with his humorous and flirty personality. From him I learned to always stay positive.

Turning to the end of the story there are pages where you will find small discolored, wrinkled spots on my book. Those are marks from tears. The end of this book made me so incredibly sad. How did Liesel handle seeing her best friend, who I figure had a crush on her, lying stiff and dead in the middle of the rubbish after a bomb? This situation just really hit me hard. It isn't easy for me to think back about this or write about it without having a heavy heart.

I've learned that I should try my best not to complain about things in my life that go wrong or don't go my way. Honestly I really don't have anything to worry about. Sadly, this isn't the case for all kids, even kids in the past. Unlike them, I

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don't need to worry about if I'm going to survive through the next day. Some children have to worry about where to find clothes, shelter, or food. I have my basic needs right at my fingertips. My biggest worries are grades I get on tests in school.

Now I'm a changed person. I realized things that seemed so unimportant to me when I was younger. This book made me imagine the unimaginable. I learned to be thankful for the circumstances I live in today. Thank you for bringing this beautiful story into the hands of people like me. I'm sure I'm not the only one who can say they have been changed by the words you have written. I have learned that there's a lot more to the world than what I see through my eyes in my daily life. There's a lot more to the world than what goes on in under the roofs of my house and my school. After all, I'm only just one in over seven billion.

Sincerely,  
Sydney Glessner

**Emma Green**  
***We All Looked Up* by Tommy Wallach**

8th Grade, John Adams Middle School  
Charleston, WV  
Teacher—Mary Frances Williams

Dear Tommy Wallach,

In today's society, it is very hard to let yourself go. Everyday there seems to be a million things to worry about or stress over, no matter how busy your life is. Unrealistic expectations make everyday life for teen girls hard. Between pressure from their parents, pressure from social media, influence of friends, and just their own self conscious, teen girls struggle with self confidence and their own self image on a daily basis. I know this feeling all too well. Just like Anita in your book, *We All Looked Up*, I too feel an immense amount of pressure from my parents, as well as added pressure from my own self.

I will be the first to admit, I have struggled with body images as well as the way I look and feel

with myself. This is why your book hit so close to home. Having these feelings of confusion and emptiness, is truly terrifying. You almost feel as if you are all alone, stranded on an island with no one there to save you. The smallest activities start to turn into the hardest tasks. You begin to question if you are doing everything right, or if you look good while doing so. Looking in the mirror begins to become a dread. You start seeing yourself as someone you are not, someone you don't want to be. This image is then placed in your mind, burned there like a brand, and then follows you around all day, to remind you just how imperfect you are. This finally turns into a routine. You become so caught up in what mistakes you may make that day, that you can't concentrate. The amount of pressure you then apply to yourself is unreal. Unless it is perfect, it isn't acceptable, is your new motto.

The sad reality, is the pressure doesn't end there. It's actually only beginning. Just like Eliza, in your book, my parents apply a hefty amount of pressure on me. Most kids feel pressure from their parents about getting straight A's, or making a sports team. But, for some reason, I feel their pressure constantly. Many people like to tell me that I shouldn't worry, and they are only applying so much because I am an only child. But, their intense expectations get into my head. I constantly feel as if I am going to let them down. Sometimes, I am scared to ask for help, just because they might think less of me. This has isolated me into my own world, where the feeling of loneliness is all too familiar.

*We All Looked Up*, has impacted my life greatly. This book was truly a work of art. The morals and lessons it brought to my attention, truly opened my eyes. The main characters were normal students, just like me. They all struggled with pressure, as well as expectations too intense to carry on their own. But, once they found out about an asteroid hurtling towards their town, they let go. They began to live a little less caught up in their stress. They enjoyed every moment they had, and never looked back. Somehow, this made them all happier. The storyline spoke to me, because it taught me something. All the years I have spent worrying about small things, I could have done great things. I intend to

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not focus so much on my body, and comparing myself to others. I will do things to please myself, and if I am the only one happy with that, I will be just fine. Life is too short to stress about the small things. Thank you for your work, Mr. Wal-lach. You have given me a new aspect on life.

Sincerely,

Emma Green

### **Ava Reed**

#### ***The Power of a Praying Teen* by Stormie Omartian**

8th Grade, John Adams Middle School  
Charleston, WV  
Teacher—Mary Frances Williams

Dear Mrs. Omartian,

I am writing to you this evening to tell you why your book, *The Power of a Praying Teen* has meant so much to me. At this moment, I am a 13-year-old girl from Charleston, West Virginia. I attend John Adams Middle School as an eighth grader. Your book has been a source of guidance since I left elementary school. *The Power of a Praying Kid* and *The Power of a Praying Teen* were gifts from my mother who thought they would help me as I started a new school and had to meet new people. Without these books, I would not be as successful in the classroom, as content at home, or as confident around others.

Why? It's because you have taught me how to pray and trust God. Most people attend church services once or twice a week. However, I feel like I attend church at home by studying *The Bible* every night before bed. The next book I always read is from your *Power of Praying* series. These chapters and passages teach me how to turn my problems over to God, such as worrying over tests and assignments, problems with friends, and other expectations that cause me to feel pressured.

In less than 100 days, I will be a high school freshman. I will have the same emotions that I felt in sixth grade when I feared the unknown.

While I am excited to start a new chapter, I realize that I am going to need to protect my values and beliefs more than ever before. Your book has shown me how to shield myself from bad influences and how to set boundaries to avoid trouble.

Most importantly, these next four years will require me to decide what sort of path I want to take in this lifetime. I will need to make serious choices about where I will attend college and what I should study once I get there. Your book tells me to ask God to show me my purpose in life, and what I will be called to do. Every decision that I make will have a consequence, even if it's a good one. On page 123 of *Praying Teen*, you write that God has important things for me to do with my life, and He has given me gifts, talents, and abilities for that purpose. Opportunities to use my skills will open up, and doors will close if I am not supposed to go through them. I just have to be patient and believe that everything will work out.

In conclusion, your books remind me not to look so far ahead in my life that I become overwhelmed. I am reminded to take one day at a time, and to let God handle everything that comes next. On the last page of *Praying Teen*, you recite 1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxiety upon Him, for He cares for you." I will continue to do that.

Sincerely,  
Ava E. Reed

### **Adesh Urval**

#### ***The Stand* by Stephen King**

8th Grade, The Linsly School  
Wheeling, WV  
Teacher—Maggie Allison

Dear Stephen King,

"Do you think people ever learn anything?" These words have lived in my mind since the moment I finished *The Stand*. Ever since I was a young child, only beginning to wade into the great ocean of literature, I have believed that

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every good story has a moral. I've searched through novel after novel, and seldom do I discover a story that manages to quench my thirst for hidden enlightenment. When I do stumble upon such a story I become enveloped in it, absorbing the knowledge, considering the implications and reading and rereading until the pages began to wrinkle. It is my belief that a novel should make everyone reexamine their role in the world. Sadly, such a novel is extremely rare, and in the meanwhile it's common to simply get drawn to regular mundanities and not once think about life beyond our daily schedule. In your book you examine many philosophical questions. Needless violence and discrimination takes place in many parts of the world today and your book speaks out about it. Therein lies the reason I enjoy great books like *The Stand*, because the words and the messages they carry does not only give us a glimpse into the character's lives, but also gives us a new perspective on our own.

When I began reading *The Stand*, I was immediately thrust into the world of Stu, Fran, Larry and Nick. I got to know each of the characters thoughts and feelings, and I could empathize about exactly how they felt when the Plague came. As the plot developed, I began searching for a moral, knowing that a novel of such quality must have one. As I read on, you began to establish the two defined sides of good and evil. And yet, as you revealed there was barely any distinction between the two sides. And with that, I began to consider how clear the line separating good and evil was. I had always thought that I could very easily draw the distinction between the two sides, but I had become uncertain. This is a problem that I have not, and probably will never, find a solution to. Regardless, I have let this concept influence my decisions, for the difference between good and evil is very hard to see so we must never assume, but instead consider every issue closely from all sides in order to make the right choice. It has lead me to understand that you must empathize with people on both sides of the "line" in order to ensure you make the correct decision.

Throughout the book you established a sense of empathy in your readers for even the antagonists, and this is one sign of a truly layered book.

The way your book animated many characters simultaneously was surprisingly complex, and I felt myself assuming the identities of each of them as I read. Most books are riddled with basic evil and good characters, but in reality people like that don't exist. But what truly startled and touched me was the conversation that Fran and Stu have in the last few pages of the book. Right as the novel draws to a close Stu utters the words "Do you think people ever learn anything?" This really spoke to me because I have heard family members recount memories about oppression in their home country, that seems very similar to the discrimination and violence that takes place across the world today. Even after being educated and seeing exactly what has happened before, we ignore the signs. Millions of people suffer, and I believe that just like they have before this, historians will write, generations from now, about all the violence that occurred and how we may have all been able to assist more in the struggle.

I've always wanted to ask you if I've understood your messages correctly, but I know a story is however the reader interprets it. I have read *The Stand* numerous times, and every time I discover a little more about what each message means. Understanding a great book is like deciphering a puzzle, and as I learn more about the pieces, they all seem to fit. Truly understanding and answering the questions your book asks may be a time consuming venture, but every time I dive back into the world of *The Stand* searching for answers, I am always entertained as I delve through the book's wealth of complexity. For, as you once said, "Good books don't give up all their secrets at once."

Sincerely,

Adesh Urval

## LEVEL 3: HONORABLE MENTION

**Cassie Adkins**

***Wonder* by R.J. Palacio**

9th Grade, Ravenswood High School

Ravenswood, WV

Teacher—Sarah Brown

Dear R.J. Palacio,

These days appearance is everything to everyone. It's like if you don't have the right look or style you're not important. Living in a small county, everyone knows who everyone is and their families and how they are. This is how they base their opinions on certain individuals. Auggie is not a very well known person in his community until he goes to school. While reading your book, *Wonder*, I think about how the meaning behind your book corresponds to how things are in my life. It's like you took a red sticker and put it on a paper that only has blue stickers.

What I am saying is that Auggie was put in a school, while having a facial deformity that separates him from everyone else. He couldn't control what people thought about him and with his disease, no one wanted to talk to him and get to know him as a person. Instead, they knew him for the disease. Your book relates to me because my disease is my last name. It is something I cannot change. I come from a family who like to do bad things. I am one out of five siblings. The first two to be put in school set how our last name made us look. My oldest brother has been in and out of boys' homes, and doesn't care about anything or anyone. My second oldest brother is following right in his footsteps and he even dropped out of school at the age of 17.

Now, there is me. I am the middle child. This book helped me realize that it is okay to be different. I considered my last name as a plague, just like Auggie is considered a plague. He showed everyone that just because he had a face deformity that didn't mean that he couldn't do the same things the other kids did, including being smart. When people hear my last name, they start thinking that I must be a trouble maker, that I don't try in school, and I am simply dumb, just because I joined sports and I am nice to everyone, and make good grades. I showed people

that my last name doesn't mean I am someone you don't want to be around.

This book didn't inspire me to make myself a blue sticker, it just made me be more appreciative of being a red sticker that still managed to fit in. Just like Auggie, he couldn't change his face and I can't change my last name, but we showed people that it was okay that we didn't need to be perfect. We needed to be us. Maybe without me having my last name, I wouldn't have taken this book to heart, and maybe, if Auggie didn't have anything different about him, he would have been just another kid.

Thank you so much for reading my letter. I hope this made you smile and realize that your book is so inspirational to many people, including me. Without reading this book, I may have not joined many things that I do today. Today, I am a varsity cheerleader, a member of a very great competition choir, and I am on the honor roll every year. All because we had a deformity or a bad last name it made us better people. My motto is, "Nothing can stop you", and your book is the reason I live by that everyday. This book will always mean a lot to me. I read this at the beginning of my 6th grade year, and I am now in 9th. Thank you for helping me understand that being different is okay, it's how you deal with it that matters most.

Thank You,  
Cassie Adkins

**Alison Graley**

***Oh, the Places You'll Go!* by Dr. Seuss**

9th Grade, South Charleston High School

South Charleston, WV

Teacher—Sandra Dow

Dear Theodor,

Inspired. You could say I was inspired after I had enthralled myself in the sound of my mother's pacifying voice speaking the exhilarating words you have written in *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*. At this point, I was only five years old, but I had



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already envisioned the rest of my life. "I think that we as people are always prone to think about, well, tomorrow will be a better day..." A wise man, Bobby Knight, has spoken these words of intensity that have come to me in my dreams and overrun my every thought since the day I opened my ears wide enough to let them soak in. Your book has expanded on this idea that tomorrow is not an excuse for today, tomorrow will not solve life's every obstacle. Today is the day to create a plan, a layout for what's to come. So, as I was laying there at the age of five struggling to find the comfort I needed to absorb in bewilderment, I was conforming to your idea that every life should mean much more than one that is never truly lived.

From a very young age, I have always portrayed the role of "the smart one" in my family. Pressure builds like a game of Jenga, and in one single moment, one move can make or break a player. In this game I have always been in the place of victory but the immense pressure never fails. Being the most intelligent person in your family is an incredible feeling; however, the consciousness of the burden, the tension of never being given the sanction to fall is at times overwhelming. Although my parents do, I assume, prevail, they have never failed to acknowledge that life is not easy, not something everyone has the power to succeed in. And though they have said this time and time again, your words were the ones that will repeat over and over in my mind until I feel I have reached a point in my life where I have truly prevailed.

I've always had this picture in my mind, too, that I'm deep in the woods and there's various winding paths laid out in front of me. Whatever path I take is the one that will lead me through life like a teacher leading his students and wherever I arrive is where I've been destined to go the entire time. For so long I was faced with that dilemma that if the path I take is the wrong one, I will never get to experience things that I have dreamt durably about. I was scared to think that when it all came down to it, I wouldn't be satisfied with the course my life had taken. Your book changed that all around in a matter of minutes. Because of those words that probably came so easily to you,

those words that were played on a never-ending loop in my head, I no longer am faced with a choice that I once assumed my own story depended on. I can now comprehend that no path is permanent and that if I am not afraid to venture into the unknown, my life will have been worth living.

The greatest struggle of all, though, was in 2007: the year my life changed forever. I was so young and at that age you're supposed to blossom as a child and never run out of energy, but for me it was the worst years of my life. I was diagnosed with hypercortisolism at the age of five; consequently, that was the same year your book, *Mr. Seuss*, started meaning much more than just an assortment of daft words on paper. I was so much smarter than most kids my age, but I wasn't happy with my appearance or how others made me feel about it. I was suffering in a sheet of depression and disappointment that never let me feel content or even normal in my own body. That's when those words, that would've otherwise been meaningless, finally broke through and held up a ginormous banner letting me know that life would progress and I wouldn't be stuck like this eternally. I felt freed from what I thought would be holding me back from the rest of my life. And with doggedness and a positive mindset, I will never quit.

Though my thoughts may wander and I may not always have the strong belief in my success that I should, this assortment of words that may not have been meant to have a hold on a person did and will continue to. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, doctor, you have created this unexplainable creation. Maybe it sounds absurd or even slightly eccentric to others to think that a little children's book could impact a human being in such a big way. Maybe I'm crazy for basing my approach at an extraordinary life lived in the moment on something such as this, maybe I'm not at all. Oblivion is inevitable, but that doesn't mean every second of time one has on this Earth shouldn't be taken advantage of. So, that is my promise to you, Mr. Theodor Seuss Geisel, that as long as I am living I will never let the fear of the striking out keep me from playing this game of life. I am eternally grateful to you and your

## LEVEL 3: HONORABLE MENTION

incredible imagination running wild with these words and ideas that've infused tenacity within me to pursue my dreams and continue to do so until I've conquered. Thank you for that.

Alison Graley

**Haley McKown**  
***The Harry Potter series* by J.K. Rowling**  
10th Grade, Wirt County High School  
Elizabeth, WV  
Teacher—April Petrovsky

Dear J.K. Rowling,

Before I get into the meat and potatoes of this letter, I would like to state that Severus Snape was not a hero, at least not in my mind. How can someone make the argument that a man who bullies students, makes fun of their teeth, or is a 13-year-old boy's biggest fear is also a good man? Many other fans will argue that Snape truly cared about Harry and helped save many lives. I believe that this is the magic of the series. You are able to write in such a way that interpretations vary many ways and people fiercely believe their view of the story was your end game.

You are able to entrance your readers in a world of magic, betrayal, and turmoil. I could feel the pure, raw emotion of Remus Lupin as he found out that his best friend wasn't a killer. I could feel unadulterated fear consume me as the Minister of Magic finds out Voldemort, a cruel man who kills without mercy or remorse, is at large. I could feel the sorrow and misery of the Weasley family when their son disowns them. Your books have made me feel emotions and feelings that I don't feel on a daily basis. I could feel my throat tighten and heart hurt with Harry as I realized Sirius Black wasn't coming back. Your books have a way of entrancing us, almost like magic. I in no way hate reading, but it is rare I find a series of books I can grasp to this tightly and remember so vividly.

Not only did I empathize with these characters, but I learned from them, as well. Your characters

have taught me my strongest values and ideals about life. I cling to the quote Sirius Black said as he remembered his horrid past of classist parents who believed their family was better than others, simply based on their blood status. He said and I quote, "After all, the world isn't split into good people and Death Eaters. We've all got both light and dark inside us. What matters is the part we choose to act on. That's who we really are." He has the strength to admit that, as bad as his family is, they aren't purely evil. People aren't good and bad, we are all a mixture of the two. Another strong quote from the series is spoken by Dumbledore in the third book. He is faced with the problem of dementors, creatures easily interpreted as fear itself, and says this: "Happiness can be found even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light." In the face of fear itself, we must remember to turn on our light. Whether it be a song, a person, or a book about a wizard, we all have something in our life that brings us joy and, well, light. I cling to these two quotes in particular as I live my life.

I can't begin to describe your main character, Harry Potter himself. It still blows my mind how you developed this character so much. You somehow were able to create a character that wasn't perfect, had flaws, and was still lovable and emotional. In the books, Harry didn't make the smartest decision, but he was human. That's the greatest thing about this series. You didn't wave your magic wand and raise the dead. You dismantled the entire idea that the dead can even be raised. You kept the dignity of your dead characters and weren't afraid to kill off important, fan favorite characters. You shocked your readers while keeping your story genuine and magical. Your ability to humanize these dark, animalistic people is possibly the strongest part of this series' Voldemort was always seen as this high and powerful wizard who can and you will torture until you beg for death. When he met his downfall, he didn't disappear into a puff of smoke or dissolve like the witch in the wizard of Oz, He died a human death. He died like all of his victims.

Now that I'm done with the meat and potatoes,

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let's get to the dessert. I don't think I could say that *Harry Potter* changed my life. I didn't change myself by dying my hair a crazy color like Tonks or getting a deathly hallows tattoo. But, I can say that *Harry Potter* changed my outlook on life. *The Philosopher's Stone* taught me that situations can, and will, get better. *The Chamber of Secrets* taught me not to boast about my abilities, no matter how big or small. *The Prisoner of Azkaban* taught me not to look at the easiest answer, but to learn the whole story before acting on my judgement. *The Goblet of Fire* taught me that the media doesn't always show the whole, unbiased story and to do my own research. *The Order of the Phoenix* taught me that we will lose those who we love and it will hurt, but we can get through it. *The Half-Blood Prince* taught me that love will conquer all. *The Deathly Hallows* taught me that good will beat evil, as well as that you may have to abandon life-long friends or partners if your mindsets differ in a way that hurts you or others. This world that you've drawn me into will be in my heart, in the words of James Potter - "until the very end."

Sincerely,  
Haley McKown

(P.S. "There's no need to call me sir, Professor" is still my favorite quote ever written)

**Sara Nelson**  
***Paper Towns* by John Green**  
9th Grade, South Charleston High School  
South Charleston, WV  
Teacher—Sandra Dow

Dear John Green,

Your book has revealed certain values to me that I didn't know I had, and some that I didn't know I wanted to possess. For some authors, a simple story with an intriguing, underlying message, like *Paper Towns*, can be difficult to end up with at the end of the day. I've read quite a few of your books, and all of them have a different message that is vital for living in our bitter society. Out of all of them, however, *Paper Towns* is my favorite. I know that you haven't been anticipating my letter to you, as if my opinion would matter. Well, here I am now, writing this letter to

you, hoping that it won't turn out like all of the other letters I assume you obtain. The words you are about to read will explain all of the feelings I have felt from *Paper Towns*.

From the start of my life, I've had a loving family. Every holiday or family dinner was always filled with love. However, every family has their own problems, no matter what they might reveal. My family problem began when I was in the sixth grade. A family member, who I have chosen to remain anonymous, that was going through all of the harmful and controlling effects of alcoholism can be hard for an eleven year old to understand. I was only getting the snippets of stories, the things that were appropriate for a child of my age. This made it all very confusing. I was confused on what was going on and who I was able to trust and confide in. I resent the feeling I possessed, a feeling of guilt. I was never the greatest child. My family considered me to be very anxious, and as I got older, I began to see it myself. Being this way could make me act out in any situation. I can remember a time that I was finding out more than just a small part of the harsh reality of an alcoholic. I ran down to my basement, threw myself down onto my worn-out couch, and sobbed. Looking back on it now makes me feel like I was down there for hours, pondering my feelings. As of now, I can identify to Margo. Margo was constantly confused on who she could trust, and that's just how I felt.

When I first finished *Paper Towns*, I was in utter awe. I felt like a clock, frozen in time. It really made me sit back and think about myself and those I care for. In this moment, I felt like I took them for granted. I love my sister, Katie. She reminds me of myself in many ways. It's like seeing a smaller version of myself with a few advancements. She tries to impress me, and in these times, I have a choice of acting two distinct ways. One of the ways I can react is going along with the feeble attempt and give into her amusement, or I can act out. Acting out consists of me yelling at her and trying to get her to leave me alone. I get angry with her over harmless things. When all of the things are said and the argument is over, I become bewildered by why I had acted out to my innocent sister. These are the times that I become angry with myself. I am now coming to a realization that she is not the reason I

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become angry, something else had been building up inside of me, or maybe it was my constant worrying. These situations make me realize that we're all only on this earth for a numbered amount of days and we need to do our best to make them count. We need to love those that we have and not wish for more or seemingly better people. In this way, I cannot relate to Margo because she was constantly pushing Quentin away when all he wanted to do was love her unconditionally, when that is all I want from those close to me.

In the book, Margo had left clues behind for Quentin to look for. He had to have all the clues and put them together in order to know where she was. It took him quite a while to understand Margo's thinking, but once he did he couldn't stop. In my eyes, he was a prisoner to an almighty queen, Margo. He lingered on every syllable that left her lips, capturing him and making him wonder. He never gave up, he continued to look for the clues even when all signs pointed towards him being defeated. I want to take this lesson away from Quentin. I want to be able to look deeper into the problems I may come across in this life. The perspective we have can be completely different than what another person may possess. Quentin and Margo had two distinct points of views when it came to how one should live their lives. This story has helped me come to a conclusion, a final ending to all my constant confusion. I want to be able to see and interpret the world from both of their views. I don't want to be subjected to the average thinking. I want to have my own unique mind, something to set me apart from everyone else.

John, your book will forever impact my life and my decisions from now on. You've taught me many wonderful things just within this one book. For one, you've taught me not to trust everyone I come across and to be careful with who I let in. Furthermore, you've taught me to keep those I love close to me, and never let them go. At last, I've learned to be open-minded and to have my own way of thinking. For teaching me all of these wonderful lessons, I thank you, John. I wouldn't have wanted to learn these precious things any differently.

Sincerely,  
Sara Nelson

**Adithi Ramakrishnan**  
*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

by **J.K. Rowling**

11th Grade

*Letter submitted individually*

Dear J.K. Rowling,

Those who shower heaps of praise onto their favorite books often say that they remember exactly where and when they were in their lives when they read the first page. Unfortunately, I am not one of them. But what I do remember, from when I first opened my copy of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, was *who* I was. I was your typical second grade misfit, framed by an oversized pair of blue glasses, buried in a book half the time and buried in a turtleneck sweater the other half. Unlike most children that age, though, I was doing some soul-searching. I did have friends, and I was happy, but there was a very significant something missing: a sense of belonging. I craved this belonging not just in my school, but in my world—where did I fit in?

All of that seemed to change when I flipped over the first page of your book. But what you created in *Harry Potter*, Ms. Rowling, was not a book. It was a universe. And it was *my* universe.

In Harry Potter's adventures, I found not only intrigue and excitement, but also a mirror—a mirror into my own life. The magic and mystery of the Wizarding World captivated me—I spent the next nine years of my life waiting for my Hogwarts letter only to be sorely disappointed, but that's another story—but more so did the strong bonds between the characters. The character that I connected to most was Hermione—hair slightly bushy, large front teeth, and a passion for literature. What struck me most was Hermione's journey—how at first she was scorned by Harry and Ron for her bookishness, made fun of behind closed doors. This, to me, was a reflection of my own fears—that being different, that daring to pursue my own passions, would distance me from friendship and from love. But over time, Harry and Ron realized not only the breadth of Hermione's worth, but the content of her character. In Hermione, they found a friend, and so did I.

## LEVEL 3: HONORABLE MENTION

Hermione's journey towards acceptance from her friends but also herself inspired me to take on this journey in my own life. I ventured out of my comfort zone and made new friends. I hobbled to the bus stop every morning with another of your books nestled in the crook of my elbow as a reminder that it's never wrong to be yourself. Don't get me wrong—Harry's death-defying fight against Voldemort kept me hooked for seven books, and I've researched the Latin roots of almost every spell wielded, but what gives *The Sorcerer's Stone* such a special place in my heart is its message: its message that no matter who you are, or who you were, there is always a place for you—a place you can call home.

It's been nine years since my considerably-shorter and less-self-confident self stumbled upon your book in my public library. But the person I am today is so distinctly different from the person I could have been had I not done so. I didn't just relate to your stories, Ms. Rowling—I became them. I became the shy, baffled boy experiencing a new world and struggling to meet the expectations thrust upon him. I became the goofy, friendly redhead trying to find his way in the wake of his ancestors. I became the well-read, outspoken girl trying to make friends while still maintaining her own sense of self. And most importantly, I became me. I became the sixteen-year-old girl who may not know exactly where she wants to end up, but does know that wherever it is, she can get there, because she is capable. And this is the most important lesson you or anyone else could ever have taught me.

Ms. Rowling, I remember who I was when I first began to read your book. But I also know who I am now. And just like Harry, Ron, and Hermione, in my journey from then to now, I've grown. This growth, from curling into myself to unfurling myself outwards, from waiting for someone to introduce themselves to putting myself out there, was encouraged by me—but it was motivated by you. Thank you for showing me all that I can be.

Sincerely,

Adithi Ramakrishnan

**Corey Shorte**

***Divergent* by Veronica Roth**

9th Grade, South Charleston High School

South Charleston, WV

Teacher—Sandra Dow

Dear Veronica Roth,

Life is precious. This is one of the various ideas you have taught me through your magnificent words in the *Divergent* series. Another important lesson I have gained the understanding of is that one should never take others for granted. You may never know when someone will not have a tomorrow. The most significant lesson you have taught me is how to find my true self. Did or do you ever wonder who you truly are or what you were put on this earth for? So did I. Like Tris, who was the main character in the book, I have gained knowledge about myself through the difficult times in my life, especially now. "Sometimes, the only way to find yourself is to get completely lost", says Kellie Elmore. During these difficult times, I was as shy as a squirrel; therefore, I did not have many friends. This did not help my circumstance whatsoever.

To begin, throughout the time I was reading *Divergent*, I discovered that life is precious. As people died left and right, I began to slowly realize that I must value all life. Since this is also the reality we live in today, I am able to relate this lesson to past issues I have experienced. About 8 years ago, my great grandfather's life was taken away. I was only a child; consequently, I did not fully understand what that meant. I was as innocent as a puppy, not knowing the good from the bad. One day, I requested to go visit him, but my grandmother began to explain to me what had happened. I slowly began to develop a slight understanding of this situation, but not until I was older did I fully understand. I was able to see the pain and agony in my grandparents' faces. Once I had begun to understand the importance of the situation, I was completely distraught. This lesson provided me with a new perspective on life. Value it.

To continue, another crucial lesson I have learned from *Divergent* is to never take others

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for granted. Throughout the story, Tris lost various people that were important in her life. People died as fast as lightning, and sadly, that is our reality today. I have become extremely grateful for the lives of my friends and family, and I attempt to enjoy and cherish every moment I have with them. Unfortunately, it is effortless to bicker and argue with one another; consequently, that takes away moments where we can be loving one another. I have realized that we must move past these arguments and forgive one another. I wish I had learned this lesson before my great grandfather passed away, Death can run up on you in the blink of an eye, so one must enjoy the moments they have with their loved ones. You never know when it can be someone's last day.

Furthermore, the most crucial thing *Divergent* has taught me is how to find my true self. I was as lost as a star in the day, not knowing who I was. As I studied the words and actions of Tris, I had the ability to relate myself to her. Tris was a shy, lonely girl who didn't know who she truly was. During my earlier years of being a teenager, I didn't have the knowledge of who I was either, I did not have many friends and I was awkwardly shy. Throughout middle school, I had met new people who I enjoyed talking to occasionally. Talking with these people had slowly began to build my confidence. Eventually, I became very close friends with these people, just as Tris had begun to make friends in *Divergent*. The book revealed to me that I had to be bold and step out of my comfort zone. Today, I now have numerous friends and we are all extremely close; in fact, I believe that we are all almost as close as brothers. I am exceedingly grateful for my relationships with my friends, and I hope I never lose them.

In conclusion, this book is extremely commendable due to the lessons and overall message that it provides. Throughout the book, I have grasped onto many lessons that are relatable to my own life. I have been taught the value of life. I have also realized that I should never take others for granted. And finally, the most beneficial lesson I have gained the knowledge of is how to find my true self. Your way with words can show the harsh reality that can reach out of the book and make you realize how bad things can really be. If you pay

close attention, you can pull the small lessons out of the book and apply those lessons in your own way. *Divergent* has truly influenced my outlook on my own life. I have become more grateful for others; therefore, our relationships have grown stronger. I am eternally grateful for your ability to write amazing books. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Corey Shorte

**Haley Stephenson**  
***A Bad Goodbye* by Jack Runion**  
9th Grade, South Charleston High School  
South Charleston, WV  
Teacher—Sandra Dow

Dear Mr. Runion,

Suicide is an end, not a beginning. Destroying life intentionally should be foreign to one's nature, I found myself wondering why I was in a dark place, a forlorn place. Why could I not just shake off these feelings? Move on? When I saw the title of your book *A Bad Goodbye*, I was instantly drawn to it. Something inside of me urged me to look closer. Your book made the fog clear, and I better understood that there is a meaning to life, that people need me here, but I never understood why I was in this dark place.

My mind is trapped with dark thoughts, and they will not fade away. Suicide is taking over my mind. I have always been told, "There is a meaning to life." Those words seemed foreign to me; however, I knew they were true. As days passed my thoughts were getting deeper, darker, and stronger. I felt as if my body was taking over and I was meeting my death sentence. So, many people around me tried to snap me out of these thoughts, but it did not work. When I received your book in the mail, *A Bad Goodbye*, I instantly opened the package, but the book sat on my table and I stared at it for a few hours before I actually opened it. When I opened the book up slowly my whole outlook changed. I figured out there is a purpose for one's life.

## LEVEL 3: HONORABLE MENTION

My mind began to think that I am only here for myself, and that nobody needs me. I always thought nobody would miss me if I decided to harm myself. As I began to get deeper into your book tears started streaming down my face. You describe missing your dad several times during your book, and it made me realize all the people that look up to me. The eye opening moment of coming back to the real world was truly amazing. I began to be shocked over my thoughts. Realizing that I needed to be here was a shocking moment, because I never realized how many people need me until you describe missing your dad. You thoroughly describe how you needed your dad after he was gone, and you never realized how much you needed him until he was gone. It is truly eye opening and amazing when you come back to the real world.

Even after reading the book I never fully understood why I had these thoughts. I cannot comprehend the thoughts that I had, because I never thought that they would ever come to suicide. I had many things going on in my life. I felt like I was moved around like a mama cat carries their kittens, So many life changing events, and I began to become in deep depression. I felt as if the deep thoughts were taking over, but I do not think I will ever realize what was going on in my mind. Everything was dark and deep, but now I am in the light.

When I had the urge to read your book, I wanted to die. As I began to dig deep my mind set changed. It seemed as if the world was opening its eyes to me. For once life had a purpose and I realized there is meaning. I just wanted to thank you for writing this book, and it has emotionally impacted me. I hope your book helps many others like it has me. If it was not for your book *A Bad Goodbye*, there is no telling where my mind would be now.

- Haley Stephenson

## LEVEL ONE—NOTABLE MENTIONS

### **Kaidin Lambert**

***The Walking Dead* by Robert Kirkman**

Melrose Elementary School, Princeton, WV

Teacher - Chelsea Gusler

### **Justin Lester**

***The Wish Giver* by Bill Brittain**

Pikeview Middle School, Princeton, WV

Teacher - Brenda Harshbarger

### **Nicolas Frazier**

***Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV

Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Emilea Stephens**

***Serafina and the Black Cloak* by Robert  
Beatty**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

Teacher - Rachel Doss

### **Elexis Spurlock**

***If I Stay* by Gayle Forman**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV

Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Isabella Meade**

***Daniel's Story* by Carol Matas**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV

Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Haleigh Sammons**

***The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John  
Boyne**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

Teacher - Rachel Doss

### **Zander Pinson**

***Out of My Mind* by Sharon M. Draper**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV

Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Marshall Reynolds**

***I Survived the Bombing of Pearl Harbor***

**by Lauren Tarshis**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV

Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Frank Day**

***Warriors: Omen of the Stars #6: The Last  
Hope***

**by Erin Hunter**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV

Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Ashtyn Krueger**

***Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls**

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

Teacher - Olivia Wilton

### **Caroline Damron**

***A Dog's Purpose* by W. Bruce Cameron**

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

Teacher - Rachele Ochoa

### **Adrianna McNeely**

***Sisters* by Raina Telgemeier**

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

Teacher - Rachele Ochoa

### **Allison Perry**

***Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls**

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

Teacher - Sandra Turley

### **Hadlee Berkley**

***A Tale Dark and Grimm* by Adam Gidwitz**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

Teacher - Rachel Doss



## LEVEL TWO—NOTABLE MENTIONS

### **Bella Giovengo**

***Oh, the Places You'll Go!* by Dr. Seuss**

The Linsly School, Wheeling, WV

Teacher - Maggie Allison

### **Kiley Harmon**

***The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank**

Fairmont Catholic School, Fairmount, WV

Teacher - Cynthia Garcia

### **Nora Augenstein**

***Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper**

Parkersburg Catholic High School, Parkersburg, WV

Teacher - Kim DuLaney

### **Denisha Ratcliff**

***I Heart You, You Haunt Me***

**by Lisa Schroeder**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

Teacher - Rachel Doss

### **Haylee Porter**

***Counting by 7's* by Holly Goldberg Sloan**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

Teacher - Rachel Doss

### **Cadie Miller**

***Red Queen* by Victoria Aveyard**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

Teacher - Rachel Doss

### **Emily Justice**

***Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children***

**by Ransom Riggs**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

Teacher - Rachel Doss

### **Tyler Johnson**

***Tears of a Tiger* by Sharon Draper**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

Teacher - Rachel Doss

### **Katie Copley**

***Mystic City* by Theo Lawrence**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

Teacher - Rachel Doss

### **Devesh Shah**

***Michael Vey: The Prisoner of Cell 25***

**by Richard Paul Evans**

The Linsly School, Wheeling, WV

Teacher - Maggie Allison

### **Kobe Hill**

***Through His Eyes* by Tim Tebow**

The Linsly School, Wheeling, WV

Teacher - Maggie Allison

### **Steven Felton**

***Ellen Foster* by Kaye Gibbons**

The Linsly School, Wheeling, WV

Teacher - Maggie Allison

### **Tayler Ewart**

***Tease* by Amanda Maciel**

The Linsly School, Wheeling, WV

Teacher - Maggie Allison

### **Anthony Defazio**

***Ellen Foster* by Kaye Gibbons**

The Linsly School, Wheeling, WV

Teacher - Maggie Allison

### **Charlie Allison**

***Ellen Foster* by Kaye Gibbons**

The Linsly School, Wheeling, WV

Teacher - Maggie Allison

### **Cecelia Fatta**

***Dragon Slippers* by Jessica Day George**

Parkersburg, WV

*Letter submitted individually*

### **Carmela Lilly**

***The Beginning of Everything* by**

**Robyn Schneider**

Fairmont Catholic School, Fairmount, WV

Teacher - Cynthia Garcia

### **Madison Meade**

***Ellen Foster* by Kaye Gibbons**

The Linsly School, Wheeling, WV

Teacher - Maggie Allison

## LEVEL TWO—NOTABLE MENTIONS

### **Edyn Parsons**

***Night* by Elie Wiesel**

Geary Elementary/Middle School, Left Hand, WV  
Teacher - Staci Moore

### **Suraya Boggs**

***Some Friend* by Marie Bradby**

Spencer, WV  
*Letter submitted individually*

### **Ian Sears**

***Outliers: The Story of Success* by  
Malcolm Gladwell**

John Adams Middle School, Charleston, WV  
Teacher - Mary Frances Williams

### **Abigail Fizer**

***To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee**

John Adams Middle School, Charleston, WV  
Teacher - Mary Frances Williams

### **Hannah Driggs**

***A Child Called It* by Dave Pelzer**

John Adams Middle School, Charleston, WV  
Teacher - Mary Frances Williams

### **Tristan Walker**

***Divergent* by Veronica Roth**

John Adams Middle School, Charleston, WV  
Teacher - Bridgette Ward

### **Julie Olsson**

***The Girl Who Was Supposed to Die* by  
April Henry**

Gilmer County High School, Glenville, WV  
Teacher - Michelle Raines

### **Ean Hamric**

***Flashpoint* by Geoff Johns**

Gilmer County High School, Glenville, WV  
Teacher - Michelle Raines

### **Kaitlyn Anderson**

***The Giver* by Lois Lowry**

Gilmer County High School, Glenville, WV  
Teacher - Michelle Raines

### **Sophie Lipscomb**

***Letters from Rifka* by Karen Hesse**

Princeton Middle School, Princeton, WV  
Teacher - Jessica Morgan

### **Emily Young**

***Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes**

John Adams Middle School, Charleston, WV  
Teacher - Mary Frances Williams

### **Nicholas Payne**

***Night* by Elie Wiesel**

Geary Elementary/Middle School, Left Hand, WV  
Teacher - Staci Moore

### **Aidan Smith**

***I Have a Dream* by Martin Luther King Jr.**

Fairmont Catholic School, Fairmount, WV  
Teacher - Cynthia Garcia

### **Lucy Skaff**

***Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelson**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV  
Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Avery Johnson**

***Summer of My German Soldier* by**

**Bette Greene**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV  
Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Gunnell Hickman III**

***Wonder* by R.J. Palacio**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV  
Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Imani Hickman**

***Almost Home* by Joan Bauer**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV  
Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Margaret Ann Gibbs**

***The Polar Express* by Chris Van Allsburg**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV  
Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Rachael Bare**

***When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV  
Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Doria Aractingi**

***Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper**

St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV  
Teacher - Stephanie Hill

## LEVEL TWO—NOTABLE MENTIONS

### **Olivia Allen**

***Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry**  
St. Joseph Catholic Middle School, Huntington, WV  
Teacher - Stephanie Hill

### **Abby Stovall**

***The Fifth Wave* by Rick Yancey**  
Pikeview Middle School, Princeton, WV  
Teacher - Brenda Harshbarger

### **Hannah Jones**

***Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen**  
Pikeview Middle School, Princeton, WV  
Teacher - Brenda Harshbarger

### **Sophia Tomana**

***Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*  
by Ransom Riggs**  
Fairmont Catholic School, Fairmount, WV  
Teacher - Cynthia Garcia

### **Dylan Cline**

***Wonder* by R.J. Palacio**  
Princeton Middle School, Princeton, WV  
Teacher - Jessica Morgan

## LEVEL THREE—NOTABLE MENTIONS

### **Kayden Upton**

***Suicide Notes* by Michael Thomas Ford**  
South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
Teacher - Sandra Dow

### **Zachary Hall**

***The Giver* by Lois Lowry**  
South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
Teacher - Sandra Dow

### **Alaina Allen**

***Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*  
by Ransom Riggs**  
South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
Teacher - Sandra Dow

### **Jared Sykes**

***Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela**  
Greenbrier West High School, Charmco, WV  
Teacher - Juanita Spinks

### **Jacob Elliott**

***Rot and Ruin* by Jonathan Maberry**  
Roane County High School, Spencer, WV  
Teacher - Sati Boggs

### **BreeAnna Rucker**

***First Dance* by Brian Connolly**  
Roane County High School, Spencer, WV  
Teacher - Sati Boggs

### **Alex Holliday**

***Legend* by Marie Lu**  
Roane County High School, Spencer, WV  
Teacher - Sati Boggs

### **Caitlyn Jarvis**

***The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls**  
Roane County High School, Spencer, WV  
Teacher - Sati Boggs

### **Justin West**

***The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton**  
Roane County High School, Spencer, WV  
Teacher - Sati Boggs

### **Lauren Alderson**

***Safe Haven* by Nicholas Sparks**  
Greenbrier West High School, Charmco, WV  
Teacher - Juanita Spinks

### **Madison Sites**

***The Giver* by Lois Lowry**  
Petersburg High School, Petersburg, WV  
Teacher - Kristie Stump

### **Adrianna Waldron**

***The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank**  
Petersburg High School, Petersburg, WV  
Teacher - Kristie Stump

## LEVEL THREE—NOTABLE MENTIONS

### **David Bishop**

***To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee**  
Greenbrier West High School, Charmco, WV  
Teacher - Juanita Spinks

### **Kayli Hughes**

***A Child Called It* by Dave Pelzer**  
Wirt County High School, Elizabeth, WV  
Teacher - April Petrovsky

### **Nia Fernandes**

***Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck**  
Vienna, WV  
*Letter submitted individually*

### **Larissa Tyree**

***Entirely* by Louis MacNeice**  
Woodrow Wilson High School, Beckley, WV  
Teacher - Karen Matson

### **Julia Henry**

***Mad Girl's Love Song* by Sylvia Plath**  
Woodrow Wilson High School, Beckley, WV  
Teacher - Karen Matson

### **Kasey Bowyer**

***The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak**  
Woodrow Wilson High School, Beckley, WV  
Teacher - Karen Matson

### **Katie Frazier**

***What on Earth Am I Here For?***  
**by Rick Warren**  
Wirt County High School, Elizabeth, WV  
Teacher - April Petrovsky

### **Addie Bailey**

***A Thousand Splendid Suns***  
**by Khaled Hosseini**  
Wirt County High School, Elizabeth, WV  
Teacher - April Petrovsky

### **Ally Jones**

***A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey**  
Wirt County High School, Elizabeth, WV  
Teacher - April Petrovsky

### **Lynsey Munday**

***Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children***  
**by Ransom Riggs**  
Wirt County High School, Elizabeth, WV  
Teacher - April Petrovsky

### **Carleigh Abbott**

***We Were Liars* by E. Lockhart**  
South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
Teacher - Sandra Dow

### **Alexis Woodard**

***The Phantom of the Opera* by Gaston Leroux**  
Washington High School, Charles Town, WV  
Teacher - Jason Smith

### **Alyssa Lively**

***Uglies* by Scott Westerfield**  
Ravenswood High School, Ravenswood, WV  
Teacher - Sarah Brown

### **Walker O'Neill**

***Where the Sidewalk Ends* by Shel Silverstein**  
South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
Teacher - Sandra Dow

### **Sydney Holstein**

***Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone***  
**by J.K. Rowling**  
South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
Teacher - Sandra Dow

### **Joshua Maddy**

***Draw Cars* by Doug DuBosque**  
South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
Teacher - Sandra Dow

### **Morgan Sites**

***The First Epistle of Peter* by Peter the Apostle**  
Petersburg High School, Petersburg, WV  
Teacher - Kristie Stump

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# THANK YOU

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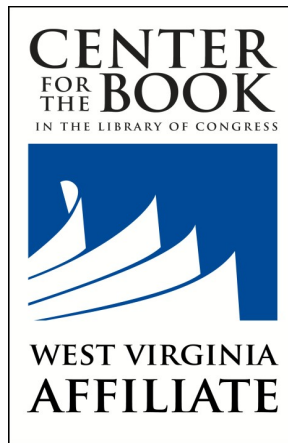
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