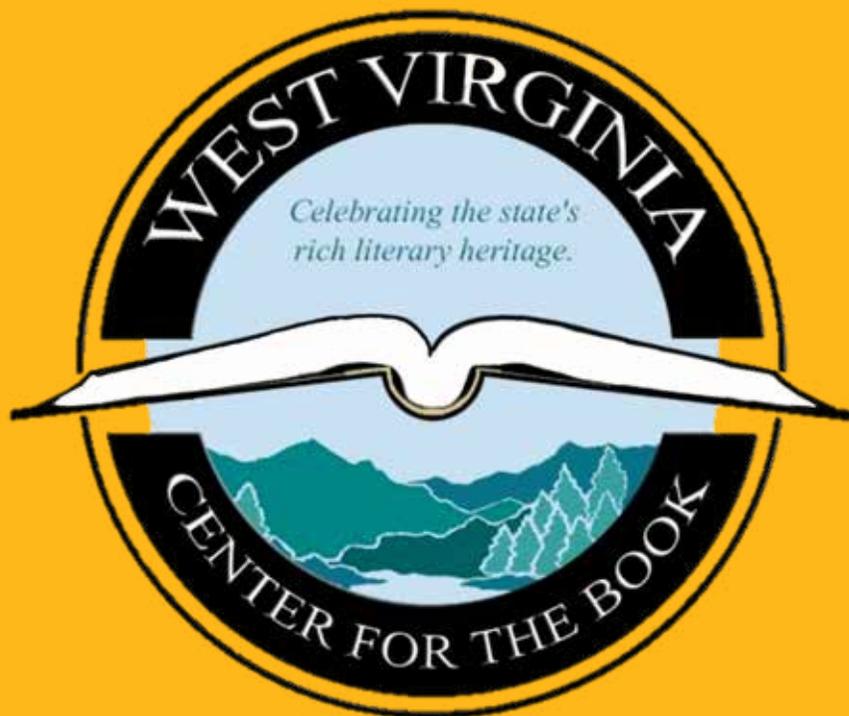


# LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE 2015





# LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

May 2015



**West Virginia Center for the Book  
at the  
West Virginia Library Commission  
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East  
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Charleston, West Virginia 25305  
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# ABOUT LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

**Letters About Literature** is a reading and writing contest for students in grades 4-12. Students are asked to read a book, poem or speech and write to that author (living or dead) about how the book affected them personally. Letters are judged on state and national levels. Tens of thousands of students from across the country enter **Letters About Literature** each year.

Is there a favorite book or poem that changed your life? Why not write to that author and tell him or her just how important it was? **Letters About Literature**, sponsored by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, encourages students to write to authors. Winners receive national recognition. If you are in grades 4-12, you are eligible to enter the **Letters About Literature** reading and writing contest.

Select a fiction or nonfiction book you have read and about which you have strong feelings. Explore those feelings and why you reacted the way you did during or after reading the author's work. Consider these questions when writing your letter: What did the book show you about your world that you never noticed before? What did you realize about yourself as a result of reading this book? Why was this work meaningful to you? How do you know the author's work influenced you? Write a persuasive letter stating your opinion and supporting that opinion with specific details. A letter is less formal than an essay or research paper.

**Write honestly and in your own voice, as if you were having a conversation with the author. Those are the best letters to read, and the most fun to write!**

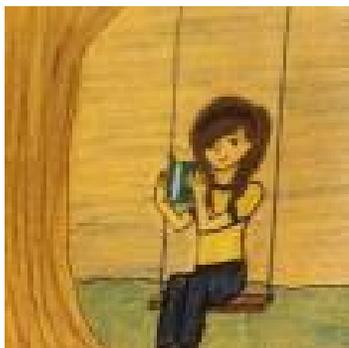
## STATE AND NATIONAL AWARDS

**Letters About Literature** awards prizes on both the state and national levels. The first step in competing is to submit a letter to the National Judges at the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

***This year the letters submitted from West Virginia went through one round of national judging before being sent to the Center for the Book in Charleston. Out of 925 letters, we only received 129 here in Charleston! So every letter we received deserves recognition for this achievement alone.***

Each participating state center has its own panel of judges who select the top letter-writers in the state. Our West Virginia judges chose three winners from each competition level; the Top Honors participant receives a check for \$100 and goes on to the final round of national judging, and the two Honors participants each receive a check for \$50. These cash prizes are generously supplied by the West Virginia Humanities Council. A panel of national judges for the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress will select one National Winner per competition level to receive a \$1,000 cash award. These judges will also select one National Honor winner per competition level to receive a \$200 cash award.

We try, as always, to advance the very best but we also include some letters that simply express honest emotion, or "heart". Keep in mind that this program is intended to motivate and reward reluctant readers and struggling writers as well as those who are enthusiastic readers and polished writers. When submitting letters to the national judges, or reprinting them in this anthology, we are allowed to make minimal edits, such as correcting spelling or punctuation. However, we are not allowed to rewrite passages or correct obvious stumbling or struggling use of language.



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. The order of appearance does not reflect students' scoring. Names are withheld by request, or in the event that documentation permitting the release of a student's name is unavailable.

(Some participants submit their letters in envelopes they decorate. These are two envelopes from the Library of Congress.)



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STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
1900 KANAWHA BOULEVARD, EAST  
CHARLESTON, WV 25305  
(304) 558-2000

EARL RAY TOMBLIN  
GOVERNOR

## GREETINGS FROM GOVERNOR TOMBLIN

As Governor, I welcome you to the West Virginia Culture Center for the 2015 Letters About Literature award ceremony.

This contest is the perfect chance to celebrate the Mountain State's most gifted young writers. I applaud the hard work, determination and tenacity, which bring these extraordinary kids here today.

The written word opens up a whole new world for the youth of today. Books give us the freedom to travel, experience and imagine without limitation. As keys to exotic lands and amazing personalities, books transport us to fascinating places and introduce us to remarkable characters, which we enjoy and from which we can learn.

Let me commend the Library Commission and the West Virginia Center for the Book for making this special competition a reality. It's a wonderful opportunity for Mountain State students, and I'm proud of every participant.

Let me shout out big congratulations to this year's finalists and winners! I have no doubt you will continue to be successful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Earl Ray Tomblin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Earl Ray Tomblin  
Governor



Dear Letters about Literature Writers:

Congratulations to each of you! Thank you for representing West Virginia by participating in Letters about Literature. Your loved ones, teachers, and librarians are very proud of your efforts.

On this occasion, I am reminded of the observation often attributed to C.S. Lewis:

*We read to know we are not alone.*

C.S. Lewis, the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, did not actually say the above. Instead, C.S. Lewis, the *character* in William Nicholson's *Shadowlands* did. But we can all easily imagine C.S. Lewis saying it. Obviously Nicholson could. And like this, we can imagine ourselves as characters in the stories of others. It is this feeling, perhaps, that compelled you to write your Letter about Literature.

Don't let your Letters about Literature experience end today. Share your letter with the author, if possible, through social media. Share it with your local librarian. Give a copy of the book to a friend, a younger sibling, or a stranger. Make a note to yourself to revisit the book in five, ten, or even twenty years. While the words will not change, their meaning will.

Within this anthology you will find letters receiving top honors, honors, and honorable mentions. These letters show exceptional engagement with literature and remarkable reflection on the value of the written word.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the program this year. Thanks to the teachers who promoted it to students. Thanks to the parents and caregivers who instill a love of reading within young people. Thanks most of all to those who shared a small piece of themselves with all of us through these exemplary pieces of writing.

Molly Krichten  
Coordinator, West Virginia Center for the Book

## FEATURED SPEAKER - BIL LEPP



Growing up in a family where it was always the responsibility of the listener to decide whether or not a story was true, Bil Lepp became adept at spinning tales and exaggerating circumstances at an early age. A nationally renowned storyteller and five time champion of the West Virginia Liars' Contest, Bil's outrageous, humorous tall-tales and witty stories have earned the appreciation of listeners of all ages and from all walks of life. Though a champion liar, his stories often contain morsels of truth which shed light on universal themes. Audiences all across the country have been delighted by Bil's mirthful tales and delightful insights into everyday life. Be it a hunting trip, a funeral, or a visit to the dentist, Bil can find the humor in any situation. Lepp explains that while his stories may not be completely true, they are always honest.

As a storyteller, author, and recording artist, Lepp's works have received awards and recognition from The Parents' Choice Foundation, The National Parenting Publications Assoc., and the Public Library Assoc. In 2011, Bil was awarded the National Storytelling Network's Circle of Excellence Award. Lepp has been featured 13 times at the National Storytelling Festival, and performed at major storytelling festivals, at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, and at corporate events and functions across the country. He performed at Comedy Central's Stage on Hudson in Los Angeles, CA.

Bil is the author of three books of tall tales, ten audio collections, a non-fiction book, and a novel. His first children's book, *The King of Little Things*, was published by Peachtree Publishers in the fall of 2013. *The King of Little Things* received a PEN/Steven Kroll Award for Picture Book Writing, Kirkus Starred review, favorable reviews from *The Wall Street Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, *The School Library Journal* and other publications. It also won Gold Parent's Choice Award and is a semi-finalist (we're not done yet!) for the Irma Black Award. Bil lives in Charleston, WV with his wife and two children.

## JUDGES

**Eric Fritzius**

Author  
Lewisburg, WV

**Linda Hedding**

Former Youth Services Director  
South Charleston Public Library  
Dunbar, WV

**Michael Knost**

Author  
Chapmanville, WV

**Terri McDougal**

Head of Children's Services,  
Kanawha County Public Library  
Charleston, WV

**Dr. Sylvia Shurbutt**

Professor of English,  
Shepherd University  
Shepherdstown, WV

**Robin Taylor**

Program Director  
Imagination Library and  
Explore WV Geochallenge  
Charleston, WV

## A NOTE FROM OUR JUDGE, ROBIN TAYLOR

A few years back, I was asked to judge this competition where students wrote letters to authors about how their books had changed their lives. My first thought was, “how can a child’s life ‘be changed’ when they are so young?” And then I received my first packet of letters to judge. Needless to say, I quickly learned how important this competition was and how incredible these students are.

In past years, I would receive a handful of letters, all well-written, but pretty easy to choose the winners. This year, on the other hand, there were 41 letters...WOW! Each of these letters told a different story, and I was amazed at how profoundly some of these books impacted the lives of these students.

I must say, since I am the program director for Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, whose goal is to instill a love of reading in children, that I was overjoyed that many of the letters this year mentioned how the books they read inspired them to be better readers. That is what I call VICTORY! Nothing warms my heart more than to see or hear of children loving to engage themselves in books!

So, to each student who participated, thank you. Thank you for sharing your stories, feelings, and raw emotions with us. I hope you will continue as life-long readers and possibly writers, sharing your talents with everyone you come in contact with.

Robin Taylor

Program Director

Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library

## A NOTE FROM OUR JUDGE, MICHAEL KNOST

As an author, I found judging the entries for Letters About Literature a delight. Getting to see the impact novelists have on young minds was uplifting and eye opening. I found myself in tears on more than one occasion as I—a seemingly eavesdropper—read how these young men and women were able to relate to the authors and/or specific works—many of which, dealing with issues, confusion, pain, and so much more themselves. It gives me hope that my work could possibly mean more to readers than just adventure, escapism, or entertainment.

I was also impressed with the level of talent and intelligence in the letters. I’m not sure what I expected, but erudite thematic observations and inner reflections were certainly not at the top of my list. I was stunned at the ubiquity of these elements throughout. With all that said, the level of quality made the judging process a very difficult one. I am so very proud of each and every entrant.

Bram Stoker Award-winner Michael Knost.

## A NOTE FROM OUR JUDGE, DR. SYLVIA SHURBUTT

I was touched, amazed, impressed, moved by the letters about literature. Not only were they intelligent and well written, but what struck me most was how profoundly some of their lives had been touched by the literature that they had read, in some cases in surprising ways. That a book can have such an important impact on young lives is immensely consoling.

Sylvia Shurbutt

# LEVEL ONE

## Top Honors

**Devlin Daugherty**

**Overbrook Elementary, Charleston, WV**

***Percy Jackson and the Olympians* by Rick Riordan**

Dear Rick Riordan,

I love your writing style and I admire all of your amazing works. I like all of your series like "Heroes of Olympus", "The Kane Chronicles", and I can't wait for your new series "Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard!" But most of all, I love your series "Percy Jackson and the Olympians." I am amazed by the modernization of Greek Myths and the wonderful storyline, but those aren't the only reasons.

When I was small, I would not read, not for the life of me. My parents would try to bribe, force, and beg me to, but nothing worked. It would take the forever to get me to read a simple book like "Dora the Explorer"! Then my dad showed me a movie (Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief) that would change my life forever. After we watched the movie, my dad told me there was a second book, but not a second movie. Intrigued, I read the next book and the next book. I hadn't read many books in general, especially not chapter books like Percy Jackson, so it was a great surprise to my parents when I started reading your books. From that point on I loved to read all kinds of books (especially yours), and in class you would find me finishing my schoolwork as fast as I could just so I could read. Percy Jackson was a gateway to reading for me and when it opened, it never closed.

When I was in first grade (the year I started reading your books) someone burned down my house while I was away on vacation. During that time I was very depressed, and so was my family. Throughout many months I lived at my grandmother's house, then a rental house, and finally a permanent house I still live in today. During the time in my grandmother's house and the rental house I was very sullen, but when I was reading "The Sea of Monsters" for hours on end, I was right there with Percy and his friends at Camp Half-Blood solving problems and fighting monsters. I was so engrossed in their epic adventures, I forgot about my difficulties.

The same thing happened the next winter when I was reading "The Titan's Curse." Aunt the Weasel (my great aunt) had just died, and a different kind of sorrow fell over my family like a heavy blanket. My father got agitated more often and quickly and my mother was less apt to say yes to any of our questions. At these points I would go to my room and read for hours, not a care in the world.

Your books brought light to my life. They taught me to love to read and comforted me during troubling times in my life. Without your books, my life would be different, and not for the better. Ever since I was little I loved to read your books, and I still do. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Devlin Daugherty

## Honors

**Makayla Hilton**

**West Virginia School for the Blind, Romney, WV**

***The Holy Bible* by God**

Dear God,

I know that you didn't physically write *The Bible* but I am so glad that you carried on your word to other people. Thank you for writing this book that has changed my life in so many ways. *The Bible* told me about you. As I know, you are the commander of the world. You made the trees and grass. You made humans and animals; you made all of the living things on this Earth. The Bible taught me about your son Jesus and when he was killed. It was what made me have peace and hope.

You are the one that helped me overcome my fears of being different. I didn't know that I couldn't see like everyone else until I was 7 years old. That didn't stop me from being the girl that I am. You were the one that made me succeed in life and made me independent like my grandma wanted me to be. When I was 8 years old, my grandma died, but I turned to *The Bible* and knew that that she would be with the angels above. She will miss me dearly, but when I think of her passing I remember that she is with Jesus and I turn to my bible to reread the stories that have always given me comfort.

*The Bible* was introduced to me when my vision teacher gave me a book of devotions. They were so descriptive even though they were for kids. I will obey *The Bible* as long as I am on this earth. When I leave this earth I will be with you and still obey *The Bible*. It means everything to me. It goes deep into my heart and is very meaningful to my life.

Love Always,  
Makayla Hilton

## Honors

**Jackson Ward**

**Bluefield Intermediate, Bluefield, WV**

***The Harry Potter Series* by J.K. Rowling**

I have read *The Harry Potter Series* time and time again and I have loved every page. Your books made me feel like I was part of the story. When I was reading your book I forgot about everything around me and didn't worry about tomorrow's math test or what my brother did with my social studies homework, and I focused on the book. During class I would think about what would happen next and every free second I got I chose to read about Harry and his friends.

Your books made me feel like I was really there with Harry at Hogwarts. I was laughing so hard I couldn't breathe one minute and sobbing the next. I had never gotten so attached to a book before. I tried to predict what would happen next but I was very rarely correct. Your books were very immersing and it seemed that I always had one of your books in my hand, and even though my parents told me I needed my sleep I stayed up almost all night reading.

Your books made me realize how lucky I am. I could not imagine how bad it must have been for Harry. His aunt and uncle didn't even care about him and he had practically no friends. His life did change though. From the second Hagrid walked through the door I knew that Harry's life was about to change.

Harry went on an amazing journey that changed him into a different person almost. He went from being a kid who slept under the stairs with family members who didn't care about him to being the most famous wizard in the world. By the end of the story I was a tiny bit different too. I was not as selfish as I was before because I realized that some people had it way worse than I do. Your story made me a better person and taught me an important life lesson.

Your books taught me life lessons, gave me something to do, and gave me books that I will never get tired of. Thank you for making such a great book.

Sincerely,  
Jackson Ward

**Honorable Mention**  
**Sydney Blum**  
**Hurricane Middle, Hurricane, WV**  
***Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson**

Dear Katherine Paterson,

Your book, *Bridge To Terabithia* is my favorite book. It effected me in so many ways. I love how much imagination is put into it. Reading it makes me travel to a new world. Your book isn't an ordinary book where something happens and you're done. I think your book makes people feel that anything is possible, and every possibility begins a new chapter, and that chapter creates new possibilities. Your book has changed me, and I'm sure it has changed more people in life too.

Your book showed me parts of the world that I have never noticed before. It showed me that with a little imagination, I can see things a whole new way. A way that creates life and adventure. Because of your book, the world around me is more exciting and beautiful. Every time I read your book, it takes me to a place where animals play, grass is shiny green and the sky is shimmering blue. Only to realize that the beautiful place, is my own front yard.

Your book did not just help me realize how beautiful the world is. It also helped me realize something about myself. I realized that I am the ruler of myself. No one else. The characters in your book were strong and mighty. They worked as a team and stood up for Terabithia. They were rulers, and didn't let anyone make their choices. Now I take after them. Ever since I read your book and focused on how they stood up to people with no fear, I have become more independent.

Your book is very meaningful to me. It's been with me for as long as I can remember. When I was little I would watch the movie with my babysitter, who I love very much. It was all I ever wanted to watch. When I found out there was a book, I had to read it. As I would read, happy memories fill my mind. Memories of me when I was little and laughing with

my family cheerfully. Whenever I read Your book, those memories fill my mind with wonder and joy. It's like your book is a time machine, traveling me to some of my best memories.

I know your book has influenced me because now I have a bigger imagination and more confidence. Your book taught me that the world isn't a place to hate. It's a place to love if you put some imagination into it. Before I read your book, I had no confidence in myself. After I have read your book I am a lot more confident. Now I don't get down when bad things happen. your book taught me that the ending is the start of a new beginning. All that your book has taught me is an influence of your writing. A good influence.

Your book has changed me, for the better. Now I have a bigger imagination, more confidence and I see the world differently. Your book has showed me so many things. Now I am an independent young girl with a big heart. All thanks to *Bridge To Terabithia*.

Sincerely,  
Sydney Blum

**Honorable Mention**  
**Erica Edinger**  
**Woodsdale Elementary, Wheeling, WV**  
***The Works of Raina Telgemeier* by Raina Telgemeier**

Dear Mrs. Raina Telgemeier,

Your books mean so much to me, especially *Smile*. I had braces when I was 8 and 9, and it was awesome to know there's someone who doesn't think like an orthodontist. I experienced pain when I first got my braces. And impressions are just as terrible as your experience in the book. I read your book while I had braces. It really helped me get through that period of time.

Another **major, major** plus about your book is that they are graphic novels. I love graphic **anything**. Your book *Sisters* also means a lot because I, too have a younger sister. We are close in age, so we are often mistaken for twins. Ugh. We fight, but not all the time. She also likes your books. After reading your book *Drama*. I laughed out loud at the funny characters. My favorite character in that book was probably Liz, Callie's best friend. She was always there for Callie when she needed her. Your turning of the classic series *The Babysitters' Club* was a pure genius idea.

Whenever I go to the library, I scour the new books for your work. I try to find every last book you ever wrote, and after I do, I read them. So far I have read *Smile*, *Drama*, *The Babysitters' Club: Christy's Idea* and *Sisters*. My personal favorite was *Smile*. I feel sorry that you had to go through so much when you knocked out your teeth. The closest I ever got to having surgery on my mouth was when I had a laser treatment on my gum to expose an adult tooth.

I first read your book *Drama* after I finished my work in class and a friend let me borrow it. I was completely absorbed. It was my first experience to your work. Sadly, I only finished part of it. I was intrigued. Soon after, I found your book *Smile* at my local library. I read at least 4 times in two weeks that I had it for. My sister and I check it out almost

every month.

After my sister and I discovered the graphic novel section of your library, I scouted out your variation of *The Babysitters' Club*. I indulged it. I bought *Sisters* at my schools book order. It was worth every penny of \$8.50. You can hook a reader from the first panel to the last. You have such a great ability to recap your childhood and turn it into a vivid story. After I start your books, I cannot put it down unless I am forced to. That day when I found your book *Drama* in third grade I was introduced into a whole new world of reading. You are absolutely, positively, and with no doubt my favorite author ever. Every single word is an inspiration to me. I admire your style of drawing. You are so talented and gifted!

Your absolute fan,  
Erica Edinger

**Honorable Mention**

**Grace Landini**

**Wheeling Country Day School, Wheeling, WV**

***The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein**

Dear Shel Silverstein,

I probably worry too much about what people think of me. I care whether people like me or not. I certainly don't like making people upset. My mom thinks I worry too much' She says it will side track me from the things that are really important in life. We talk about the fact that this worry can distract me from something great that could be right in front of my face and yet I miss it...entirely.

Your book is about a tree who gives a boy an apple, but it's really about one person asking too much of another. The boy treats the tree like it owes him something. He asks for more and more and more. Eventually, the tree gets cut down and is nothing but a stump. Finally, the boy as an old man goes to the tree and sits. At that point sitting is all he needs.

It reminds me that people can ask too much of me. I don't have to be the person that everyone likes. I just have to be me. I can give to others as long as it is not changing who I am.

Yes the tree changes into a stump, but it is still the same. It gives whatever the boy thinks he needs. The old man realizes he didn't need all the things he thought he did. All he needed was to sit and rest by the tree. The same way the book started.

Maybe if I stay true to myself other people will like me as I am. I am me (even if that includes a little bit of worrying from time to time).

Grace Landini

**Honorable Mention**

**Name withheld by request**

**Melrose Elementary, Princeton, WV**

***The Harry Potter Series* by J.K. Rowling**

Dear J. K. Rowling,

My name is name is Sophie and I absolutely love your book series, *Harry Potter*. Your books are very well written and you always paint the picture. When I am reading *Harry Potter*, I am always so indulged.

You see, books have not always been easy for me to get absorbed in. Don't get me wrong, I am a wonderful reader, but it is hard to find a book that is interesting to me. That is another reason I like your books so much, they keep my attention while also challenging me.

I never thought a book could transport me to a different world. Out of all the characters I think my favorites have to be Fred and George. I love how what they do is never predictable. It is amazing to me that a book can make me show so much emotion. when Dumbledore died I wanted to say, "come on snape, you're better than that!" I was so upset! That's when I have to remind myself that it's just a book. The fact that anything can happen in the wizarding world makes the book more fun for me to read because life in our world can sometimes be boring. Since I have read and know about your books I have the right to call myself a *Potterhead*, which I like a lot.

To me *Harry Potter* is not just a book it is something I can think about when I go to bed and something I can have a decent conversation with my brother about. Even my parents are getting into it! I'm so glad you wrote these books because when you created them you also gave birth to a happy place for me and many others. So on behalf of all *Harry Potter* fans everywhere, I would like to say thank you very much.

Your devoted fan,  
Name withheld by request

**Honorable Mention**

**Maddison Lowery**

**Hurricane Middle, Hurricane, WV**

***Fruits Basket* by Natsuki Takaya**

Dear Natsuki Takaya,

Your series, *Fruits Basket*, affected me in a lot of ways. It made a difference in how I see my problems. I began to see the world and the people around me differently because of this series. This series made me begin to see myself differently as well. After I read *Fruits Basket*, my life changed.

*Fruits Basket* made me see my problems in a new light. Before I read this book series, if someone made me angry, I most likely would have yelled at them. Now that I have read this book series, I would take what made me angry in a nice way. Because of this, I am normally happier in my daily life. Before reading this series, I would take everything anyone said negatively, and I would have problems with everyone. Now, I try to take things in a positive way, so I have fewer problems. Because of this book, the way I see and solve my problems have taken a turn for the better.

Because of *Fruits Basket*, I now see the world and the people around me differently. I have realized a lot of people in this world have been sad for small things like forgetting their homework, having homework, their plans being canceled, or being forced to do chores. Both of Tohru Honda's parents passed away, and she barely got upset. I have also noticed that so many people judge people because of how they look, where they are from, what they wear, and so many other things. Judging people because of these things is stupid. Tohru met people who turned into animals and still only saw what was on the inside. I now see the world in a clearer way after reading this book series.

*Fruits Basket* made me see myself and my actions in a new way as well. I started getting to know people before I judge them because it is what is on the inside that matters. Because of this book series, I have begun to smile more and more each day. When people are mean to me, I just show them a little kindness because sometimes that all it takes to make someone kinder. I have also been working harder in school because of this series.

After reading *Fruits Basket*, my life has changed in many ways. How I look at my problems has changed. The series made me see the world and the people around me differently. This series made me see myself in a new way as well. Thank you for writing such a great series!

Sincerely,  
Maddison Lowery

**Honorable Mention**  
**Name withheld by request**  
**Hurricane Middle, Hurricane, WV**  
**Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbit**

Dear Natalie Babbit,

I used to fear death. No, I didn't exactly fear it. I guess I just thought that the human life span was not long enough. However, your book, *Tuck Everlasting* made me think about some things a bit differently.

Obviously, I hate death. I hate it. I mean, doesn't everyone? But would I rather live for all of eternity? At first it doesn't sound so bad. If I were the Tucks, I could simply drink from the spring, and I could live forever. But then, there were the terrible struggles that the Tucks went through. They were not able to have friends or a partner, because they would soon find out about the Tuck Family's secret. But at the same time, how can you do everything you wanted to in less than one-hundred years?

I have made many decisions in my almost twelve years. Winnie did the same. The Tucks wanted her to stay with them, but she had to do what was best for her not what anyone else wanted. I go through a lot of peer pressure. My friends sometimes do the wrong things, and they want me to follow along with their evil schemes. I have to do what is right. I have even lost a friend or two this way. It has become very difficult to say no.

Your excellent book made me feel very many things. It made me value life and friendship. It made me basically

just let things go the way they do. This may sound very cliché, but I will say it anyway. I believe that everything happens for a reason, and if you don't try to fight reality, everything will later fall into place just as it should. I highly congratulate you, Natalie. You taught me a lesson that I use every single day. You taught me to live everyday like it's my last.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
*Name withheld by request*

**Honorable Mention**  
**Madison Pack**  
**Overbrook Elementary, Charleston, WV**  
**The Magic Treehouse Series by Mary Pope Osborne**

I love *The Magic Tree House* books. I like how the characters travel all over the world in a tree house and learn new things around the world! When I get older I want to travel around the world.

My favorite book is when they travel to Paris. The name of the book is called *Night of The New Magicians*. I think the creative part is when the bird lets them know that it is time for another mission. Jack and Annie's journeys are amazing! Jack and Annie are two characters in the book.

I use to read a small amount of books in the second grade. In the third grade I read books like crazy! I use to not like reading, but these books inspired me to read more and now I love to read!

When I have something I don't like thinking about, I read a book. I go to a quiet room or place then I start reading the *Magic Tree House* books. When they travel, which is the interesting part, I imagine I'm with them and that makes me forget about the stress and the bad thoughts!

Often I wish I had a magical tree house similar to Jack and Annie's. When you read about a certain place or read a cover of a book, it will take you there. My brother, Owen, and I would solve the problems in the stories. *The Magic Tree House* books have brought good luck for me when I didn't like to read. I chose this book and author because they have inspired me to read and travel around the world and also learn new things! These books have helped me love to read!

Sincerely,  
The 5th grader Madison Pack!

**Honorable Mention**  
**Name withheld by request**  
**Hurricane Middle, Hurricane, WV**  
**The Fault in Our Stars by John Green**

Dear Mr. John Green,

I recently read your book *The Fault in our Stars*. It changed my feelings about death. I have only experienced one death in my life. My great-grandmother lived to be ninety-two, but she passed away in July. Before reading your book, I thought death mostly happened to the elderly. This story gave me some inspiration about living life to the fullest. I

am now inspired to do new things even if I'm scared.

I discovered cancer can affect any age. In your book the characters are not much older than me. I also learned bad outcomes related to cancer such as loss of hair, loss of limbs, sickness, depression, and loss of weight. Augustus hated treatment but he wanted to do anything that could maybe help him live longer. Augustus was brave for continuing something that was hard. I am brave when I try something new.

It was sad when Augustus died. Hazel was grieving for Augustus, and wanted to kill herself. I was very sad over the summer when my great-grandmother died. I learned death happens, and it can affect any age. My great-grandmother's death taught me to deal with my feelings. I am very grateful for the time I had with her.

The most important part of this book was the message to live life to the fullest. Hazel and Augustus learned time is precious, and you should spend it with those you love. I want to spend my time with my family and friends. On the weekends and holidays, I make time I make time to make sure my family and friends know I love them. I sometimes don't want to go to church like Hazel doesn't want to go to support group.

I learned that cancer is not only a disease of older people. It does not choose based on race, age, gender, or ethnicity. You can have cancer but it does not ruin your life. I see many people with cancer loving their life, but it makes me sad to see the ones that don't.

I know now not to wish my life away because it doesn't stay forever. I think all people cancer or not should live their life to the fullest. Your book taught me to be happy no matter what conditions.

Sincerely yours,  
*Name withheld by request*

**Honorable Mention**  
**Madison Riddle**  
**Robert L. Bland Middle School, Weston, WV**  
***This Star Won't Go Out* by Esther Earl**

Dear Esther Earl,

"Death is not the final word, but a new adventure." That is what I think of when I am about to do something crazy. When I got the call that my dog had died, I didn't cry. I thought, "Maybe she will be happier in dog heaven", but then I came across *This Star Won't Go Out* in my school library.

After reading *This Star Won't Go Out*, I saw life differently. No matter what you think is going to happen, it doesn't matter because God has a plan for you. You may not know what it is, but He does. Even though Esther Earl died in 2010 at age 16, she is still living in all of the people's hearts that she touched after they read this book, including mine. She also changed the people around her and told them, "I do hope when the day comes, whether in 1, 10, or 100 years, I don't want you to think of me and be sad." Esther's doctor knew she was going to die, but that does not mean that Esther could not live until that time.

*The Fault in Our Stars* was inspired by Esther. John Green was Esther's friend; they met at a *Harry Potter* convention. That is why he wrote the introduction of *This Star Won't Go Out* on the back of Esther's book. She quoted, "Just be happy, and if you can't be happy, do things that make you happy. Or do nothing with the people that make you happy." That is so true because love and happiness is the best medicine. Even though it may not save your family's life, it might make it better, and that is exactly what I learned from this book. Live life, and just be happy.

Sincerely,  
Madison, Grade 6

## Top Honors

Name withheld by request

Harpers Ferry Middle, Harpers Ferry, WV  
*A Child Called It* by Dave Pelzer

Dear Mr. Dave Pelzer,

Greetings! My name is [name withheld] and I am an eighth grade student at Harpers Ferry Middle School. Your book *A Child Called It*, is an inspirational work of literature that has touched my life in so many ways. It has not only changed me as a person, but it has taught me valuable life lessons that I will carry with me into adulthood.

I always thought of abuse in the physical sense, such as hitting and kicking. I always assumed that once someone who was being abused got out of their home, or away from their abuser, they were safe. After reading your book I realized that while the physical bruises may heal, the emotional scars are always with you. You opened my eyes to the evils we have to face, both as a society and as an individual.

I have always felt blessed to grow up in a very supportive and connected family that cares about each other. However, it wasn't until I read your book that I realized how truly lucky I am to have parents who love me unconditionally and want me to have a happy, healthy life. I realized that I need to show my gratitude and appreciation of how lucky I am on a more regular basis, and never take for granted the opportunities, love and support that I am given.

The courage you displayed in telling your difficult story taught me the value in being honest, even when you may be scared. While I found myself crying with you as you described the numerous hardships and abuse that you faced, I also celebrated the fact that you were able to escape your difficult situation and used something so horrific to inspire others.

I always knew that I wanted to pursue a career that helped others, but after reading your book, I feel a strong and sincere desire to become a Social Worker and help children in the same situation that you faced find their voice and their happy ending. Thank you so much for inviting me and so many others into such a painful part of your life and for telling your story. You are a true hero, and I will never forget you.

Sincerely,

Name withheld by request

## Honors

Alexis Bragg

George Washington Middle, Eleanor, WV  
*The Smoke* by Alysia Chendemi

Dear Alysia Chendemi,

Forgetting someone is such a silly concept, due to the fact that once you've developed memories with another human being, it's not as simplistic as to just forget what you've said or done. Removing all thoughts and feelings within a second is near to impossible. People are going to cause you pain and sorrow. They will leave you and act as if you have no past because it's just in our nature. That's simply what we, as beings, do. We make mistakes, steal hearts, commit crimes, hurt, and a plethora of other things. You can't blame people for doing what you've once done, or potentially will seem to do. You have to live and accept the fact that disappointment is an unavoidable section of life, just as is happiness. Those are just a smidge of things that your poem *The Smoke* has taught me, and I would like to express to you just how much a small poem of yours has completely and utterly changed my mindset and the way I view our society as a whole.

When I was younger, I would often ask my grandmother, whom I lived with, questions much different than the average child. I would question flowers, and why they develop in the way that they do. The same applied with humans. I was a very curious little girl. I had a best friend, also. He was my great uncle who lived with us because of recent health issues. He had been in a car wreck that caused the entire bottom half of his body, waist to toes, to be paralyzed. This meant he was always in a wheelchair, and this made him a very sad man. Of course at that age, I didn't understand why he wasn't able to walk like everyone else. It always depressed him when I asked about his legs, so I chose not to speak of it often, though it left me very curious. One day I woke up from a beautiful dream that I still remember to this day. We always shared our dreams with each other, so I ran downstairs to his bedroom to tell him, but I didn't see him. I yelled his name but he never responded, all I saw was my grandmother crying. He wasn't joking when he would tell me he was sad, it just never hit me that he would do that. He had committed suicide that previous night after he tucked me into bed. The loss of my best friend is what truly drew me to this wonderful piece of poetry. As the unnamed girl in your poem lost her love somewhere in the smoke, I lost mine in the haze of my dreams. The relation was uncanny.

As I read in *The Smoke*, all she craved was immediate affection, from a man who wasn't willing to give so. He desired opaque smoke to hide himself from her. He did not want

her to witness such sorrow in a man. I connected with her, as my uncle connected with him. I simply wanted to break everything to the core, so no confusion existed, yet all he ensured was that I would not get involved with mourning emotions. The man left her without a word said; as did he with me. She felt as if her world was crumbling all around her, as that is perhaps the foulest way to leave someone. It took time for me to understand the ending of your poem, though. Now I correctly comprehend it. She was fine in the end. That always seemed to confuse me, up until now. Sometimes there are negative things in your life, and as much as you long for them to stay, they're only bringing you negativity into your life, which is not healthy. You may never let go of all the mental images, and beautiful words they had spoken to you, but you cannot try to keep someone in your life if they do not want to be there. I understand now, because I am the negativity. Thank you for your beautifully written contribution to literature.

Yours Truly,  
Lexi Bragg

#### **Honors**

**Olivia Dowler**

**Weir Middle, Weirton, WV**

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

Dear John Green,

I believe that every book changes you in some way, whether it is the way you think, the way you see yourself, the way you see other people, or the way you see the world. If a book cannot change you in some way, it has failed at being a book. Your book, *The Fault in Our Stars*, has obviously succeeded in this manner.

This book has given me a different way of seeing the world. Before I had always been worried that I would not be remembered, and that thought terrified me. Through the words of Hazel Grace, you told me, "There won't be anyone left to remember Aristotle and Cleopatra, let alone you." With the beautiful telling of Gus and Hazel's story, you showed me that it really does not matter if you are remembered or not. If you are happy in your life, loved someone, and received love then having everyone keeping you in mind should not matter.

Mr. Green, I had always thought that if you were sick, you were different. Obviously that is not the case. With the showing of Augustus and Hazel's several treatments and procedures being minor details of their lives overall, you made me understand that just because you are sick does not mean you cannot live a relatively normal life. Looking at your whole life overall, you should not be thought of as your illness, but as the person that you are.

You inspired me to become an author. Your choices of words are brilliant, and make the story even more enjoyable. As I read these words, I realized that I could convert my ideas and thoughts into words and communicate them to the world. It seems that my words make more sense on paper rather than floating on the air.

I chose you, instead of any other author, because I feel as though I can relate to the emotions and the characters. I had read your book when it first came out and thought that I understood it. A few months later, a close friend of mine was diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor. I read it again. It seems to be that you do not truly understand some things until you experience them. Also, I strongly relate to Augustus Waters in the sense that I fear oblivion. This may be irrational, but I am afraid of this world ending and taking all life as we know with it. Thank you for making me see that it does not matter how many hours you are given in life. It matters what you do with them.

Sincerely,  
Olivia Dowler

#### **Honorable mention**

**Alexis Coleman**

**George Washington Middle, Eleanor, WV**

***When Tomorrow Starts Without Me* by David Romaro**

Dear David Romaro,

September 26, 2014 my sweet Papa died of heart failure. I was at school when he went into cardiac arrest. He was a really big part of my life. I was crying my eyes out one day when I was scrolling on a site and saw your poem *When Tomorrow Starts Without Me*. It made me realize that he did love me with all his delicate heart. I'm very sorry about your wife. I understand that she meant a lot to you just like my papa. I didn't quite realize what it felt like to have someone important to you die and be gone; it doesn't feel real. Your poem showed me that I don't need to shed a single tear because my papa is in a better place with our Savior Jesus Christ and he is in no more pain, no heart break, sorrow, or struggles. your poem showed me that just because my papa is gone don't mean he isn't still with me. He is still with me in my heart.

Sometimes I'll still think about my papa and wonder why he had to leave, and then I realize that things happen for a reason. Before I read your poem I thought that my papa was missing us and wanting to come back, but he was actually in Paradise! Your poem showed me that he is with God, and he doesn't have to stay down here in this violent world with cruel people. He was a nice man, and I know he doesn't want me to cry for him. Your poem showed me that I should value every minute, second, day, and hour with the people I love because we only live once, and when it's over, it will hit you like a bullet straight through your

heart. This poem made me realize that our loved ones don't want us to forget about them. I used to not let him kiss my cheek when I saw him, but now I am tortured by the fact that I can't ever kiss or hug him again. Everyone dies, and when they do you feel guilty, and you grieve about it for the rest of your life.

Just like in your poem it says I wish you wouldn't cry for the things that we didn't say. I wish that I would have clung to him like glue and would have told him how much I love him all the time or how much I miss his tender smile now. Even though it hurt the way it ended up, I would do it all again. I would go through his whole life with me again, except I would love and care for him more than I ever have. My papa is gone now, but I still don't believe it. It went by too quickly! Like your poem it says that he will walk through the pearly gates and see God's sweet face. I'm very glad he is up there with God and the angels in a land of no hurt or pain.

When I first read your poem it filled my heart with thoughts of joy and comfort. It made me feel like my papa was still with me, and that is very comforting to me. My papa was 75 when he died of heart failure. When my mom texted me about it I cried and almost ran out of the school because I wanted to see him before he died. When I got home that night he died in the hospital at 2:34 A.M. I held his hand by his bed and sang songs to him till his very last breath. Just like in the poem, ty papa barged into those pearly gates and was free from all pain and suffering.

Your poem inspired me to be glad for my papa instead of sorry. Before I read your poem, I didn't quite understand how happy and glad they would be to finally see paradise and destiny just up ahead. Because of your poem I found delight and comfort and I thank you for that. I wasn't doing well with the whole situation until I read that poem. My papa Coleman was a Pastor of an Apostolic Church, and he did very well. Your poem let me know he was always going to be with me, right in my heart. I miss him desperately and wish I could see him one last time. There are things we never got to say and things we never got to do. He rescued me from things that the normal everyday life people don't go through. He gave me food, water, shelter, and most of all love. Your poem was very heart touching and had a lot of sympathy towards whoever it was for, and I completely love it because for people like me, who have lost a loved one, it is very comforting to them and their families.

Sincerely,  
Alexis Coleman

#### **Honorable Mention**

**Sidney Gandee**

**Edison Middle, Parkersburg, WV**

***Teardrop* by Lauren Kate**

Dear Lauren Kate,

Your exquisite writing in your book, *Teardrop*, has changed my point of view on the life we live. I never realized how quickly our lives could change in one minute, everything whisked away by one move. Eureka, the main character in your book, knew this all too well. She went through the denial, the shock, the grieving and her terrible thoughts when her mom died in the car accident. Her life was completely turned upside down, probably like many people we pass in the hallway or on the sidewalk, but we would never know what they are going through. We would never know because they hide their pain with a smile.

I went through what Eureka went through when my grandma passed away. Your extraordinary writing helped me through my rough patch in my life because I could relate to the story. Your book taught me that even though we could be going through the most heart wrenching pain of losing our loved ones, we need to continue to look back on the happy moments we shared with them. It also taught me that I need to open my eyes to other people's feelings too.

Eureka was always so concerned about keeping other people safe and not hurt; she didn't take care of herself. Last year, I didn't take other people's feelings under consideration when I did something. I did it to make myself happy, and never thought of others. This year, since reading *Teardrop*, I have opened my eyes to other people's feelings. I watch out for other people more than I use to, so they don't get hurt. If I do know people are hurting, I try to be there to comfort them because sometimes that is all we really need. You are my favorite author, and I cannot wait to read more of your books.

Sincerely,  
Sidney Gandee

#### **Honorable Mention**

**Shawna Lockard**

**Crum Middle, Crum, WV**

***Evil Genius* by Catherine Jinks**

Dear Catherine Jinks,

To begin with, it seems so long ago that I was carelessly strolling through the familiar aisles of my local bookstore the dull summer before the last. Back then, I was but a shy, fretful overachiever obsessed with impressing others with my extended knowledge. Just as I was about to surrender my disappointing quest for an interesting novel, your book, *Evil Genius*, caught my eye. It contained an

attracting, almost daring aura with its clichéd title countering the undoubtedly unique description. Before I could even comprehend my actions, the intriguing book was carefully tucked securely in my arm; receipt in hand. To be completely honest, I had quite a few doubts as to whether or not purchasing the product was a sensible decision. However, as the moral of your story suggests, looks can be dreadfully deceiving, just as my run-in with the popular kids proved.

At this time, to me, the 'popular group' was simply perfect. Every member smiled easily, the elegant curls in their hair identical, their reactions to most everything eerily predictable. Even their hearts beat to the same drum. Gorgeous make-up defined their already angelic features, giving them an unnerving resemblance to Barbie dolls: pure, simple perfection. However, it was too late for me when I realized that every seemingly remarkable thing had a long, sinister shadow tagging along.

Regretfully, it didn't take long at all for me to be swept away into endless suffocating abyss of rumors, curling irons, hair spray, nail, designer clothing, and anything else you could imagine sixth grade girls being drawn towards. Like Cadel, I seemed to become a mindless clone. On second thoughts, I believe I was more of a mannequin: their tool control, dress, program, and design. I shamelessly allowed myself to be instructed what to wear, how to act, how to treat certain stereotypes, what to excel in, and who to hang out with. In my clouded mind, I was gaining a whole new universe; a foreign, yet greatly accepted, lifestyle. I was becoming what many would describe as a scripted shell. However, despite my plentiful attempts to embrace this new me, some miniscule part of the old me strived in the rear of my psyche, doing everything within its power to alter my treacherous new ways. This part, though it seemed troublesome and annoying to me at the time, is the ladder that allowed me to escape the dark well of popularity, your book being the mighty bolts that fastened the object to the surface of freedom.

It was then in this dark time in my life that I began to read your book. It utterly shocked me with the similarities Cadel and I possessed. He was affiliated with the wrong crowd and it negatively affected his life for years to come, even after separating. I read on, dumbfounded and gobsmacked at the resemblance of our lives. As the book continued, it explained that Cadel met friends that helped him realize that what he was doing was wrong. I hadn't a person like that, or more so, I hadn't a person like that anymore. I unconsciously had driven a steel wedge in between my former friends and me.

In this short hour, I realized something crucial: If my life so strongly resembled Cadel's, then why should his resolution differ from my own? If the things I was doing were driving barriers between my long term friends and I, were they really righteous? I went to school the next day with new,

evaluating eyes. For the first time, I really gave careful consideration to my actions; not just my peer's opinions on my actions. What I concluded left me stupefied. The 'popular group', who I once believed was the universal role model, wasn't actually that admired at all. From the corner of my eye, I caught countless disapproving glares, disgraceful gestures, inimical references, and so much more. Also, I realized that no one in my league actually liked one another. They were like spies making subtle attacks on one another from the shadows of lies. Yet all of this negativity was masked by smiling faces. Stinging pricks of light pain stung my eyes as the tears soiled my vision. The unofficial position that had boosted my ego so much was destroying me piece by piece, strand by strand.

It took only a short week for me to begin to feel emotionally ill towards the people I once called my friends. However, I felt most disappointed towards myself. How could I have been so naive? By then I had completed your book. Likewise, by this time, I had realized what was to be done. I had to follow Cadel's example; I had to break away from it all and fix my mistakes. And that is just what I did.

As my life story unfolds, I gathered that I was right in concluding that I had driven a heavy burden between my friends and I; albeit, I was mistaken in believing that the bridges I weakened were unrepairable. My true friends never turned away or gave up on me; they were just waiting for me to finally come to my senses.

Now, with me being in the seventh grade, I have a clear outlook on life. I know my true friends and admit that what I had done was unjust. I am forever thankful for your book guiding me in the right direction. It, along with other incidents, caused me to realize that everything may not be what it seems. Had it not been for your lifesaving work, who knows where I could be now?

Forever Thankful,  
Shawna N. Lockard

#### **Honorable Mention**

**Jacob Mollette**

**Crum Middle, Crum, WV**

**Coach Carter by Jasmine Jones**

Dear Jasmine Jones,

Your book, *Coach Carter*, is one of the most astounding books I have ever read. When I finished your book, my life changed more than you will ever know. Your book has taught me about so many things like discipline, using manners, teamwork, confidence, and the importance of school. It has also been very entertaining. Ever since I closed the last page of your book, my life has been significantly different. My manners and disciplinary status have been superior. I've been doing nice things for people and helping

them in every way I can. My school-work has improved because you taught me that school is important. I have tried harder and my grades have grown from D's and C's to B's and A's. I play on a basketball team and we have gotten better at working with each other.

Not long after I read your book, my life has went from being the malicious kid of the group to being that kid everyone wishes to be around. I have been helping out around the household by doing chores and washing the car. My mom and dad used to get on to me about not helping out. Now, my mom and dad reward me if I do good things. I'm so glad I found this manuscript because I probably would have grown up and went to prison, but your book showed me that if you put your mind to it, you can do anything you want to do. I never knew I could take me life, and turn it around.

Near the end of your book, I began to understand the importance of my education. Not only did your book, *Coach Carter*, teach me about discipline, it educated me that school is very important and it can change your life forever. Instead of growing up and living in a box, you can go to school and grow up to be a surgeon or a lawyer and you can have a gigantic house or a lovely car. I want to be that person that grows up, has a nice career, and can look back into the past and say, "I am so glad I read that book.". This book has made me a better person.

In your book, you show us that if a team becomes your family, you cannot be stopped. Before I read your book, my basketball team was unsuccessful for about three years. I taught my team what you taught me. I told them that if we work together, there would be nobody that could bring us down, and even if they did, we would walk off that floor knowing that we lost, but also knowing we lost as a family. Ever since that speech, my team has improved vastly. We went from a 0-14 season to an 8-6 season, and if you can't tell by those numbers, we have gotten better. This season coming up, I plan on winning the state championship, and if we do, I will give all the credit to your book.

As a reader of your book, I've realized that if you put your mind to it you can achieve anything. This is a little something called confidence. For example, I used to be afraid of rollercoasters. After I read about confidence in your book, I started thinking. Do I want to be afraid of rollercoasters my whole life? No I don't, so the next amusement park I went to, I went straight for the rollercoaster. At first, I was scared, but I knew I had to do it. I got on and before you know it, I'm screaming, "Woohoo!!", all the way down. Thanks to your book, I love rollercoasters now.

Now that I've talked about all the discipline and important aspects, I want to talk about the entertaining parts of your book. I love the parts when the kids are in a basketball game and it is

neck and neck. You don't know who will win, the Richmond Oilers, or the other team. Richmond wins every game until the last one. It teaches the reader that just because you lose, doesn't mean you really lost. It teaches us a very important life lesson, and that is as good as it gets. I know you mean to teach us all kinds of different things about life, but sometimes people just need to laugh a little, and that's exactly what you did.

In conclusion, I'm going to recap all the things I've talked to you about. Ultimately, your book taught me how to become a better person, also known as discipline, the importance of school, confidence, and teamwork. If I would have seen this book long ago, I would be significantly different than I am now. To wrap up the story, I talked about the entertaining parts of your story. Not only was this story teaching us readers about life lessons, it showed us the entertaining side of the story. I just want to say thank you for writing this story. You have truly made me a better person.

Your reader,  
Jacob Mollette

#### **Honorazble Mention**

**Riley Palumbo**

**John Adams Middle, Charleston, WV**

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

Dear R.J. Palacio,

*Wonder* has an excellent moral. I think that it is very important to remember to not judge, as the book showed me. You really showed me how important it is to get to know someone before you think about judging them, and to not judge on appearances.

In your book, Auggie is judged a lot because he has a deformed face. People are mean to him and make fun of him, which is so cruel. Finally, very kind people come along in his life and give him a real chance. They all end up being the best of friends. You see, when people don't judge, they realize how considerate and fun someone could really be when you give them a chance. It is so nice seeing people who are so kind to the people who are tormented. Your book does a phenomenal job of showing that; Summer was always kind to Auggie and a wonderful friendship was made.

You and *Wonder* changed my view of the world by teaching me not to judge a book by its cover. Ever since I've read *Wonder*, I have been very cautious about judging others. I've learned to always get to know the person I am thinking about judging. People will learn that others are not always what you expect them to be.

I know this book changed me and my view of the world because I can really notice when people judge other people and form thoughts against them. I'll see people giving others mean looks or not treating them nicely because of their incorrect judgment. People who get judged and bullied because of this do not deserve it. It is really sad seeing it, and it's just plain out rude.

Some kids at school judged Auggie because of his looks. People bullied and made fun of him constantly, just because of his appearance. That is just awful! When kids got to know him, they realized how much they missed out on by judging him. People can surprise you, just like Auggie did when kids at school judged him on his appearance. Your book makes me want to be like Summer who never judged Auggie and who sat at lunch with him and they bonded. Jack, Will, and Auggie had some bumps in the road, but at the end, it was all good and they were best friends. Auggie was always a funny, sweet kid; he just had to find the right people to realize it.

Judging is like not giving anyone a real chance to show you who they are. It shows that you aren't willing to get to know people. I've seen it before, and your book did a perfect job of showing it.

I chose to write about *Wonder* because of its wonderful message. The point of view in this book helps me understand how people feel when they're judged, and it makes them feel awful about themselves. Nobody should feel that way. I would completely recommend this book to others, and I hope it'll change them just like it changed me.

Sincerely,  
Riley Palumbo

#### **Honorable Mention**

**Willem Porter**

**John Adams Middle, Charleston, WV**

***The Giver* by Lois Lowry**

Dear Lois Lowry,

Your book *The Giver* has made me think a lot. This book was probably the first science fiction book that I had ever read. It talked a lot about a more authoritarian society made citizens lose their individuality. I have been a lot more alert to the news thanks to this book. Yet what is baffling is that the book had never uttered the word "government."

What I remember most about the book is the Giver's speech. He had talked about how as society progressed, individuality became more of a problem. From weather, to color, and to personalities, everything had to be the same. And while this had benefits, it ended in civilians becoming brainless zombies. While this idea is scary, what is even scarier is the possibility of this happening in reality.

As our society is progressing, people's voices get louder and more menacing, so that it is more dangerous to have unpopular opinions. The people's words even made it sound like this sort of stuff is normal. Such convincing writing has scared me into paying more attention to the news, so I can be more aware. You can see this in current society is when people conform to the next fashion or trend without thinking about what they like. And while it is alright to have popular opinions, our opinions should not be based on what society tells us.

Your book has also gotten me even more interested in history. I wanted to know if these sorts of occurrences had ever happened and how they were brought down. But even though this book had made me think about a lot of negative things, the one positive thing this book gave me was hope. Even though Jonas had seemed to be outmatched, he still had the hope and courage to pull through. This reminded me that even though your enemy may be stronger or well-armed, you still have hope, courage, and knowledge.

In the end of the book, Jonas and Gabriel sled down a mountain towards houses filled with singing and dancing. I think this shows how at the beginning of the book one of the memories he received was of a kid sleighing down a mountain, and now here he is, where he has finally found himself in the place he wanted to be. This ending has led me to analyzing the books I read more thoroughly, since it made me wonder if other books had symbolism like this. I also thought about how much the Elders relied on the Receiver. This had made me think about how in real life a lot of dictators had relied on far more intelligent people to do their dirty work.

And like in the book, they ended up being betrayed by the very people who helped them. This book had also made me think about how an authoritarian government can make people do stuff that is clearly not right by lying. Like when Jonas's father killed the one baby because the government told him to. Even though he was clearly dead, all the government had to do was tell him it was asleep and he was none the wiser. Your book has influenced me so much and I want to thank you for it.

I hope this letter reaches you so you can know what I felt about this book. I think your book is fantastic and I want to read your other books.

Sincerely,  
Willem Porter

#### **Honorable Mention**

**Bethanny Prascik**

**Fairmont Catholic, Fairmont, WV**

***Someday Dancer* by Sarah Rubin**

Dear Sarah Rubin,

When I first saw your book *Someday Dancer* sitting on a bookshelf in the store, I was immediately drawn toward it. Being a dancer I look for anything dance related. I walked across the store to where it was sitting. As I do with most books, I picked it up, flipped it through the pages, and proceeded to read the back. Just by reading those two paragraphs, I knew I would like the book.

After reading your book, I felt quite different. I had never really thought about making dancing into more than just a hobby. I had never even dreamed about taking it to a bigger scale. Now, I was thinking about what I really could do with my ability. I had never been to a tryout or audition of any kind. I had always been too afraid to fail, that I never wanted to try. Listening to Cassie's story made me realize that you can't be scared. If you want something to happen, you have to go and make it happen and, you'll never get anywhere if you never try. Cassie also taught me that, no matter where you come from, you can always go do great things. I guess what I'm saying is that after reading your book, I wasn't afraid to try.

I guess you could say I was looking differently at my dance career. I had always thought of it as a passion, but never a future. I think the real reason I had never thought of it as something more was because I was always too afraid to go to tryouts and conventions. The really important thing your book did for me was show me and make me believe I could do great things and be something more. I always had the opportunities in front of me, but I never took advantage of them. Now I wasn't scared, I was ready.

A few months after I read your book, around April I think, an opportunity came up in Pittsburgh. Pointe Park University was holding a summer dance camp this summer. Tryouts were in two weeks for anyone who was interested. I decided to go because I knew this was an opportunity I didn't want to miss. A couple other girls went too and my dance teacher came also. The tryouts lasted about four hours and after they were over, we all went out to eat together. I was really glad I went, but all I could do now was wait.

The letter came about three weeks after the tryouts ended. I had anticipated this moment for what seemed like forever. I ripped open the envelope, pulled out the letter and began to read. I wasn't accepted. I was upset, but not for long because I knew that I should never give up. Now I had the courage to go to all sorts of tryouts. Your book helped me to find the courage to try new things and to do what I love most of all, Dance.

Thank You,  
Bethanny Prascik

### **Honorable Mention**

**Name withheld by request**

**Huntington Middle, Huntington, WV**

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

Dear Anne Frank,

Even though you only wrote one "book", you are one of the most inspirational people to have lived. You were a young, Jewish girl who expressed the feelings of a typical teenager. Except you weren't the typical teenager. You were in hiding because you were Jewish in a time and a country where that wasn't acceptable, which is ridiculous. You expressed how you felt as you matured from a child to a young woman in your little over 2 years in hiding. You were very brave in your terrible situation. I'm sure even in your last moments you were still brave.

It's such a shame the world lost such a wonderful person like you because of terrible ideas. I'm sure you would have done amazing things.

Another thing I learned from you is that even if you're in a terrible situation, it can make you a wonderful person. You should always let a bad situation soften your heart and let it help you understand more things. You shouldn't let it harden your heart.

Your journal not only gives us an insight into your life, it lets us see how it was for Jewish people in hiding during the holocaust. We got to see how unfairly you all were treated and how you were forced to hide to stay alive and even then it wasn't granted you'd survive. It shows what happens when people blindly accept authority. A horrible person with ridiculous, terrible ideas is put into power and kills millions of innocent men, women, and children. Many other wonderful people just as yourself were killed.

Reading your story shows me that even when you are in the worst of situations, like yours, you can still have hope. You don't have to be miserable, even if your situation is. Hope is one of the most important things in this world. You showed me that.

You also shed light on what it's like to be a victim of genocide. Hopefully we as people learn from our mistakes and the terrible genocides, like Rwanda and the Holocaust, never have to happen again.

Thank you for being such an inspiration, not to just young women as myself, but to everyone.

Sincerely,  
*Name withheld by request*

**Honorable Mention**

**Billy Tobin**

**Fairmont Catholic, Fairmont, WV**

***The Giver* by Lois Lowry**

Dear Lois Lowry,

Before I read your book, *The Giver*, I did not really understand how people did their own little "selection". I had seen how people would pick other people out and assign them to a group usually based on how they looked. Even I did that. When we were children in elementary school, we picked out from our classmates who was part of the "cool" group, or who was going to be "not cool". We didn't think about it much or really know what we were doing, but it just happened that way.

But then I read your book. Your book, I realized, was not like other books. It is a book about how a young boy broke through the selection the government had made for his community. He had been born into a community with a barrier on freedom and emotions. He was used to it at first, not knowing about the wonderful things that lay outside the community. He had no choice. But then the Giver showed him what life would be like with those wonderful feelings. That was when Jonas had his turning point. That is also when I had my turning point.

Freedom is the right of choice, to do whatever we want to do with ourselves, as long as we don't stop other people from enjoying their freedoms. Freedom gives us the power to choose our jobs, our partner, and our life. We enjoy our freedom, but most of us only take it for granted. Even I didn't think about it that much before I read your book. We don't realize what a big part of our lives freedom is.

Emotion is what we feel in response to something happening. We can be happy, sad, mad, etc. But Jonas's community tried to remove emotions, because they sometimes made people do crazy things that hurt others. But emotions can help us do good things too. And the most important emotion, Love, drives us to make our decisions. It makes us feel good inside, knowing that someone loves you.

The thing that made me sad the most was when a person was Released. Just because the Elders thought that some people would 'disrupt' the flow of how the community worked, the Elders would kill that person (or baby). Imagine if today's world was like that. Important people like Stephen Hawking would have been released when he was younger because he had a serious disease and was different. But his contributions to the world would not have happened. And this could go for you or me. We could have not been 'good enough' for society and might have been killed as a child.

I am very glad that you wrote this book, because it has made me realize how many things we take for granted that others would beg for. Hopefully, others will read this book

and feel the exact same way as I do, so no one has to live in the same type of community that Jonas lived in.

Sincerely,  
Billy Tobin

## LEVEL THREE

### Top Honors

**Jamey Perrine**

**Buckhannon-Upshur High, Buckhannon, WV**

***Ella Enchanted* by Gail Carson Levine**

Mrs. Gail Carson Levine:

When I was seven years old, I won an art contest at my elementary school and as my prize, I was allowed to pick one free book from the book fair. Words can't describe just how incredibly happy and proud I was as I perused the selections. I didn't want some little girl book, I wanted to prove I could read just as well as my older brother, who was nine at the time, and as a result, I went to the section for older elementary students. The only one that caught my eye was a brown book, with a girl in green on the cover and the title was in pretty gold script. I smiled happily at my treasure and went back to class.

I fumbled through *Ella Enchanted* for over a month. The only thing I understood was that a young girl's mother died, and then the daughter had to deal with ogres, wickedly controlling step family members, elves and the like. Your book was a terribly difficult read and just entirely uninteresting, but I was determined to prove that I was smart enough to handle Ella and her story. I really did try but after a while I set it on my book shelf and there it stayed.

At the end of my third grade year, my teacher, Mrs. Bickel, convinced me to give Ella and her story a second try. Mrs. Bickel was the most inspirational and wonderful woman I had ever met, so I went home, got it from my shelf, and curled up in my bed. "That fool of a fairy Lucinda did not intend to lay a curse on me. She meant to bestow a gift." I was suddenly hooked and just couldn't but the book down again!

In just a year and a half, I had grown to a level on which I could understand. Ella, poor motherless Ella, was left to fight against the world. She couldn't trust anyone but her "cook", Mandy. Even though Ella was a beautiful, kind, and smart girl, she was tortured, abused, (both mentally and physically), and beaten down by almost every aspect of her life. It really opened my eyes to the fact that the world, especially the written world, was unfair and didn't bother to even pretend otherwise.

Ella became my hero. She fought through everything that was thrown her way in order to have the world that she had been dreaming of for so long. Ella didn't need a supportive family to be a strong young woman. She could make her true love and best friend literally despise her if she had to in order to keep them safe. Despite the curse and all the horrible things, Ella did still manage to love. She didn't grow bitter and mean like Mum Olga and her step sisters, she grew even more strong and kind because of them.

I read *Ella Enchanted* at least once a year, and every time I do, something even more special happens to jump out at me. Ella is my best friend and closest confidante. She has taught me about racism, strength, kindness, self-growth, love, and hardships. She taught me that obedience does not equate to weakness.

No, I obviously have never faced a curse, but in my family kindness and obedience is expected. I was taught to be the good girl, perfect daughter with the perfect student facade entirely intact in public. Rather than losing myself, I learned from Ella to be strong, rebellious, and confident in myself, despite my polite and obedient exterior.

I am a performing arts student at my high school, with an addiction to choir and musical theatre. One could also easily say that I'm the fat nerd girl. Given those two facts, it's no surprise I was bullied and picked on. Instead of resenting myself and who I am, Ella taught me to not think twice about others and focus on becoming the best me I can be.

If you were to ask most girls who their hero is, they would say their mother, a teacher, a nurse, a doctor, a model, or maybe an actress. My idol is a reflection of you, Mrs. Levine, but instead of a reflection in a mirror, its ink on a page. Ella is the strongest young woman I have ever encountered, and I hope to be just like her someday. I am so thankful to Mrs. Bickel for convincing me to pick up Ella's story and give it another shot, and to you for persevering with this character. I've read some things online that said you struggled with her character and the idea of obedience, but you made it through and inspired young women across the country. The prompt for this is to write about how a book changed me, but *Ella Enchanted* didn't change me. She helped to shape the young adult I've become, and without Ella, I have no idea who I would be today.

Respectfully,  
Jamey D. Perrine

### Honors

**Cynthia Shi**

**Morgantown Middle, Morgantown, WV**

***A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket**

Dear Lemony Snicket,

My brother and I have not always had the relationship that would be defined as "loving" in the common dictionary, though this surely rings true for most siblings. However, the circumstance in my family strays away from the common fact of feeling that my brother is a bother or simply an annoying factor in my life-though I've believed this to be the reason for a long time. As the eldest child of the family, I undoubtedly carried the most duties throughout the house. I was also forced to constantly strive to reach the high expectations that were

set out for me, and I never settled for mediocrity, since I did not want to disappoint. For as long as I could remember', I had never done anything to truly make my family ashamed or disappointed. I, in other words, am the goody-two-shoes of the family. My brother, on the contrary, was never burdened with the pressure that I would oftentimes feel. He would never be expected to bring in a school report with straight A's recorded on it-never was he able to accomplish this either. He wasn't responsible for many chores around the house, and when he was, he never completed the tasks to a level that was acceptable to my parents. I never believed myself to be bothered by this, however, because I had enjoyed being the better of the two in the eyes of my parents. I prided myself with my accomplishments, and loved the praises that I would receive from others.

As I was too busy indulged in the compliments I often received from other adults, I disregarded my brother's role in my life. At times, I would even catch myself perceiving him as an embarrassment. Had I known that my thoughts were ill natured and awful? Of course I had. Nonetheless, I was unable to find the unique talent in him that every human acquired, and eventually, I completely stopped searching for it.

I was incredibly young when I first encountered your books, and-though I am ashamed to admit it-I was drawn to them for the simple reason that the book covers were enchanting to my adolescent eyes. However, not a long time had passed before your novels mesmerized me with reasons much more meaningful than merely an intriguing cover. At night I would curl under the safety of my blanket with a book light attached to your pages as I read on and on, unwilling to stop until every last word is memorized by heart. During lunch, I would shove my untouched tray forward as far as I was permitted in order to reserve some space for your work, I was, to put quite bluntly, obsessed.

I must clarify that I regretfully read your books at an age where I could not have possibly captured all the inspirational elements that the series contained. Neither had I bothered to navigate deeper into your work because-and please forgive me as I state this-I had thought of it no more than any other novel one may find on a bookshelf. Perhaps to some, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* may forever be the series in which no happy ending will appear, and only that. However, as I had later discovered, I was given the first welcoming sense of responsibility towards my younger brother, Larry, from the books.

In your books, I discovered the love that I had never felt in the relationship between Larry and me. From the Baudelaire orphans, I witnessed the true bond that one should feel for their family members. I can recall myself thinking, "Why does the love between the orphans appear so different from the love that my brother and I share?" My brain was raveled upon this question for ages, and eventually, I settled upon a conclusion: The love we share is only as weak as I choose to make it. From that point forward, I worked hard to create circumstances in which I could learn more about Larry. I willingly played video games with him-he would always be the winner, of course-and

I helped him in the homework that he couldn't understand. In an odd sense, it had almost become my goal to create a better relationship between my brother and me; at the very least, I wanted to fix all the things that were wrong in our previous one. I even went as far as to address it in my 12th birthday wish: I wanted to have a healthy and happy bond with Larry. I hadn't realized that in all the actions that I was putting forth, I had already amended and improved upon what was previously broken.

One time over dinner, when Larry was attending a party, my mother asked me why the change between my interactions with Larry had been so drastic. I provided no answer, and pretended the difference was only a "natural cycle". However, words could not have possibly described the immense glee I had felt from her words. I suppose I believed that I had made my mother proud, since her most significant wish had been for the two of us to always have each other's backs, no matter the time or place. It was also a way of confirming that I had fulfilled my promise to myself, and it had perhaps been the greatest accomplishment I had ever achieved.

Nowadays, with high school taking place and the courses becoming more difficult, I am gradually interacting less with my family members, and more with my studies. Be that as it may, I will never forget the importance of family, and how precious it is to be thankful for their existence.

I've written this letter simply as an attempt to thank you for writing such an inspirational selection of books, and for creating the characters that I will never forget nor regret to have read about.

Thank you for creating a tighter bond in my family.

With great admiration,  
Cynthia Shi

**Honors**  
**Alison Whitener**  
**Spring Mills High, Martinsburg, WV**  
***The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank***

Dear Anne Frank,

Saying you changed my perspective of the world would be an understatement. When I was in fourth grade, I remember sitting in the miniature library in the back of my classroom, reading a biography about you. As I got deeper and deeper in the book, it was the only thing I was interested in spending my time on. *She's Jewish like me!* I recall thinking. Holocaust was a foreign word to me then, and Adolf Hitler was just a man with an obnoxious mustache and a peculiar name. Being a sophomore in high school now, I almost completely understand the atrocities that occurred during the Second World War. I say almost because no matter the amount of books I read, lessons I learn, and movies I watch, I will never be able to fathom the Holocaust.

There's a specific day in sixth grade that is etched into my brain. At the end of gym class, I was shoving my foul-smelling sweats into my backpack when one of the girls in my class approached me.

"I don't think we can be friends," she explained. "My family is German and your family is Jewish. You can't come over to my house, but we can still talk in class." I could feel the heat rise to my cheeks. Angry? Just a little. But the feeling of embarrassment was crushing. I went home as soon as I could, weeping as I unlocked the door to my house, scuttling upstairs, simply to collapse onto my bedroom carpet—devastated. My walls were closing in on me. I felt like I couldn't breathe; my thoughts were running miles around my cranium, my fists were clenched so tightly that my knuckles were pale, my eyes were blurred, and I felt like the weight of the entire world was on my shoulders. Looking back on how I reacted, it sounds silly to be as upset about something as meaningless as that. But, in that moment, being different had broken me. I refused to attend synagogue that evening.

Throughout my years of middle school, I tolerated standing out when people discussed their Christmas gifts, plans for Easter weekend, and their little cousins being baptized. I found security in reading books about you. When you stood out, you embraced it: a characteristic that rubbed off onto me. In eighth grade, my English class was required to read your diary. Previously, I had only skimmed through it because I found reading someone's private thoughts inconsiderate. To my surprise, when we were assigned to read a few sections every week, I read the complete book in two days. Mesmerized would be an understatement.

To this day, I find your positivity breathtaking. The way you handled being a teenage girl crammed into such a compact, suffocating home and remaining more optimistic than people who have everything will never cease to amaze me. You find an overwhelming amount of beauty in the darkest circumstances. Even while living for months in an attic, you wrote, "In spite of everything, I still believe people are truly good at heart." This is a quote that I live by. Your thoughts flow like a river; I can feel the words running through my body, diverging to both my mind and my heart. My mind says you're insane for being too kind and welcoming, yet my heart is drawn to your compassion.

Since reading your diary, I've opened my mind so much more. When meeting new people, I've trained my initial thoughts to be positive. I try as hard as I can to treat people as if they only had a few hours left on Earth. The world is full of infinite opportunities, beautiful people, and I hold an incredible amount of power in my hands. I can change the world; you showed me that. Without even realizing, your private thoughts changed the minds of millions of people and the way they see the universe surrounding them. I have come to the conclusion, thanks to you, that there's just as much beauty in the world as there is evil.

Sincerely,  
Alison Whitener

### **Honorable Mention**

**Jane Cabbiness**

**Washington High, Charles Town, WV**

***Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* by J.K. Rowling**

Dear J.K. Rowling,

When I was little, my mom and I used to lie down in her bed and just read. Bright lamps glowing on either side of the bed illuminated the books to life. Each word I read was like a scene in a movie playing in my head. Enhancing my senses were colorful adjectives I would read over and over again until I fully understood their meaning. I would sit and ask my mom to explain to me what each big word meant, so I could see a clearer picture in my mind. Sometimes my dad, and even my brother would join us—just reading in a comfortable silence for hours at a time.

I was in the third grade when I came down with a serious case of pneumonia. I was out of school for three weeks, and had been hospitalized on multiple occasions. One night, I remember finding myself unable to get a breath, so my mom loaded me into our grey Honda Civic and rushed me to the Sterling, Virginia Hospital.

Keeping my eyes open for long periods of time had proven to be a struggle. I remember I was on your third book, *Prisoner of Azkaban*. I had just reached the climactic point where Ron, Hermione, and Harry had just discovered Ron's pet rat, Scabbers, was actually Peter Pettigrew after Snape had turned him back to his human form. I found myself too weak to finish the scene, so I called my mom into the room and begged her to finish the book for me.

Her soft, yet powerful voice enhanced each word she read. Like gold being neatly written on parchment paper, her enchanting voice seemed to engrave each word of your book into my mind. I felt as if I were standing at Hogwarts with each of these characters. I had no idea it was even possible to be filled with so much content, yet so much remorse at the same time. I was angered by the ending of this book, but so happy that she finished it for me.

It was nearing the end of my eighth grade year when my mom decided to read *The Harry Potter Series* for the fifth time. She had now been living with terminal cancer for two years. She was slowly beginning to disintegrate under the powerful chemo she was being given. Although she knew her cancer was incurable, she still opted to receive the most aggressive chemotherapy they could give her—in hope of a miracle.

Within a matter of weeks my mom lost almost full use of her legs and had become bedridden. For the first time in her two years of battling cancer, she had to stop working. Because of this she was left with a lot of extra time on her hands, so she

read your books. It took her a couple of days to get to The Prisoner of Azkaban. When she finally got there her liver had started to fail and her battle was coming to an end. My mother opted not to pass in a hospital, so she stayed at home through this time.

One night, I came to her bedside and noticed your book, *Prisoner of Azkaban* sitting on her bedside table. At this point, she had lost almost all mobility of her arms, and each of her organs had begun going into failure. It took far too much energy for her to swallow, so I had come down to sponge her mouth with water, so her tongue wouldn't begin to crack from the dryness.

At this point in her battle, my mom could not speak, she could heave words and hear what we were saying but she could not physically hold a conversation with us. I asked her if she wanted me to finish your book for her, she responded with a strained, "yes," so I proceeded to pick up your book and read it to her.

I let each word slide off my tongue with ease, and confidence. I had never read a book with such enthusiasm. I remembered when my mom had done this for me. I let my emotion intertwine with each word I was reciting from the pages of your book to her ears. I wanted her to feel what I felt when she read this same book to me. I found life between every line, and discovered emotion between every word.

I never got to finish your book for her. My mom was having trouble staying awake and slowly dosed off when I reached the part where Hermione and Harry were turning back the hands of time to rescue Sirius from his sure life long punishment. I sat down the book and kissed my mom's forehead before heading to bed.

She passed away two days later. I never got the chance to finish reading your book to her. Currently, I am reading your series for the fourth time. Each word I read still brings your characters to life. I can see my mom in between the lines and just wish that your words could bring her back to life too. I see my mom between every word and hear her voice in every line. Thank you for allowing her light to shine through your work. You have provided me yet another way to remember my mother, and for that I am ever so grateful. I just wish I could've finished reading your book to her.

Much Thanks,  
Jane Cabbiness

## **Honorable Mention**

**Isaiah Cook**

**South Charleston High, South Charleston, WV**

***Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*  
by Rick Riordan**

Dear Rick Riordan,

The only thing that's certain in life is death. To make all the things in between worth it is the most difficult task to accomplish. Those who have ADHD, myself included, find that living in today's society is a burden on all of our shoulders. In your book *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* you give a whole new perspective to our lives. Making it so that we not only feel less like outcasts, but you gave us a world to escape to. Before I went out of my way to be alone. In school, at home, and anywhere else you could imagine. I felt as if I was less than acceptable. Seeing someone battle monsters, having powers, and saving the world lifted my spirits to a point where I can go anywhere without shrinking into my coat. The fact being that I have slept easier at night since I read your book series.

Although I'm not a Half-Blood, I feel as if I am more than what I thought I was. Not only has your book shattered my shell, it has shone light into my mind. I think about the world in a more positive and fantastic way. I used to think the world we live in was a cruel and hateful place. I wanted to end the pain as fast as possible. One day, however, my English teacher happened to refer me to a book. I looked at the cover and saw a boy with black hair and a horn in his hand, but looking at the Empire state building. To be honest I didn't accept the book at first, for I was dead set on leaving. Until one day we were assigned to read for the class period, so I gave in and started to read. Immediately I noticed a comedic presence in the book. Page after page I grew more curious until I found out he, the main character, was also diagnosed with ADHD. Immediately I checked the book out of the library and in no time I found myself in the middle of the book. I sat the book down and thought. Here I was thinking I was nothing, but then I start reading about this kid who was slaying monsters, blowing things up, and going on an adventure. I slept that night dreaming of a world I could never live in, but I was somehow ok with that.

Sadly, as all good things do, the book came to an end. I found myself, however, wanting more. I brought the book back to the library and asked where I could buy one for myself. It seemed to elude me for a while. Although, I had wanted to end things before, the book had given me something that can't easily be accepted. That thing was hope. Even if I couldn't control the sea, or even battle monsters, I could filter the heroic presence it has into my normal life. It made me strive for excellence, meaning, but most importantly acceptance. In your book the main character, Percy, has great difficulties believing that he had these conditions because of his parentage. I used to blame everything but nature. Eventually I came to an understanding; you must accept all of your problems as your responsibilities. You don't have to slay things to make a difference, for all you

need to do is change one little thing at a time. It took a while to see the changes that I was accomplishing. My grades, mood, and the outlook of the world. I sat there in class staring out of the window. I didn't see a simple land of green and trees. I saw a world of fantasy and thrill. I had almost given up on finding the rest of the book when Christmas happened to arrive. I tore into a package with such little enthusiasm, but then I saw the Empire State Building. I immediately ripped the paper off and sat there gazing upon the very thing that saved me from myself. I thanked my mother and went to my room without opening any of my other presents. I stood there, gently placing the books on my shelf. It was a good Christmas.

After all of this the only thing I regret about those books were the fact that they were paperback. I loved them anyway, but nature had different plans. Within two weeks I started to notice water damage. My heart sank as one by one fell to the forces of nature. I put them away for storing until I could get enough money for hardback versions, but so far no luck has come my way. I guess I should mention this. I am in your debt. It's hard to imagine that all of this started when you ran out of stories to tell your children. It's amazing what one little deed for one's child can do for the rest of the world. I mean this, not only for those with ADHD, but for those with dyslexia. Both conditions have been looked down on for ages. Times have changed drastically. The time of knowledge has started its rise.

Although I can never forget the troubles gone through to get to where I am, I'll always remember the change I've endured. Looking back on it I suppose connections between life and death can be right next to each other, but still be as far apart as ever. All it takes is one thing to tip the balance and everything crumbles. This can also work the other way around. From the brink of death all I needed was a book to bring me into light. Although ADHD will always be a part of my life, so will your books. I guess at the end of the day all we can do is live on and take the good with the bad. Whether it be just the mist from your book or just an illusion of the normal world I will always see the world as it is now.

Sincerely,  
Isaiah Cook

#### **Honorable Mention**

**Aubrey Keller**

**Morgantown High, Morgantown, WV**

***Looking for Alaska* by John Green**

Dear John Green,

I understand, it all makes sense to me now. The world really is an awful place. We're all to escape this crazy maze with walls that twist and turn while we attempt to find a way out. I understand now why Alaska wanted to escape. we all have these emotions that never seem to make sense. It may just be because I'm a teenager struggling with life, and our worlds seem to crumble down if Jason doesn't ask us to prom or a straight A's student gets an F on an exam. At times I want to escape

this maze, most will agree. We spend our life preparing for the future, but what if our future is not what we expected? What if our future is filled with debt, pain, and regret? Is this what the plan was all along? walking through the maze we find ways to cope. This novel helped me cope when I was trapped in a dead end in the maze and was too ignorant to turn around and find another way.

I read this novel a year or two ago when I was struggling with depression and anxiety. I was suicidal and reading was my only way to escape my world and jump into another. Another world filled with excitement, love, happiness, everything and anything I wanted on the pages of a novel in my hands. This novel made me laugh as well as cry. It made me realize there's always a reason for every situation. There are also other ways to handle your complications. Your work has showed me that I am not alone. Alaska was going through a difficult thing, yet she kept it all to herself. She seemed to be a maze herself, she was hard to figure out. I can relate to that. I put on a mask and pretend everything is okay, when really I'm struggling with school, my friends, and my past.

This book really made me want to take a stand in teen suicide. I used to think it was totally normal to be depressed every day and not want to live. your novel showed me that suicide does hurt others. Pudge and the colonel were hurt and confused that Alaska would leave this world. The world is a horrible place. I can relate to Alaska's emotions and reactions. I am a deeply unhappy person that decides to read to escape. Reading is my way to escape the labyrinth. Alaska seemed to do the same, however she made other poor decisions involving sex, drugs, and alcohol. This novel was the spark that lit my interest in this topic. I do the obvious to help my friends when it seems they are showing warning signs. I'm not just stopping there, I plan to become an adolescent psychiatrist. Many find me easy to talk to and since I've had similar reactions and emotions, I would understand a lot more and be able to help greatly. Life is meant to be lived to the fullest, small things such as listening can save a person's life.

I chose this book for many reasons. One, being that it is my favorite novel and you are my favorite author. This novel was not just words on a page to me, this felt relatable. I related to Alaska Young, her feelings, her actions, and her thought process. Alaska did not care what others thought, she was her own person and she did what she felt was right. Therefore, she was very self-destructive and made poor decisions, then again most teenagers do. I have made similar decisions to those she has. *Looking for Alaska* is an incredible novel that I feel every young adolescent should read. Thank you for showing me that I am not alone, John Green.

Aubrey Keller

**Honorable Mention****April Knight****The Linsly School, Wheeling, WV*****The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls**

Dear Jeannette Walls,

I am friends with a lot of people who have to deal with divorced parents. They constantly remind me how lucky I am that my parents are still together. I'm very thankful for that because I could not imagine how hard it would be to have to go through that as a kid. However I do not think they realize that just because my parents aren't divorced, that doesn't mean that my life at home is perfect by any means. Other factors can contribute to family struggles. For me, those struggles have just begun.

My dad had a stroke in August, which was right around the time that I finished reading *The Glass Castle*. He spent weeks after that in hospital beds, going from hospital to hospital and getting tests done so that the doctors could find out what was wrong with him. For a while, they didn't have answers. Then finally a few weeks later, we were told that he was going to have to have a major surgery done in a few months. With the diagnosis came many trips to the hospital, back and forth, which was about three hours away. Since my older sister just went off to college, that means that I am the oldest member in the house when my parents are away, and it is up to me to take care of myself and my two younger brothers.

One day I came home after a long day at school and I got a call from my mom saying that she was at the hospital with my dad. They weren't going to be back until really late, so she told me I had to make dinner, wash the clothes I needed for school the next day, help my brothers with their homework, and on top of that, I had homework in just about every subject. I was extremely stressed out. I thought to myself; How am I supposed to do this? I felt like it was entirely up to me to run the family, but I was only in high school. I took a deep breath and I realized that I was going to have to get used to this feeling. Things were going to be like this for a while.

This is when your story came to my mind. I thought about your childhood and how it was up to you most of the time to take care of yourself and your siblings. It was very different for you because you were a lot younger when you had to live like this and your situation was a lot more extreme. Still, your story gives me comfort when I am feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities. Looking at how successful you have become today after all that you went through also inspires me and gives me hope for my future.

When I read that some schools were banning *The Glass Castle* from their English curriculum, I was honestly disappointed. I feel as if banning books, especially this one, from being read in schools means that those students are missing out on an opportunity to learn about a different part of life that they may have never known or thought about. I believe that by the time students graduate, they should be aware that there are different ways for people to live and things that they have to deal

with, whether they want to or not. *The Glass Castle* mentions things like alcoholism and domestic violence. Those parts of life are usually the kinds that people frown upon and don't want to talk about or think about. No matter how much people push those topics aside, they still exist, and millions of people struggle with things like alcoholism and domestic violence everyday. Allowing students to have the chance to learn about them can help them deal with those things in the future, whether it's giving advice to someone who is going through something like that or even if that is something they encounter in their own lives. I understand that no parents want to think about their child struggling with alcoholism or domestic violence when they get older, but in reality, anything is possible. Just being aware of those parts of life makes all the difference.

With that being said, I would like to thank you for writing *The Glass Castle* and sharing your story. I am very privileged to say that I got the chance to learn about the struggles of your childhood because it has helped me with mine.

With sincere thanks and admiration,  
April Knight

**Honorable Mention****Name withheld by request****East Fairmont High, Fairmont, WV*****Vultures* by Richard D. Seal**

Dear Richard D. Seal,

I do not like birds. I have never liked birds. For one thing, they poop all over the place. My driveway, my parents' cars, and my grandparents' deck are completely covered with the stuff in the summer. One even had the audacity to poop in my hair. Can you believe that? Not to mention, they spread disease like wildfire. And then they fly around the place, flaunting their ability to do something that humans can't. The nerve of those things. But there's one kind of bird that I have a special distaste for, and that would be the vulture. So, you can imagine my delight when I found out that the antagonists of your poem *Vultures* are, indeed, the evil little bottom feeders themselves.

In your poem, you describe the way the little beasts scan for something already fragile, and patiently wait for it to die before indulging in its death. It wasn't until reading this that I realized my reason for disliking them. I was the something fragile.

Upon entering my junior year of high school I sensed that I was growing apart from my friends. All summer, they'd spent their nights together at bonfires, swimming and eating s'mores and excluding me. I understood that yes, people grow apart, and yes, it was for the better, as they were getting involved in things that weren't exactly legal, but as the days went on, it went from growing apart to a feeling of bitterness toward me. Somewhere along the lines, not only had they stopped talking to me, but they'd also began gossiping about me, and, in a

way, I was rather famous. So famous that open water bottles, bananas, and bags of trash were thrown toward me at lunch.

For a month I lived constantly in anticipation of the next item of trash to be thrown at me, the next profanity to be screamed at me, and the next eye-roll to be sent my way. Anxiety was continually hanging over my head like a dark cloud, and I was unceasingly awaiting the burst of thunder that would send me gasping for air trying to explain this odd pain in my heart. Eating became a chore and my only shelter from the storm was sleep.

Then I stumbled across your poem online.

I found refuge in your words. I uncovered courage in myself that I didn't know existed. Through your poem, I discovered that these people hurting me were my vultures. They were pathetically preying on the frail, taking advantage of my confused, somewhat fragile state and breaking me over and over again. The bad part, I realized, was that I was allowing it.

It became clear to me that the only way to stop the distress they were causing me was to stop being the prey. My goal became to arise from the depths of my mind and disregard their pitiful attempts at ripping me apart. I reminded myself that vultures only go after the dead, so I had to pick myself up, day after day, and show no reaction to their hurtful actions. As time passed, they received the message that I was very much alive. It became clear to them that I was not rolled over, dead, but instead, I was erect, and I was not going to be anyone's prey any longer.

I owe this small victory in my life to you, Mr. Seal, because without your words, I would be nothing but a picked-at carcass. You helped transform my vultures from people who damage to people to aid in strengthening. So, in a way, I guess vultures aren't completely bad.

Much Gratitude,  
*Name withheld by request*

### **Honorable Mention**

**Brandon Lester**

**Pike View High, Princeton, WV**

***The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak**

Dear Mr. Zusak,

It's hard to believe that doing something as simple as reading a book can change the way you look at your life. Reading *The Book Thief* did exactly that for me. I realized had Death come for me the day I began reading your book my color would have been gray. That was one of the things I learned from reading, *The Book Thief*. Gray is a neutral color, not very imposing. It exists in the background often unseen. If gray had feelings it wouldn't care so much about anything. It would be content to go through the day without many questions, just completing the tasks before it and participating in daily living without

much thought. Yes, I was gray. I have come to believe most people, especially here in America, are gray as well. We think we are living with purpose, thinking original thoughts, and motivated by personal desires. We might think we are blue, green, yellow or purple. I would have thought the same, but now I am not so sure.

When I first began reading *The Book Thief* I was incredibly disappointed. I had recently read another book about the Holocaust which vividly demonstrated the terrors of war and the plight of the Jews. It had shaken and moved me deeply. Initially I felt that your story was a bit light and trivial. The imagery that you used in employing Death as the narrator frustrated me. Talk of colors, smells, and feelings. What was the point?

As the story began to unfold I realized that your intent was not to focus on the Jews themselves, but rather the German citizens. They were people of different races and beliefs living together in communities prior to the war. They had family, friends, and neighbors. They worked, went to school, owned businesses, and went about the daily business of living. The change came upon them slowly much the way infection spreads through the body. It starts with a small scratch, and then bacteria enter that leads to infection, which can eventually overtake the body. Untreated, infection frequently results in death. That is how it was with the German people. The scratch came as propaganda. The scratch draws attention to a certain area. In this case it was the Jews and others who were different. Soon the bacteria of fear came, and very few dared to try and combat the bacteria. It spread throughout the country, and eventually most would succumb to it. Death did occur. It would occur in the death of almost six million Jews and other "societal imperfects". That was the obvious death. The other death that took place was the death of the will and conscience of the German people. Like a collective corpse they would no longer see or respond to the atrocities being committed. Their heart had stopped beating.

As Death narrated the book, the feel of death almost oozed out of the pages and I felt a general coldness. The main characters, especially Liesel Meminger, Hans Hubermann, Rudy Steiner, and Max Vandenburg, were alive and in brilliant warm colors set against the cold gray background, and their warmth drew you to them. Even Rosa Hubermann's harsh, independent, outspoken ways were welcoming compared to the collective mentality of others. The touching moments between Liesel and Hans and their daringness to react regardless of consequence and how they secretly cared for Max Vandenburg made me begin asking myself, "How much do I really care?" I began to consider whether or not I thought independently. How many of my ideas were my own? What color was I?

As Max Vandenburg took Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and purposefully painted the pages white and chose to create his own story with his own words and art, I wondered if I would ever dare to be bold and make things different. Would I take risks and go against what is politically correct, and dare to live out my convictions in the face possible persecution?

More and more questions began to form. By the end of your book I saw a broken people They had given up their hearts, and in the end they were left empty in piles of rubble. Their losses began to grow as death came close to home claiming lives of those they loved. What was it all for?

Your book in the end made me angry. I was angry to think that people could be so easily deceived. It made me angry to realize that I was living a gray life. Self-inspection made me realize that there were times that I was indifferent. I didn't like that feeling. That day my color turned red. I want to live with purpose. I want to be a seeker of truth and not just be led by popular opinion.

Thank you for *The Book Thief* which gave an interesting perspective on World War II. It has given me much to consider and made me determined to live with purpose.

Sincerely,  
Brandon Lester

**Honorable mention**

**Kathleen Norman**

**Dora Bee Woodyard Memorial Library, Elizabeth, WV**  
***The Ultimate Gift* by Jim Stovall**

Dear Mr. Stovall,

There have been several different books in my life that have changed me in one way or another. There are those stories that make you want to read them cover-to-cover in a single setting. Sometimes, your current choice of literature may make you want to toss it across the room, but you keep reading anyway. Otherwise, I have often found myself reading books that have made me laugh, cry, and shake with barely suppressed fear or anger. Books connect with us in a way that movies and other forms of entertainment cannot. They convey their messages with the utmost devotion and care from person to person, spreading the words their authors have so lovingly printed upon their pages to everyone who picks them up. Each book has its own rules, its own land, and its own voice. In my case, one of these poignant "voices" was that of *The Ultimate Gift*.

All of the ten smaller "gifts" that Red leaves for his nephew to unravel are things that we, as both a nation and a person, need to learn or should already know. Like Jason, most teenagers today have a tough time listening and heeding their elders' advice. Because of this fact, they often do not learn the techniques needed later in their lives. I, myself, often struggle with this aforementioned problem. Even though I greatly respect and cherish my family, I oftentimes find myself tuning them out in favor of "more important" things. It is only until later that I find that these were not as important as I had originally thought. Although our parents want to make our lives easier, it often backfires on the children because they have not acquired the skills necessary to perform everyday tasks. While I realize that my parents' intentions are for my own good, I

know that I have gotten off easy so far. I still have to learn how to do things for myself. Like Jason, I gain satisfaction when I complete a task that I or someone else has set aside for me to finish.

Learning to manage one's cash is a particularly daunting task to learn for anyone, teens especially. My experiences in money management started this summer at "nerd camp." While there, we were treated to a field trip to Washington D.C. where we went to one of the Smithsonian museums and ate at the Hard Rock Cafe. I assumed I did well, considering that I bought only a t-shirt and a poster. I could have ended up like a few of my friends who only returned to their temporary homes with only a few dollars to spare. My father has a knack for comparing prices and products from several different places to find the best "bang for one's buck." My mother's tactic is slightly different, but just as effective. She will pick up something she is interested in and walk around with it, trying to come up with ideas as to why she shouldn't buy that item. If she comes up with reasons as to not take it home, she returns the item. On the other hand, if she cannot think of any reason to not pay for it and it suits a particular purpose, it usually comes home. Nine out of ten times she will usually talk herself out of getting things. I have learned that if you do not have the funds to buy something, you should not put yourself in debt getting the item.

Learning is something no person should ever skimp on. Personally, I like to learn new things. It allows me to assist both myself as well as others. When you learn new things, it gives you a feeling of accomplishment. This new knowledge can then be shared with others to assist or intrigue them. At my school, I am somewhat known amongst my circle of friends as a wealth of information. Whenever someone comes to me and asks for advice, I offer an open mindset, a listening ear, and a new perspective on their problem. In turn, I can come to them from time to time and get the same from them. In other instances, I will somewhat randomly spew the odd factoid out of nowhere that people usually want to know more about. I also can tie both of these together and make the experience of advice-giving more meaningful.

In your book, you stated that "if we are not allowed to deal with small problems we will be destroyed by slightly larger ones." This is something that I greatly need to learn. If I am faced with a problem, I have a tendency to either try to avoid it or get so wrapped up in it that I become too wound to do much else. Math and the subsequent tests always seem to stress me out more than anything as far as school is concerned. I am afflicted with anxiety when faced with any kind of test, but I can usually do fine. Unfortunately, as soon as a mathematics exam is placed before me, I simply blank. I may have understood the homework leading up to it perfectly, but once the word "test" is typed on that paper it all goes downhill from there. I suppose I only need to channel my inner David, but I just need to locate my misplaced slingshot.

The above paragraphs only touch on a few of the gifts in your manuscript, but all of them affected me in one way or another. Each gift, like each individual here on God's green Earth, is unique. All of the ten gifts speak to one reader in a slightly different way than another. In the end, all of us have something to learn from your writings. After all, we should never stop learning new things, correct?

Sincerely,  
Kathleen Norman

**Honorable Mention**  
**Alexandra Richards**  
**Woodrow Wilson High, Beckley, WV**  
***To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee**

Dear Harper Lee,

As a girl growing up in a society dominated by males, I have always been expected to be a proper lady. That meant sitting with your legs crossed, wearing dresses to church, and most importantly no playing in the mud. I've been told on numerous occasions that "scrapes and bruises are not attractive for females," "playing with bugs is not allowed," and "Don't lift that! Get one of the boys to do it." However not only are women expected to look and act accordingly, but they are expected to hold more feminine jobs, in other words no manual labor. The universe is for men; the women decorate it like ornaments.

In your novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* what I find fascinating is not the judgment of race but rather the judgment of gender. It was the similarities with Scout I found within myself that made this work a classic for me. To live in a world where you are criticized for wearing overalls as opposed to a cleanly ironed dress, where girls aren't allowed to fight to save their values in school, and where the dream to be as capable as a man is denied and then denied again mirrored in my own life. Scout didn't need class or manners. All she needed was the freedom of dirt under her feet and the wide open outdoors to make her happy and she didn't want her family to convince her otherwise. To female readers such as myself, Scout's spirit and personality is a symbol of triumph for our gender. She accomplished what others couldn't do. She proved to be brave during times of chaos and panic. She stopped a mob about to march into the jail. All these things for both of us would seem near impossible, but she accomplished it. Scout's denial to be a lady is a message directed toward the doubters of our capacity, the silent, yet bold, conviction of our presence in the world.

This vision of women reminds me of my favorite quote by Whitney Houston, "I like being a woman in a man's world. After all, men can't wear dresses, but we can wear the pants." Scout has taught me to embrace the dirt, clothes that actually cover your legs are acceptable, and even a small voice can make a difference if you have the right intentions. Now as a senior in high school, I will graduate at the top of my class and pursue an engineering degree, a field dominated by men, but I'm not afraid. So when people ask me, "Well don't you want to be

a lady?", with the confidence and determination I share with Scout, I can honestly answer, "Not particularly."

Alexandra Richards

**Honorable Mention**  
**Name withheld by request**  
**Woodrow Wilson High, Beckley, WV**  
***Perfect* by Natasha Friend**

Dear Ms. Natasha Friend,

I would like to begin by saying for years I have thoroughly enjoyed your writing. I have never been known to be much of a reader, but when I pick up one of your books, I find myself not being able to put it down. Your writing has changed the way I examine the world and myself. One book in particular that really influenced me was *Perfect*.

When I read the book I was fourteen, around the same age as the protagonist Isabelle Lee. At this time I saw the world to be a perfect oasis in its natural form, but that is simply not the case. I saw how Isabelle and her family dealt with her father's death. I realized then the world was cruel, taking a father away from his loved ones so suddenly. Visualizing how Isabelle's mother hid in her room and cried every night tore me apart. Not to mention the turmoil the fatality had on Isabelle. Developing bulimia on the day of her father's funeral really opened my eyes on how a person deals with loss and the toll it has on the human body and mind. This made me wonder how the world could be so cruel to ruin an entire family's life for no reason. Here is where I saw the world turn dark.

But the book did not only change my outlook on the world, but the book changed how I perceived myself as well. I do not admit this to many people, and I am even quite ashamed of my actions, but for three months during my freshman year of high school I battled bulimia myself. Granted my disorder was not as severe as Isabelle's and was not brought on by a death, but I still had my fair share of depression.

Growing up in a society where only a size 0 is considered normal, being fourteen and a size 6, I felt like a cow to say the least. So I began losing weight the unhealthy way, the same way Isabelle did, by binge eating and puking it back up minutes later. But one day while browsing a bookstore, I came across *Perfect* in the teen section. Instantly drawn to it because of its pink cover, I picked it up and began reading the teaser. Here is where I fell in love. Instantly feeling the connection, I bought the book and read all 172 pages in one night. But the story line is not only the thing that swayed me. In the back of the novella I discovered Ten Steps to a Positive Body Image. Ten simple steps helped me overcome my eating disorder. Ten simple steps helped me love myself for who I am not by the number in my jeans. Four years later, picking up the book again, I reread the steps and a rush of emotion came over me. Step two says to keep a list of ten things you love about yourself and come to find out; I was using that list as my bookmark.

Confidence is sometimes all a person has and your book led me to finding my own. In the mists of a dark world, I found the light within myself. I cannot thank you enough for encouraging me to surround myself with positive people and always define beauty as me.

*Name withheld by request*

**READ.  
BE INSPIRED.  
WRITE BACK!**

## LEVEL ONE—NOTABLE MENTIONS

**Olivia Abbott**

Weimer Elementary, St. Albans, WV

*Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco

**Wade Blackburn**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

*Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney

**Emily Braden**

Woodsdale Elementary, Wheeling, WV

*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

Name withheld by request

Bluefield Intermediate, Bluefield, WV

*Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Long Haul* by Jeff Kinney

Name withheld by request

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

*If I Stay* by Gayle Forman

Name withheld by request

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

**Madelynn Clark**

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

*No Passengers Beyond This Point*

by Gennifer Choldenko

**Katie Copley**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

**Tyler Duty**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

*The Maze Runner* by James Dashner

**Mirielle Ferrell**

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

*Everyday Angel* by Victoria Schwab

**Madison Flora**

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

Name withheld by request

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

*Discovery at Coyote Point* by Ann Gabhart

**Sierra Hunt**

Ripley Elementary, Ripley, WV

*Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery

**Kaylin Johnson**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV

*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

**Keelah Kidd**

Ansted Elementary, Ansted, WV

*Dork Diaries: Tales From a Not So Talented Pop Star*

by Rachel Renee Russell

**Devin Macri**

Woodsdale Elementary, Wheeling, WV

*A Bear Called Paddington* by Michael Bond

**Kathryn Mason**

Fairmont Catholic Grade School, Fairmont, WV

*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

**Hailey McNeely**

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

*Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson

**Trey Montanye**

Woodsdale Elementary, Wheeling, WV

*I Survived* by Lauren Tarshis

**Jordan Niggemyer**

West Taylor Elementary, Flemington, WV

*Spirit Animals* by Brandon Mull

**Kaitlyn Parsons**

Weimer Elementary, St. Albans, WV

*The Three Little Pigs* by James Orchard Halliwell-

Phillips

**Emily Smith**

Robert L. Bland Middle School, Weston, WV

*A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket

**Halie Swallie**

Mount Nebo Elementary, Mt. Nebo, WV

*A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Daniel Handler

Name withheld by request

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

*CHOMP* by Carl Hiaasen

**Desirae Tucker**

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

*The Amazing Voyage* by Geronimo Stilton

**Emily Warden**

Hurricane Middle School, Hurricane, WV

*A Child Called It* by Dave Pelzer

**Jessica West**

Weimer Elementary, St. Albans, WV

*It's Not Easy Being a Bunny* by Marilyn Sadler

**Samvat Yadav**

Mercer Elementary, Princeton, WV

*Matilda* by Roald Dahl

**Nicholas Young**

Weimer Elementary, St. Albans, WV

*Heart of a Champion* by Carl Deuker

## LEVEL TWO—NOTABLE MENTIONS

**Amber Arko**

Spencer Middle School, Spencer, WV  
*Entwined* by Heather Dixon

**Ashley Bender**

Spencer Middle School, Spencer, WV  
*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

**Maddie Brown**

John Adams Middle School, Charleston, WV  
*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

**Zona Browning**

Spencer Middle School, Spencer, WV  
*Mononucleosis and Other Infectious Diseases*  
by Jon Zonderman

Name withheld by request

John Adams Middle School, Charleston, WV  
*Melody* by V.C. Andrews

**Abbie Cokeley**

John Adams Middle School, Charleston, WV  
*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

**Dylan Corley**

Fairmont Catholic, Fairmont, WV  
*October Sky* by Homer Hickam

**Ainsley Gray**

Sherrard Middle School, Wheeling, WV  
*Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls

Name withheld by request

George Washington Middle School, Eleanor, WV  
*Lockdown: Escape from Furnace*  
by Alexander Gordon Smith

**Baylee Holmes**

George Washington Middle School, Eleanor, WV  
*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

**Brayden Hornsby**

Summersville Middle School, Summersville, WV  
*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

**Dena Jarrells**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV  
*When the Whistle Blows* by Cannon Slayton

**Sarah Jude**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV  
*Hana's Suitcase* by Karen Levine

**Creed Kidney**

Sherrard Middle School, Wheeling, WV  
*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis

**Jordan Krivonyak**

John Adams Middle School, Charleston, WV  
*Into the Wild* by Erin Hunter

**Noah Lance**

Spencer Middle School, Spencer, WV  
*The Last Olympian* by Rick Riordan

**Clarissa Lares**

John Adams Middle School, Charleston, WV  
*The Works of Edgar Allan Poe* by Edgar Allan Poe

**Megan McCullough**

John Adams Middle School, Charleston, WV  
*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

**Duncan McGee**

John Adams Middle School, Charleston, WV  
*Dog Company* by Patrick O'Donnell

**Abeigh Meadows**

George Washington Middle School, Eleanor, WV  
*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

**Kristian Moore**

Harpers Ferry Middle School, Harpers Ferry, WV  
*The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein

**Carley Myers**

Harpers Ferry Middle School, Harpers Ferry, WV  
*The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks

Name withheld by request

Edison Middle School, Parkersburg, WV  
*Lone Survivor* by Marcus Luttrell

**Allie Perkins**

Edison Middle School, Parkersburg, WV  
*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

Name withheld by request

Harpers Ferry Middle School, Harpers Ferry, WV  
*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

**Isabella Raines**

Huntington Middle School, Huntington, WV  
*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

**Celeste Ray**

Crum Middle School, Crum, WV  
*The Finisher* by David Baldacci

**Magnus Sheets**

Fairmont Catholic, Fairmont, WV  
*October Sky* by Homer Hickam

**Chloe Sotomayor**

Spencer Middle School, Spencer, WV  
*Looking for Alaska* by John Green

**Lauryn Ward**

Edison Middle School, Parkersburg, WV  
*The Phantom of the Opera* by Gaston Leroux

Name withheld by request

Huntington Middle School, Huntington, WV  
*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

## LEVEL THREE—NOTABLE MENTIONS

**Liz Adams**

Dora Bee Woodyard Memorial Library, Elizabeth, WV  
*Divergent* by Veronica Roth

Name withheld by request

South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
*The Best Nest* by P.D. Eastman

**Dhania Bond**

South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
*Maximum Ride* by James Patterson

Name withheld by request

Dora Bee Woodyard Memorial Library, Elizabeth, WV  
*The Betrothed* by Alessandro Manzoni

**Ronnie Chico**

The Linsly School, Wheeling, WV  
*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

**Morgan Clutter**

Buckhannon-Upshur High School, Buckhannon, WV  
*A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway

Name withheld by request

Pocahontas Co. High School, Dunmore, WV  
*The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* by Stephen King

**Caitlin Cottrell**

Dora Bee Woodyard Memorial Library, Elizabeth, WV  
*Life As We Knew It* by Susan Beth Pfeffer

Name withheld by request

Woodrow Wilson High School, Beckley, WV  
*Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

**Jessica Daughtry**

Washington High School, Charles Town, WV  
*Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury

**Jack Dudich**

The Linsly School, Wheeling, WV  
*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

Name withheld by request

Dora Bee Woodyard Memorial Library, Elizabeth, WV  
*Princess Academy* by Shannon Hale

**Michael Haney**

Dora Bee Woodyard Memorial Library, Elizabeth, WV  
*No Easy Day* by Mark Owen and Kevin Maurer

Name withheld by request

Greenbrier West High School, Charmco, WV  
*Self Portrait* by Edward Hirsch

Name withheld by request

Dora Bee Woodyard Memorial Library, Elizabeth, WV  
*Old Yeller* by Fred Gipson

**Bradley Jenkins**

Gilmer Co. High School, Glenville, WV  
*Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler

Name withheld by request

Dora Bee Woodyard Memorial Library, Elizabeth, WV  
*The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton

**Morgan Larch**

South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
*Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep* by Mary Fryer

**Mary Laswell**

East Fairmont High School, Fairmont, WV  
*The Blood of Olympus* by Rick Riordan

**Mikinna Poling**

Buckhannon-Upshur High School, Buckhannon, WV  
*The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost

Name withheld by request

South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
*The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton

**Victoria Rapp**

Spring Mills High School, Martinsburg, WV  
*A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness

**Morgan Reveal**

South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

**Corey Riner**

Preston High School, Kingwood, WV  
*Sleepers* by Lorenzo Carcaterra

**Madi Rogers**

Washington High School, Charles Town, WV  
*Accidents* by Amy Everhart

**Lucretia Shumate**

The Linsly School, Wheeling, WV  
*Is It in Your Genes?* by Philip Reilly

**Gwynn Smith**

Dora Bee Woodyard Memorial Library, Elizabeth, WV  
*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

**Kaley Vestal**

Greenbrier West High School, Charmco, WV  
*The Program* by Suzanne Young

**Haley Weatherholtz**

Washington High School, Charles Town, WV  
*Dearly Beloved* by R.I.D.

**Josiah Womack**

James Monroe High School, Lindside, WV  
*The Great Santini* by Pat Conroy

**David Wright**

South Charleston High School, South Charleston, WV  
*The Legend Trilogy* by Marie Lu

**Ethan Wriston**

Dora Bee Woodyard Memorial Library, Elizabeth, WV  
*The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien

Name withheld by request

Dora Bee Woodyard Memorial Library, Elizabeth, WV  
*A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Daniel Handler

**Write about it...**

**Autographs...**

# **Attach souvenir program....**

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