

West Virginia Center for the Book

Letters About Literature 2010

West Virginia Center for the Book
West Virginia Library Commission
Culture Center
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East
Charleston, WV 25305
304-558-3978

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Directory

Special Notice

The response to this project is so great that the West Virginia Center for the Book will publish only the essays receiving Top Honors, Honors, and Honorable Mention Awards. The letters appearing in this publication depict the students' writing as it was submitted for judging. All attempts were made to keep the grammar and spelling true to the students' submissions, with the exception of necessary corrections to titles and authors. 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.

Level One

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	5	Harvath, Colin		Freas, Mason	Mosley, Halley
	5	Keaton, Riley		Funk, Andrew	Robson, Blaise
	6	Riggs, Chase		Funk, Jack	Siers, Seth
	6	Shanklin, Jessica		Graham, Ary'an	Woods, Abby
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	8	Clark, Austin		Name Withheld	Platz, Graham
	9	Dahlia, Sabrina		Fraley, Kayla	Stoffel, Zoe
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	10	Miller, Rachel		Harless, Robert	Name Withheld
	10	Moore, Mikayla		Harrison, Destiny	Thompson, Brad
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	15	Name Withheld		Holcomb, Victoria
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	16	Nichols, Hannah		Name Withheld
	17	Richards, Katarina		Phillips, Mikayla
				Sheppard, Cecila
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Additional Letters & Remarks-Pages 20-22

Level I

Top Honors

Cara Laswell-Fairmont Catholic Grade School

Stargirl by Jerry Spinelli

Dear Jerry Spinelli,

Last year I read your book, Stargirl. When my teacher gave it to me, I didn't think I'd like it, but I had read your wonderful book Loser, so I decided to read it. After I read the first chapter, I was amazed at how entertaining the book was. I think it was entertaining because it was how I wished I was. It was my fantasies. I wasn't really an outsider, but I was afraid to be best friends with everybody because I was shy. Then I read your book and everything changed.

I was shy, and I thought something was wrong with me because I was called names. But after I read your book it made me want to be outgoing and different at the same time. That's how I am now. As the year progressed, I changed into somebody who enjoyed being who I am, and if I'm going to be betrayed like Stargirl was, I don't need that person as a friend. I just need to keep my true friends close and forget about those who aren't the nicest people in the world.

While I was changing, I felt more confident in myself. I enjoy being who I am now, and nobody can change that. Nobody can change who I am and I know that if I'm okay with who I am. For everybody who isn't, well, just isn't worth the time and heartache.

The most important part of the book to me was when Stargirl wasn't afraid to sing to anyone whose birthday it was. I also enjoyed the part where I found out that she was the girl who sent the porcupine tie. I like to think that I modeled the new me after Stargirl. I like to be myself, I try my best to be a good person, and I forgive and forget.

So, I conclude with a sincere thank you. If it weren't for you, I'd still feel like a girl trapped in the wrong body. Now I love my life with all my heart. You've changed my life just with one book. Without you I don't know how I'd be able to talk to others without getting nervous. I'm confident and happy with myself and I truly thank you with all my heart, mind, and soul.

Thank You,
Cara Laswell

Honors

Myah Sheets-Princeton Middle School

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry

Dear Mrs. Lowry,

Your novel, Number the Stars, has changed me. It has inspired me to change the way I look at friendship, equality, and religion. This novel has made me want to be more like Annemarie and Ellen. I want to be a better person.

First, your novel has changed the way I look at friendship. Annemarie did everything she could to help her best friend, Ellen. Ellen was Jewish. She even lied to the Nazis to save her Jewish friend. This novel makes me want to help my friends, no matter what hardships we face. I want to do everything I can for my friends. Number the Stars has inspired me.

Next, your novel has changed the way I look at equality. Adolf Hitler and the Nazis killed people just because they didn't like the facial features of the Jews. I think everyone should be treated the same. That is the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." For example, at school, I treat people well. Therefore, they treat me well, too. Your novel has taught me so many lessons.

Last, your novel has changed the way I look at religion. Ellen and her family were consistent in their beliefs even though they were almost killed by Adolf Hitler. This novel has taught me to never doubt my beliefs, no matter what happens. It makes me want to attend my church youth group every chance I get. After reading your novel, I feel like a different person. I feel better.

In conclusion, your novel has inspired me. It changed the way I feel about my friends, my freedom, and my religion. After reading Number the Stars, I want to help my friends, treat everyone equally, and be consistent with my beliefs. Your novel has taught me three important lessons that will help me for the rest of my life.

Sincerely,
Myah Sheets

Honorable Mention

Haven Cochran-Mercer Elementary

Missing May by Cynthia Rylant

Dear Cynthia Rylant,

I read Missing May and it taught me about love, caring for others, and determination. It really made me think.

First, your book taught me that love is shown in different ways. Before I read your book, I thought I could recognize love. I thought about Ob and May, and I realized that different kinds of love were all around. Ob made whirligigs for May and that showed his love for her. When May brushed Summer's hair, she felt love. Cletus felt love from his parents who gave him the freedom to be who he wanted to be.

Second, Missing May taught me about caring for others. At first, I thought that caring for others would not do me a lot of good. But when I started to lose friends, teachers, and even family member's respect I realized that it was very important. Your book said that to me when Ob cared for Summer throughout the book. Also, Ob showed sympathy and care for Cletus when he "turned that buggy around" and took Cletus and Summer to the capitol.

Lastly, the story taught me about determination. That it is the power to get what you want or to be who you would like to be. Ob and Summer did not go to Putnam County to see Reverend B. Young (Medium At Large) for no reason. It was for a purpose. I would have just given up halfway through. But your book showed me that determination was one of the things that I needed to reach farther down inside and find myself—the true me.

When I read your book Missing May, it taught me of love, caring for others, and determination. Your book really changed me. As you said in your book, there was a wind that blew and set everything free. Thank you Cynthia Rylant, for Missing May.

Sincerely,
Haven

Honorable Mention

Tyler Easley-Bluefield Middle
“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost

Dear Robert Frost,

Your poem “The Road Not Taken” has made a major impact on my life. Since I read your poem, I am more ambitious, patient, and willing to persevere. These characteristics make me a better person. The type of person I am proud to be. Thank you for giving me a reason to show more self respect.

I think the reason I am impacted by your poem is because I understand it. I understand that the choices we make define who we are as a person. The only problem is that I sometimes wonder if I make the right decisions. If I do, I will be respected for my wisdom. But if I don’t then all the respect I deserve from others, will be forgotten and not given to me. After reading your poem, I also understand that it is better to be a leader than a follower. If I take the road not taken, others might follow my lead and do what they feel is best for themselves.

I am more ambitious in a way that, if I have a goal to reach, I will reach it, one way or another. When I feel something is important enough to go after, then I will go for it passionately and unmercifully. Anything I put my mind to, I can do. For example, I always wanted to play soccer for the middle school so I tried hard and practiced day after day, working on my skills. Eventually I tried out and made the team. Thanks to my hard work and grueling time with a soccer ball I was able to attain my goal.

Thanks to you, I am also more patient. I live life one day at a time. I go for the things I want; I just go for them at an acceptable rate. It’s like eating ice cream. Eat it slowly and you will enjoy it’s pleasures longer. Eat it quickly and not only will you have your ice cream for a short period of time, but you will also receive “brain freeze,” and I don’t like “brain freeze.”

When dealing with “brain freezes”, I try to fight through them. After reading your poem, I now have the will to do so. I deal with the “brain freeze” as effectively as possible, by persevering and trying to get to the next good thing coming. For example, I one

time entered a poem into a competition. I really had my hopes set high. I just knew I was going to win but when the letter came I found that I did not. So I tried harder and wrote better poems and entered them into different competitions and have won. I know the reason I was able to win was because I persevered through the fact that I had not won that first competition. I believe perseverance is a virtue of civilized life. You gave me the gift perseverance.

These are the reasons I am now a leader, a patient person, and I’m always persevering through the problems. “The Road Not Taken” is a poem that enhances my character, personality and lifestyle.

Thank you,
Tyler Easley

Honorable Mention

Colin Harvath-Fairmont Catholic Grade School
Harry Potter Series by J.K. Rowling

Before I read your Harry Potter Series. I was always on the computer or playing video games. But ever since I’ve read your book I’ve been inspired to read. Every chapter I began, I would start think about the next or what was going to happen. The morals of every book taught me something new. I loved how the strong friendship of Harry, Ron, and Hermione last forever. They taught me that even when your best friend makes you mad, it should never break you apart.

Now instead of getting on the computer I pull out a chair and read. This has began my new hobby.

Now I’m always exited to get a new book. When I first went to read your book, I thought was going to be to boring and long. I just can’t believe how many books I’ve missed out on by judging by their cover.

Thank you for writing this inspiring book. You book have helped me become a better reader. Please write more novels. Maybe I’ll learn a new moral.

Sincerely,
Colin Harvath

Honorable Mention

Riley Keaton-Spencer Middle School
Angels and Demons by Dan Brown

Dear Dan Brown,

When I read your book, Angels and Demons, it changed the way I thought about the creation and so-called war between science and religion. I was always on the side of God and religion. When I read your book, you made it so easy for me to wrap my head around the fact that The Big Bang and Genesis were a possibility. I would have been disenchanted by people like Leonardo Vetra, who brought science and religion together. He explained how they were just two sides telling the same story, but

they each emphasized different parts of the story. My mind now comprehends that it all could have happened in the beginning.

I have come to admire the thoughts and logic of Professor Robert Langdon of your story. I would read parts about the Altars of Science, and I just could not figure it out. I thought so literally about the words that I was blinded to the real meaning in between the words themselves. The search for the altars taught me to not be so literal in reading. Instead, look at it from a metaphysical standpoint that compares it to everything else you see from your new viewpoint. I learned to take things for their symbolism instead of what was in black and white in front of me.

In the end, I have been changed for the better. I have learned that Genesis and the Big Bang are one in the same. As I said before, I have been changed for the better.

Sincerely,
Riley Keaton

Honorable Mention

Chase Riggs-Johnson Elementary School
Follow My Leader by James B. Garfield

Dear Mr. Garfield,

I recently read your book, Follow My Leader in my 5th grade Reading class and I wanted to write to you to tell you how much it opened my eyes to people with disabilities and about forgiveness. Your story was also very personal to me because I have a cousin who is blind.

One of the lessons that I learned in this book is to never judge someone that has a disability. They are just the same as you and me; they may just have to do things a little differently. They don't want to be treated special or pitied they just want you to treat them the way you treat everyone else.

Another lesson that I learned was the power of forgiveness. Forgiveness just isn't for the person that has done something to you, it is for you too. If you don't forgive, you carry that hate around and it continues to eat at you. I realize now that when you forgive someone you become a better person and not a bitter person.

The most important lesson I learned from your novel was all of the things that a blind person can accomplish. My cousin Zeke is blind and I have always looked at him as being so different than me and thought that we didn't have much in common but now I see things differently. I know that Zeke needs my friendship and love more than he needs my help.

Your friend,
Chase Riggs

Honorable Mention

Jessica Shanklin-Bluefield Middle School
Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

Dear Kate DiCamillo,

I think you have written a truly inspiring, amazing book. The book Because of Winn-Dixie has inspired me to be more courageous, more helpful, and less shy. Before I read this book, I didn't face my fears, appreciate others, or help out when needed. It has made a dramatic change in my life, and I thank you for that!

First of all, I'd like to thank you because the book taught me to be more courageous. In the book Winn-Dixie had a pathological fear of thunderstorms. After a while Winn-Dixie became more used to them. I used to be afraid of being alone, but after reading this book five years ago, I learned to face life and started to understand that everyone has to be alone sometimes.

Then, the book taught me to be more helpful. In the book Opal started helping people a lot. She helped Gloria throw a party and helped everybody else get over death and losses of family and friends. I started to help my sister with homework, help my mom with cleaning, and help my dad cook. I think this has been a pleasure to me and my family.

Finally, it has taught me to be less shy. Opal was shy in the beginning and didn't want to make friends; I've been more sociable since then, but I have stayed a little shy. Thanks to you I have realized it is okay to be a little shy, but you need friends to help you through life.

The book Because of Winn-Dixie is truly inspiring. It has taught me to be more courageous, help out more, and be less shy. It has made a dramatic change in my life. Thanks a lot.

Sincerely,
Jessica Shanklin

Level II

Top Honors

Molly Lovern-Bluefield Middle School

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly by Jean-Dominique Bauby

Dear Jean-Dominique Bauby,

Ouch! Yet again I've cut my finger, late at night, lying in bed, with nothing fueling me other than the feeble glow of my book-light and my ferocious yearning to lose myself in your writing. Your autobiography, The Diving Bell and the Butterfly--your story as an intelligent, sophisticated man trapped inside his own body -taught me that even though I may not always be able to overcome every obstacle heaved into my way; I can always face it with my chin up and my metaphorical sword and shield at the ready.

Earlier this year, I contracted mononucleosis, a variation of the Epstein-Barr virus, of which symptoms include extreme fatigue and muscle weakness. I am a competitive, passionate soccer player; therefore, being ill and stationed on my couch for weeks, wrapped in blankets, was obviously not ideal. Several times, I tried to return to practice and my body was not strong enough to take it -- I was ready to quit. Luckily however, I happened upon your book, and boy, what a bolt of luck that turned out to be. Looking into the world of paralysis, the life of a man suffering from locked-in-syndrome, did not only inspire me; it reversed my perspective on the entire situation. Within a month, I was playing again. The story of the ending of your life led me to understand the importance of facing your own battles with an optimistic outlook and persevering through them. With this acquired knowledge, I suddenly realized that all the realms of achievement imaginable were in my reach.

Since I read The Diving Bell and the Butterfly, I've no longer feared standing up to challenges, I've no longer cowered in the facade of seemingly insurmountable hurdles, I've no longer doubted that there is always a bigger picture and a positive spin on every situation. Your maintained passion through the battle for your life confirmed my faith of kindness and goodness in the human race.

Thank you,
Molly Lovern

Honors

Danielle Coffinbarger

The Lord of the Ring Trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien

Dear Professor Tolkien,

When my Dad told me I had to read The Lord of the Rings series before I could watch the movies, I didn't hesitate. It was a book and I love reading. He warned me that it was a difficult read, and that was probably one of those books that you read once and that was good enough. Now, however, they're falling apart from being opened so many times. I have read The Lord of the

Rings countless numbers of times and am always discovering something new or an old fact that suddenly made sense. The world of Middle-Earth has turned me upside-down.

Ever since opening The Fellowship of the Ring three years ago, I've often wondered if you knew something that most people didn't and still don't--is the fictional world of Middle-Earth really that fictional? Or is it just taking everyday people and seeing the hobbit, elf, man, dwarf, wizard, or orc in us all? Now I see the traits of these characters in the people that surround me in everyday life.

There are times when life just gets out of control and slips away from me, or when I lose things, like friendship, or my dreams feel like they are fading. I'm the kind of person who is free-willed, ambitious, tries the 'impossible', and just likes to be me. I had a best friend who, after two and a half years of friendship, started to make fun of me: what I thought, what I liked, what I wore. For a long time, until recently I just kept hoping she would realize what she was doing and that she was hurting me. (I still hope she'll come around and we'll be friends again.) When this kind of stuff happens I start to doubt myself. Then I pick up your books and flee to the sanctuary you have built with words. For me the The Lord of the Rings has become a haven full of people that I have come to know, relate to, and love. I feel like I'm not alone on a journey anymore. There is a presence assuring me that at the end of the road there is something, even if it's not what I thought I was looking for. I can place myself in one of your characters shoes and find myself amazed at how alike yet different we are. I have done this so many times I can't count, and in all those times of pretending I have found that it is easiest for me to be one person-Eowyn. She takes control of her own destiny, being a little impulsive at times. She is brave, strong, caring, free-willed, and loyal. To me she embodies what I want to be and what an almost perfect person would be like.

When I completed The Return of the King, I had finished the trilogy and closed the door on Middle Earth, but had opened a different portal in my own world.

I'd like to thank you, Professor Tolkien. You created a realm out of paper, ink, and imagination, and you were willing to share it. To me that has meant a lot.

Sincerely,
Danielle Coffinbarger

Honors

Kendra Wenner-Harpers Ferry Middle School

A Child Called "It" by Davie Pelzer

Dear Mr. Pelzer,

Your book A Child Called "It" has made a huge impact on my life. I already knew about child abuse and the whole foster care system but I never knew how bad it could really be. Your book really opened my eyes to some of the real dangers in this world that most people just pass by and I never knew existed. Ever since

reading that book and its sequel The Lost Boy I have become more appreciative for everything that I have. I realize how amazing my family and friends are and how much they really mean to me and that I'm so glad I have the life I have even though it can get rough sometimes its definitely not the worst.

Your book has also changed the way I look and treat people. Now if I see someone not wearing the best clothes or constantly annoying people for food or toys I don't instantly think that this person is rude or annoying I actually stop to think about why they would really be like this and that maybe they really are having a hard time at home and just need some attention. If someone is caught stealing something and I hear about it on the news or maybe from one of my friends I don't instantly think that they are a bad person or a thief I think maybe they have a family to feed but no money or maybe they aren't provided enough food so they are forced to steal to survive.

Your book has also compelled me to want to help other people. I want to make a difference, donate money to a women's shelter and help bring in food for food drive. I have even helped my parents become foster parents and I plan on being one once I get older and out of college. I no longer get so selfish about my food at lunch when my friends wants some of mine because she forgot hers and when my parents ask me to clean I don't argue and back talk anymore I just do it.

I am very glad I read this book just reading about all the horrors and suffering in a book was enough to make me cry I couldn't even imagine how bad it would be to have actually gone through it so I hope to make a change so that other people don't have to go through all that suffering and pain. So I am going to help out as much as I can, appreciate what I have, and not think so badly about others when maybe it isn't actually their fault they are acting the way they are at all. I thank you for writing this book for it has really changed me in many ways.

Sincerely,
Kendra Wenner

Honorable Mention
Tristan Broughton-John Adams Middle School
Lord of the Flies by William Golding

Dear William Golding,

My name is Tristan Broughton, and I live in Charleston, WV. When I read your book, Lord of the Flies, I thought, "wow, this was the greatest book that I have ever read!" Now it doesn't matter where you live, growing up you will meet people who have a mean streak. This book shows you that even people who you might not even expect could kill another person.

I have never been in a plane crash or abandoned on an island, but I have met kids who have a nice impression, but have a blood-thirsty nature. I loved how you told the reader just what was going through Jack's mind when he killed, whether it was an animal or a person. People want to ban your book, but I think it should be required to be read in every school.

Ralph is a smart child who tries to make a mini civilization. He wants to get the boys rescued. I don't think some parents know just how savvy children can be. Ralph certainly is. Jack is an older kid striving for power, who shows the truth—that some kids would become barbaric given the right situation. I didn't like Jack, but he was a necessary character to prove to people that anyone, that even kids need law, or their world can turn into chaos. The shy character Simon reminds me of a kid I know. Roger, Jack's lieutenant, is a sadistic, cruel older boy who brutalizes the little ones and eventually murders Piggy by rolling a boulder onto him: I hate Roger more than anyone else in this story. The pair of twins closely allied with Ralph, Sam and Eric, are always together, and the other boys often treat them as a single person. They are a sweet reminder that they are all just kids. Piggy was a younger, kind boy; he just wanted to be found, and his death made me cry. The monster (aka The Lord of the Flies) is a very scary symbol, which shows that they are still scared of things in the dark like most kids, and it helps make this novel more realistic.

You are the best author at helping paint an image in my mind. I like to think that I'm like Ralph, because he is athletic and brave. This book was sad, because the boys lost their innocence. It was also a way of telling parents to look out for their kids and don't make them grow up too fast. The fact of how it was like civilization vs. savage was mind blowing. I never would have thought of being in that situation.

I am sure that this book made a lot of people think about things in ways they have never thought before (like me). I have a few questions about how you came up with some of the characters: What does Piggy represent? Was this book really an altered story from the Bible or is it completely yours? "Wow! this is the greatest book that I have ever read."

Sincerely,
Tristan Broughton

Honorable Mention
Austin Clark-John Adams Middle School
"The Third Wish" by Joan Aiken

Dear Joan Aiken,

Your short story, "The Third Wish" has a lot of symbolism and a strong affect on me. It makes me want to cry but not the kind of crying that is from sorrow but for the greatness of it. It has great meaning for me. I believe the story tells you that you should pursue something that you truly love no matter what barriers stand in your way. In this world today we don't see a lot of love for each other, true love at least. I think there is a difference between true love and love. True love cannot be described but only shown through examples. An example of true love would be a mother and her newborn. This woman has undying love for her child. The mother would do almost anything to keep her baby safe and out of harms way. In today's world this would not be a great comparison as there are many stories of bad mothers in the newspapers, but you have to look at how it is in the animal

kingdom. The mothers, in some cases, take care of their child for long periods of time and even for the rest of their lives. These mothers risk their lives in order to protect their young ones. This is undying love or true love. Regular love isn't as high a standard as true love is.

The swan is a unique animal in the animal kingdom. It picks a mate and stays with that mate until it dies and even then, they stay faithful and go on alone until their lives end. Marriage could be an example of that, but in today's world it isn't. People are always getting divorced and separating. The swan cannot comprehend anything such as divorce; it stays faithful forever.

Few people in this world stay together and faithful to each other forever. This is the real meaning of marriage. The swan is one of the only animals that can uphold such a thing. The two swans have undying love for each other. When the man wishes for a companion of great beauty, he gets a swan that has been turned into a human. They then get married and the rest of the story goes on, but this something else happens too. The swan still remembers its life as a swan and now has learned the difficult life of being a human. The swan still wants to be with its sister, but cannot because of the new barrier set between them. The swans have undying love for each other. The swan and the human still have undying love for each other, too. Part of the swan wants to be with its swan sister and the other wants to be with its mate, the man. The man loves his companion so much that he is willing to give her up to become a swan again and be a happy swan like she used to be. While this is all happening, she still has the undying love for both of them. She tells him that she is willing to let her sister go to be with him because she still loves him. He decides to give her up for her own happiness so she can be with her sister.

That just touches me so much that they would do anything for each other. My parents would give up or do anything for my safety, well being, and happiness; this is undying love. This is why my feelings are so strong about this story.

Sincerely,
Austin R. Clark

Honorable Mention
Sabrina Dahlia-Fairmont Catholic Grade School
My Sister's Keeper by Jodi Picoult

Dear Jodi Picoult,

I was deeply impressed by your book, My Sister's Keeper. It is definitely a heart-wrenching story about a family's struggle through the hard times of having a sick child. My life is like Kate's in a way, I have a rare disorder called Left hip Dysplasia. This is when at some point during a pregnancy the blood is cut off to the left hip causing it to become deformed or not properly in the socket joint. In my case it's both. I have had to undergo countless surgeries and MRIs. Let me tell you it's not fun at all.

My mother always says that you don't know what true sadness is until you have a sick kid. I know what Kate's going through.

However, this story also did inspire me. Before I read My Sister's Keeper I wanted to become a pediatrician, but now I can't wait for my time to go to college so I can make a change in the world. I now want to become an oncologist and discover the cure for cancer. I want to bring hope and faith to those millions of people who are dying from cancer. I want there to be no more children and adults who have to suffer with this awful disease.

My Grandfather is also currently battling brain cancer. Granted, it's not nearly as awful as what Kate had to go through, however it's still just as hard to see my Grandpa lose his nicely combed white hair. I feel that this book opened my eyes to a whole new world that I did not even know about. Before I read My Sister's Keeper I did not know that this disease could do more than just make a person not feel well. Now I know that cancer can rip a family to shreds. It can crumple relationships like an old newspaper between a sister, mother, father, and a brother.

Cancer can cause permanent emotional damage to a family and whether the outcome is survival, or not the memories of what the family members have to go through will forever be imprinted like deep, stabbing wounds in their hearts. I would also like to point out something, Kate's unfortunate that she has this disease, but she is so lucky that she has a loving family that cares about her so much and would do anything to save her life. I am also fortunate that I have a loving and supportive family that has been there to protect me and make sure I receive the proper medical care to be able to walk.

My favorite character in your book is Anna. She gave up everything for her sister, including her own life. Anna even sold her golden locket that her father, Sean, had given her after a bone marrow transfusion to file a lawsuit to let her sister die peacefully. Sara, Kate's mother, never gave up on her daughter's fight and to be honest I admire that. Jesse, Kate's brother, is a rebellious young man who smokes and plays with matches, but he is a big softy on the inside and does learn to change later in the book. Sean, Kate's father, supports Sara in everything she does, but then he thinks to himself, "Maybe Sara's going too far with this." Campbell is Anna's lawyer who fights for Anna's rights to her own body only because he wants publicity and knows what it's like to not have control of your body.

This book has taught me so much about the power of love, survival, and family ties. I hope that it will teach others as well. I now realize that you have to live your life to the fullest and appreciate the things you have in life. Give thanks for having a healthy family and shower the ones in need with love.

Thank you Jodi Picoult, thank you so much for writing meaningful stories to inspire people like me. It is because of you that I want to become an oncologist and save lives.

Sincerely,
Sabrina Dahlia

Honorable Mention

Benjamin Lee-Harpers Ferry Middle School
Eragon by Christopher Paolini

Honorable Mention

Rachel Miller-Taylor County Middle School
Uglies by Scott Westerfield

Dear Scott Westerfield:

To be put on an operating table against your own will, to receive a new face, new body, and new brain... no one would want that. And to be put there against your own will?! That is horrible. In your book, *Uglies*, the first book of your series, I learned a lot about being yourself and to be grateful for who you are. When I read your book I found myself becoming... well, myself again. When I was much younger, I was very independent. I always wanted to be the leader and the trendsetter, and usually I was. But as I got to middle school, I got caught up in the "in-crowd." I wasn't doing anything bad like drugs, but I was slowly losing who I was. I would want to dress like everyone else and look like everyone else. I wanted to "fit in." But last year in the 7th grade when I started reading your books, I realized that all of that stuff isn't always the best road to travel. I am currently in the 8th grade and more myself than I've ever been,

In many ways I'm very similar to Tally. Although in the beginning all she wanted was to become pretty, she took a big leap to run away with Shay. And as she goes throughout your books in the series she becomes a wonderful leader. Not only have you helped me to not be ashamed for who I am, but you have helped me look at people differently. I no longer look down on those who don't sit at the "popular" table at lunch. I look at everyone as an equal, because that is what we all are. That's why I am now nice to everyone, and it makes me very happy and satisfied when I make someone's day because I complimented their hair or said they looked pretty. My face lights up when someone comes to thank me for something nice I said.

So, I have realized that no matter what shape, size, or color someone is, they are beautiful in their own way. No one needs the perfect nose or to be able to fit in the right size jeans. We just need to be grateful for what beauties God has blessed us with. So thank you very much for your wonderful series. I hope others who read your books will discover that they are perfect the way they are and no one needs to change that.

A grateful fan,
 Rachel Miller

Honorable Mention

Mikayla Moore-Fairmont Catholic Grade School
To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Dear Harper Lee,

Your book To Kill a Mockingbird really changed my outlook on African Americans' struggle years ago. I had no idea of all the

hardships and how the white people treated them. The story of Scout and Jem's journey being picked on, and hated by some people just because their dad, Atticus, was defending a black man; I cannot imagine people acting like that, or anyone acting like that towards me. Today people might be punished, or even hated because of their background, not so much in America, but in other countries. It's hard to imagine how tough it would be to live like that. It is also hard to believe that people were just out in the open about hating someone, just for the simple fact that they are a different race. I also think it would be so hard to be willing to put someone's life at risk, just because you did not like them; that is an awful, selfish, and terrible thing to do.

Reading this book I realized that life was way different back then. The children were allowed to be gone all day, without their parents knowing. People could get away with things a lot easier then they can now. In some ways I wish life were still like that, to be able to run around with your friends and not be back until dinnertime. Without your parents not worrying about someone taking you, or you getting hurt, in other ways I'm glad life is different, because life was unfair and in some cases people could get murdered, and the murderer not get caught. Plus technology was so under developed that you would never know cause of death, or how to help someone who was seriously injured.

Another thing I took out of this book was the way that some people have different personalities themselves and not even know it. I still don't understand how you can judge someone just on his or her skin color without even knowing him or her. I am glad things are not that way anymore. Thank you for opening my mind; it was a very good book.

Sincerely,
 Mikayla Moore

Honorable Mention

Name Withheld-John Adams Middle School
A History of Africa by Kevin Shillington

Dear Kevin Shillington,

I ended your book with a thirst for more. I don't know what it is about history that interests me but I've always enjoyed learning about it. I have a European ancestry in Africa and I now realize that it is our fault for some of the problems in Africa. At first I was naïve and thought that it was the people in Africa's fault for so many of their problems. I thought that they were lazy bums who didn't want to work for their money, but that was far from the truth. It seems that because of European imperialism many problems exist, for instance because of artificial borders that clumped feuding ethnic groups together there are many terrible and unnecessary wars.

I am still curious whether or not these ethnic groups would still be fighting each other, and would their countries be too small for success. I don't think that this really matters much anymore. Before I read your book I thought that Africa was a nation of naked savages beating on drums. This is not true and only goes to

show how naïve many of us are. I admit that I once thought that the colonial powers were a source of good whereas they actually destroyed many cultures whose ideas and beliefs are now lost forever.

The sole justification for this rash imperialism is that they were, “modernizing Africa.” That was not even the real reason for this; the Europeans were just after the natural resources in Africa. I was under another naïve assumption, that Egypt was the only major African nation. I’ll never forget those great African civilizations like the Zulus or Great Zimbabwe. I was disgusted by the way the colonists in the Belgian Congo treated the African populations. I will now fight so that nobody is ever treated that way ever again.

“Why don’t we learn more about these cultures in school,” you have to ask yourself. Your book helped me come to the conclusion that our social studies were too general and need to be more specific or we might destroy more cultures because of a misplaced sense of superiority or ignorance.

Hopefully the twenty-first century will bring about development and prosperity for Africa. This won’t come easily and will require them all to cooperate instead of hating each other. While there is hope many countries are running out of water and this may lead to warfare between the nations of Africa. I can’t tell the future we can only know the past, but I can tell you that Africa is a special place that must be respected and not abused.

Sincerely,
Name Withheld
P.S Write another book!

Honorable Mention

Name Withheld-Oakvale Middle School
My Louisiana Sky by Kimberly Willis Holt

Dear Miss Kimberly Willis Holt,

Your book My Louisiana Sky moved me very much. I feel you wrote the book about me but just tweaked it a little. The character Tiger Ann and I are very similar in so many ways. She and I both live in rural areas, we both live with our grandmothers, and we both go to church. Most importantly, we have both been pressured to move in with a relative at one time or another. It is surprising to me that you and I have never met and you still wrote about Tiger like it was me! It was sort of chilling to think that you could do that.

When I was first born, both of my parents were very young and were still in high school. My mother still lived in my grandparent’s house so I did too. My grandmother and I became very close and were inseparable. When my mom moved out, I stayed put. This stalled me having to decide who to stay with. Right after Thanksgiving when I was six years old, my mom and step-dad asked me to come live with them. At first I was happy and excited about the idea. but then the reality sank in. I would see my grandmother only on the weekends if I moved. I thought

on it, then as hard as it was, I came to a decision. I concluded that I was going to stay with my grandmother.

The next time my parents asked me to move in with them was when I was seven years old. They had taken me and my new baby brother to a restaurant. We were going to celebrate C.J. being born, but we were also there for them to tell me about their new house. They said it would be everything I could ever want: my own large bedroom, an in-ground swimming pool, and two-stories high. Then when I went to see it the next day, I knew they were absolutely right. I was going to say yes, but then I thought about my grandparents and again said no.

When I was nine years old, they asked me again. This time my mom was pregnant with my sister Gracie. Every time they had asked me, it seemed like it was getting harder to turn them down. If they wanted me to move in that bad, they must have really needed me. My mind wanted to say yes, but my heart kept feeling for my grandparents and I said no. This time took the most consideration to say no.

I was flabbergasted that Tiger and I were so much alike! As I read, I felt the exact feelings that you gave Tiger. I was excited and happy at the first mention of living with my parents. After pondering the possibility of moving away from my grandparents’ house, I began to feel sadness and grief for them. Then I felt stuck between two decisions because I knew that both choices would make me happy, but only one would benefit me and my grandparents. In the end Tiger was pleased with her decision and so am I. My whole family has enjoyed your book so much that we have gone to the bookstore and bought our own copy.

Sincerely,
Name Withheld

Level III

Top Honors

Tracy Patton-Capital High School
Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare

Dear Mr. Shakespeare,

Have you ever witnessed a hail storm while the sun is shining? I have. I was sitting in my tenth-grade English class gazing out the window, as tiny ice balls hit the ground and the sun quickly melted them away. My teacher had been calling my name, "Tracy dear, come back to Earth." I could not help but to look outside; it was disgusting yet beautiful at the same time. Once I had realized that my teacher had been trying to grasp my attention for quite sometime, I quickly snapped back at her with an abrupt, "Huh?!" as if I were waking from a trance. She then assigned me my role in Romeo and Juliet. Because there weren't many guys in my class, I was given the part of Mercutio, and I thought to myself, "Great, I have to die first."

As I read the part of Mercutio, I felt your story come to life, and my heart began to race with each turn of a page. It was so full of lust, hatred, friendship, poetry, and grief; I could not help but feel overwhelmed, whether it was my turn to read or not. Far too soon I spoke my last words as neither a Capulet nor Montague, "A plague on both your houses!" It was astonishing! I felt as though I, myself had died.

The bell rang and my class was over, but the story had not yet ended. The next day we continued the reading of your play, and though I had no more lines as Mercutio, I was drawn into the drama amongst my classmates. Before I knew it Juliet had stabbed herself over the loss of her beloved Romeo, and the curtain closed. The end. My eyes were heavy with tears and I tried to hide it with a chuckle, but there was really nothing to laugh about. You are a brilliant author. You, Mr. Shakespeare have made me realize that love and a new life can come from a tragedy.

My tragedy was the death of my grandmother. She was dear to not only me, but everyone that had ever been around her. Most considered her a saint; unfortunately she had been living with cancer for quite a while before passing. Much like the way you viewed death, I saw the tragedy of losing my grandmother as something beautiful, and thus I was inspired to write a song, much like the way you wrote sonnets.

Verse 1

Oh these tears are tears of sorrow,
These tears are tears of pain,
Won't you please just take them now Lord,
And let me be, just let me be.

Chorus

I want to be free, free as an eagle
Flying high above the sea.
I want to be free. Free as the saints
Who are watching over me.

Verse 2

Oh my memories, so sweet and tender,
So pure and close to me,
I want to keep them all here with me
Please, don't let them go far.

Chorus

I want to take them with me, over the mountain,
Way past the deep blue sea.
I want to take them with me, to the saints
Who are watching over me.

Chorus

I am free, free as an eagle
Flying high above the sea.
And now I'm here with the saints
Who have watched over me.

Thank you, William Shakespeare for sharing with me the beauty of a tragedy.

Life's good.
Tracy Patton

Honors

Thomas Holland-Musselman High School
The Bible by Prophets and Holy Men of God

Dear Prophets and Holy Men of God,

The Bible is the best book ever written. In fact, it is one of the only books I have read. Not being a big reader, I usually don't find books to suffice my specific interest. I am also ashamed to say that I did not always use the Bible as my moral compass or code. The Bible was used at church for Bible school or at home before I went to sleep. I used the Bible as much as I practiced being a Christian. In church I would fidget and squirm until my parents would tell me to pipe down or leave.

Over the last two summers I have renewed my active faith as a Christian and told my father that I was thinking about reading the Bible from start to finish. He laughed and told me that it would be difficult because the Old Testament was a very boring thing to read and suggested that I start from the New Testament that had many of the parables, and the story of Jesus. I told my father that if it was in the whole entire Bible, I would read it.

I soon as I started to read I was transfixed by the poetry and storytelling of the Bible. Its words were so old and stylized that it made me fall in love with the type of writing. The way I looked at life was very different and I started making better decisions about how I would treat others and I was introduced to the phrase "simple acts of kindness". I started opening doors for people and being more open about my walk as a Christian. People noticed the change I had made and asked what was different. I answered, "I've finally seen God."

As I went on past the first books, I have to confess it was difficult to read some of the body of the Old Testament including the rules that the Israelites had to follow. And even for a time I put the book down feeling shameful and said that I couldn't continue to read. God's strange will sent me back into the book. At Sunday school, we were reading a passage right from the chapter, talking about the story of David and Goliath. David bravely faced the towering giant with just a stone and sling while others had perished with a swords and armor. David shot one stone into the middle of the giant's head and killed him on the spot.

The story inspired me to face the giant I needed to overcome and finish the book. Its poetic and epic stories developed and taught new and wise moral lessons that I had never heard before. Lessons included when Jonah needed a wake up call on what God clearly wanted him to do, or Job who was taught the lesson of faith and perseverance when it comes to God. I finally saw the world the way it was meant to be seen. I could see God's beauty all around me. It wasn't just the picture perfect view of a ravine of trees sloping down the most beautiful mountain face you had ever seen. God's beauty was also the grass and worms beneath my feet.

I loved the Gospels and how they talked about Jesus' ministry and the stories and parables that were in them, but I had heard most of them before while in church. I really enjoyed the story of Paul. The tale had such a redemptive power to it, especially since Paul used to persecute Christians. After a bit of pushing from God, Paul along with Peter went on to start the Christian church that is still here today.

I have made some mistakes in my life and the story really helped me to realize that I could be forgiven and that I should be that thankful for what I had. It is truly humbling to think that people could be forgiven and that I should be thankful for what I had, when back in Jesus' time Christians had to meet in catacombs underground in order not be persecuted. In the end though, reading the Bible truly helped me realize that the Bible is really the truth. I finally know now that the Bible is more than a nonfiction book, it is a biography.

Your grateful reader,
Thomas B. Holland

Honors

TylerAnn Jones-Wirt County High School
White Oleander by Janet Fitch

Dear Janet Fitch.

As I read your book White Oleander I found myself connecting with the main character Astrid. Although I am not a foster child and have never had to move around to different places, I could still relate with her feelings of loneliness. This book helped me to persevere and believe that better things would happen in the future if I survived through the present. I can link this book to many decisions and and actions during one of the darkest times of my life.

When I began reading this book, I realize now that my life was quickly spiraling towards depression. My parents were fighting constantly. I'd just gotten out of two awful relationships and found myself stepping into a new one where the outcome looked to be worse. I felt like I just couldn't stop myself. Life seemed to me like a fast moving river; and here I was with a little canoe and one measly paddle. Astrid's discovery of the survival book inspired me to fight the current that had swept me off my feet, and find a way to stand strong, again. Even though I felt like I couldn't control anything that was happening in my life, I knew that if I didn't try to change the circumstances on my own, I would never survive.

Through my own experiences, I found that I could understand Astrid's feelings about the problems and situations she encountered as the book continued. As she was put through countless bad and situations with a variety of characters and influences upon her she developed strength to survive them all. The way that Astrid was molded by all of the many characters in the book made me realize the ways that I myself have been changed by the influence of the people I surround myself with. In this book Astrid always adapted to her surroundings. Often times she let people change her in some way in order to fit in better. I have always struggled becoming comfortable with my own appearance, and I understand why Astrid let herself be shaped by the circumstances. Being proud of who you are, how you act, and what you look like is something that every human being should learn, and this book taught me that.

I also realized how to use my individual strengths to help myself get through the day, one step at a time. For me, my greatest strength is my Art. Astrid also used her artwork, even at a young age, as a basis of strength and method of escape. I love to draw and paint, and I have been creating artwork since before I can remember, just like Astrid. While I was reading this book, I realized that I had not painted for a great time, and that I missed it very much. The following day I painted for the first time in months and by doing this small thing I felt so much better about myself. One of many small weights seemed to have been lifted off of my soul.

At the end of your book, when Astrid went to find Paul Trout in New York, and stayed with him was a very enjoyable conclusion. This was very inspiring to me, that love can persevere through anything for anyone, no matter how difficult the circumstances are. In the end, Astrid finds happiness with Paul Trout, and this made the story excellent. When I finished this book it didn't seem like the end of just another story. This book, after completing it, seemed to open new doors for me. I started to take control of my life, cleaning things up, and finding ways to help myself. I told the boy I was with I needed space and he dumped me the next day. This was very beneficial to my confidence and self esteem. I found myself opening up and talking to new people. Two months after this, I finally talked to the boy I had crushed on since the fourth grade, and our relationship blossomed. I have now been with him for over two years, and he supports me, gives me strength and makes me happy. Because of your book White Oleander my life has improved greatly, with my depressive memories locked away and left behind me, like one of Astrid's suitcases.

Thank you,
TylerAnn Jones

Honorable Mention

Katelyn Cottrell-Wirt Co. High School

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone by J.K. Rowling

Dear J.K. Rowling,

The Harry Potter series is the most amazing 7 books I've ever read. I grew up on Harry Potter. Though I got older and wiser, as the books seemed to do as well, I never cease to love the very first book of the series, Harry Potter and the Sorcerers Stone. The first Harry Potter book that J.K. Rowling wrote was easily the best in my opinion. Harry was still a young boy, learning to deal with life, and I at that age had difficulties similar.

Harry Potter was 11 years of age and living with his aunt and uncle. They were the ghastliest people in my personal opinion. They were nasty people, but their offspring, Dudley, now he was awful. How does this relate to me? Well, I never lived with my uncle or aunt, but, however, I did have an awful, I mean dreadful brother. He reminds me, oh so much of Dudley. From day one, I was tortured. I got the smallest room, like Harry. I did chores and got beat on, just like Harry. I'd read that book, when I felt alone and misplaced. Harry inspired me to put up with my surroundings at home, and I should do my best to get over what was going on to complicate my life. Luckily, I reached age 10, almost 11 like Harry, and I got into middle school.

Middle school was like my Hogwarts. I had to stay with my grandmother a lot during the year. When Harry went to Hogwarts, he had to make new friends, deal with pressures, and handle hard classes. I went to school and would think about how Harry handled things. Harry made the right choice in not being friends with Malfoy. He motivated me, unknowingly, to stay away from making the bad decisions in friend relations. There was a girl in the class ahead of me, who I knew was a bad influence, who tried to get me to do the wrong things during school, and thanks to Harry, I had the courage and thrive to say no. Harry achieved through strict and harsh teachers, so I knew I could do it, too. Harry's goals were similar to mine, therefore, I was always looking for Harry's answers to help me find my own. It really helped in sports.

Harry Potter was a young starting player of a Hogwarts sport called Quidditch. He was young, yet he was very gifted in the game. Harry had to deal with older members and opponents of Quidditch. Harry of course persevered all his troubles. With older members from his team who weren't so happy he was there, he simply ignored them, and he enjoyed playing his game. Other players, soon became friends; they helped him a lot on his way. As I would read the book, I would see how Harry handled all players and conflicts; then, I would apply this new knowledge into my life. Harry stood up to the components, and he played to his best abilities, regardless of the environment. As I became more of a player, instead of a fearful child, I soon realized that Harry and I weren't that different.

Harry inspired and motivated me in so many ways. As I look back on the years, I honestly can't picture how I would have

handled my experiences without the prior knowledge from J.K. Rowling's fantastic book. I was moved by the way he handled himself, and I learned to be myself. J.K. Rowling, you are my hero. Without your book, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, I would probably still be that little lost girl, stuck in confusion. I have more courage and self confidence than I ever pictured being able to have, and I give all thanks to you and Harry, of course! It's funny how a book can easily inspire you to be a better, stronger person. I'll never forget how my life truly started.

Sincerely,

Katelyn Cottrell

Honorable Mention

Paige Hacker-Richwood High School

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Dear Mrs. Lee:

Many words may describe the character Atticus Finch, but one word that never leaves my mind on the discussion of To Kill a Mockingbird is perseverance. Perseverance is persisting constantly to a purpose or task in spite of obstacles. Atticus goes against what his peers and society itself believes and supports a black man named Jim in a case in which he is wrongfully accused. Atticus Finch, from my personal view and your constant reaffirmation of his character throughout the novel, is just that. Atticus' perseverance throughout the novel has had a great influence on my life.

Atticus first demonstrates his unwavering will by representing Jim, even though he was African American. Society can be very persuasive and even make life miserable if one may choose to be the odd man out. Atticus, aware of the circumstances, did not allow this to affect his moral stand on what is truly right. His perseverance to do what was right in spite of the conflict of the society and the hardship placed on his entire family, has inspired me to persevere throughout everyday life despite of what may stand in my way.

Holding on to my morals and knowing when to keep on persevering is one endeavor I have worked hard to achieve in my life and will continue to practice. When presented with the choice between my morals and what the rest of a group would consider to be the right, I choose my morals and persevere as Atticus did in the story by representing Jim, knowing full well that those around him would be against his decision and would even segregate themselves from him. When school work has gotten to the point that I feel like I am overwhelmed, I am inspired by Atticus—when he continued to defend Jim, even when overwhelmed by the racist jury and the threats against his beloved family—to push on toward my goal even when all I want to do is close my books. I am also inspired in basketball by his unbending character; I learned not to give up on myself or my team regardless of what the odds are and to fight for what is important to me as Atticus did.

The world today may seem as if it has turned against itself and that it is not uncommon for people to just give up on what they believe in because the society around them believes in something different. Your book has taught me one of the most important lessons of my entire life: we should always fight for what believe in and to persevere against all odds. This is the only way in which our world will be able to prosper in these troubled times. If your book was this much of an impact on only my life, think of all the other hearts that could be touched by the undeniably heroic deeds of Atticus. Atticus represents the good in all of us when he persevered through his hardships and continued to represent the higher morals we should all strive to achieve

Sincerely,
Paige Hacker

Honorable Mention

Name Withheld-Musselman High School
Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Dear Jane Austen,

I wonder what Elizabeth Bennet would be like in the twenty first century. Would she be shocked at the clothes we wear? Probably not so much as Miss Bingley would be, but Miss Bingley is unusually spiteful. Lydia and Kitty would go insane in our world. They each remind me of a small child with a shiny set of keys. Mr. Bennet would fit in quite nicely, with what feels like an increase of sarcasm in our society. Mrs. Bennet reminds me of my mother. My mother, like Elizabeth's, also fancies herself nervous whenever she is upset. I never noticed these quirks about people until I read Pride and Prejudice. I never sought out to divulge their character. To me they were two dimensional, with only one defining characteristic. As I read the book a second time, I began to notice the similarities between the characters and those around me.

Jane is like my best friend, sweet, innocent, and I have never heard her say something bad about anybody. My mother and father are almost exactly like Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. My older brother reminds me of Mary, serious and devoted. My younger brother, oddly enough, is more of a Lydia. He flirts constantly, more concerned with his next girlfriend than anything else. His humor is what makes me smile. My youngest sister, the baby of my family, is more of a Kitty. Kitty is a follower, never making her own decisions. Anything Lydia does, Kitty does. I think that is why Kitty felt so abandoned when Lydia went to Brighton. But it is bold faced opinions like these that get Elizabeth into so much trouble. Perhaps it merely appears like Kitty is a follower and is actually just extremely close to her sister. In this, I had to learn the same lesson as Elizabeth.

I feel like a mixture of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bonnet. Wherever Elizabeth goes, she makes friends whereas Mr. Darcy is more reserved and quiet. I feel like him not only in this matter but also in the way that, "My good opinion once lost is lost forever". I cannot easily forgive someone if they hurt me. It takes a great deal to hurt me, however. A mere insulting comment is not

enough for me to lose my good opinion of someone. Like Mr. Darcy, I feel that there is an expectation I am to meet, but like Elizabeth, I smile and laugh while working towards it. I tend to laugh at all things ridiculous.

I wish I could be Elizabeth just for a day. While I was reading, I could smell the trees of Pemberley. I could feel sun as Elizabeth walked to Meryton. I felt Elizabeth's concern for her ill sister as she walked miles in ankle deep mud. I could hear her sisters' laugh and got caught up in the music of the balls. That would probably be what I would enjoy the most: the silk gowns and sweet, flowing music from the live orchestra. If I were Elizabeth, I would also get to dance with Mr. Darcy.

Perhaps one of my favorite parts is the dance between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy. So much tension is between them in that moment. Mr. Darcy is unconsciously trying to impress her and Elizabeth is trying to hate him.

I see things differently now, because of your book. I see the personalities of others. For that, I thank you. The gift of understanding another is not one easily given. Thank you for all you have done.

Sincerely
Name Withheld

Honorable Mention

Name Withheld-Wirt County High School
Amber Brown Wants Extra Credit by Paula Danziger

Dear Paula Danziger,

Out of all of the books I have read in my life, your book Amber Brown Wants Extra Credit has been the most meaningful and comparable to my life. Although I read this book when I was in probably the fifth grade, I can still remember the qualities Amber Brown and I share. I have many things in common with her in this specific book.

In the beginning of this book, Amber makes her mother what she calls "Amberino Certificates." Likewise, I have made similar certificates for my mother for Christmas, birthdays, and Valentine's Day. In your book, Amber feels as if she needs all the help she can get, and sometimes I feel the same way. Life sometimes feels to stressful and I feel as if my mom doesn't really know how I feel. Amber seems to feel the same way in your story. Her mom is always nitpicking at her because she is an only parent, and she believes she needs to be stronger in the way she raises Amber. I can relate to that because my mom feels she needs to be stronger since my dad is gone due to his job a lot of the time. My mother believes that I am not acting how she thinks I should be. In the first few chapters of your book Amber's mother has been fussing at her because her room is never clean enough, she doesn't do her homework as good as she should be, and she is also mad because Amber never wants to meet her new boyfriend Max.

Another thing Amber and I have in common is the fact that we will judge a person before we even really know them. When Amber's mother gets a new boyfriend, Amber says she hates him and will not have anything to do with him before she even gets to know him. I am the same way sometimes. She also uses the excuses that she was to stressed and angry to do her homework; I do that when I just don't feel like doing my homework. Also, a little later in the book Amber loses her best friend Justin because he had to move away with his family. I can relate to this because it seemed like when everything else was going wrong, my best friend had to move away which made matters worse. After my best friend moved away, I felt lost.

In Amber Brown Wants Extra Credit, Amber finally realizes that being nice to Max isn't so hard, and judging someone before you truly know them is a bad habit. I learned to feel the same way and I changed the way I look at people now. Amber still however feels guilty because she is having such a good time with Max and her mother. I believe Amber and I are very much alike in many different ways. She begins to do better in school, she's starting to like her new lifestyle, and she is beginning to look forward to the life that she will have with her mother and Max.

Overall, I feel that I have many similarities to Amber Brown in this book. I enjoyed reading this book because I feel that the characters and lifestyles are realistic, and actually happen in the real world. Thank you, Paula Danziger, for your realistic, funny, yet adventurous story. This book is unforgettable!

Sincerely,
Name Withheld

Honorable Mention

Hannah Nichols-Wirt County High School
A Separate Peace by John Knowles

Dear John Knowles:

We had to read your book, A Separate Peace, in my tenth grade English class. I am not really much of a reader, but your book had something different. I was actually trying to predict what was going to happen next; I enjoyed it. For the first time, I enjoyed reading.

Your book meant many things to me. It made me know that things really don't last forever; everything I have could be gone in a heartbeat. I never really stepped back to look at things in persuasive as your book did. I never thought about the outcome of my actions with my friends. I would always just take things as they came. Since I read your book, I look at what the future can bring by the way I act.

I can't even begin to image how hard it would be to lose my best friend. I'm terribly sorry your friend didn't make it through his surgery. When I think about things like these, I try to be as close to my friends as possible. I would hate to have to say good-bye with a negative impression. I would hate it, because you would not be able to take it back. Also, you would not be able to make it up to them.

I think that it is awesome that you came from West Virginia. I am also from West Virginia. It is also very cool that you went to Yale.

In your book, you sounded pretty serious about you grades. It made me want to try harder in my school work. I actually started studying just from reading your book! I am doing a whole lot better in my classes now. I did not think that I had it in me, but I guess I did. I just had to reach within me and find it. Your book inspired me to start studying.

Your book meant so much to me. My friends would always try to drag me away from my school work as well. Just like you, I fell for it. I noticed that while I was reading. I was surprised when I thought about it. I never really noticed how friends can affect your school work; I guess they can. As you had, I have competition for valedictorian as well. There are six people in my grade that are tied. After reading your book, I notice that I needed to start studying more if I want to win.

I am involved in many sports. I as well have friends who like to make up new games. They always change the rules as we play. They also add rules. I think that it would be great if I could win the Olympics like you. I know that it takes a lot of training and learning new things, but I believe I have the effort inside me to achieve my goals. Now, I want to achieve that goal. If Gene can do it, so can I.

I would also want to write a book about my life. I might have to change a few things here and there to make it a little more interesting. It is not that my life is boring, I just like to do things in a certain order every day. Your book, A Separate Peace, made me want to write a novel about myself. I was not sure on whether I should try to write a story until I read your book. I am happy we read your book.

I loved how your book always kept me guessing. I always tried to predict what would happen next. Most of the time, I ended up being wrong. Sometimes, I was not even close. That is why I think your book was very interesting to me. When Finny took the turn for the worst, I cried. I did not expect that all. It also made me think about my friend. She had gone through the same thing. I try to help her in every way I can. I do not know what else to do, but be there for her.

As you can see, your book has inspired me in many ways. I cannot wait to read another one of your books. Your book is one of my favorite books. I think I am going to read it again, because I loved it that much. I was happy to provide you with this letter saying how much I appreciated your work. When the teacher told us to write this I knew exactly who I wanted to write to. Thanks for all your work; I appreciate it!

Sincerely,
Hannah Nichols

Honorable Mention

Katarina Richards-Wirt County High School
Looking for Alaska by John Green

Dear Mr. Green,

I would just like to say that you are an excellent author. All of your books have made me laugh and think more deeply about life. Each

book I've read has opened my eyes and changed my perception of the world. One of your books that most inspired me was Looking for Alaska. One of the first viewpoints that changed for me was when Pudge decided to go look for a "Great Perhaps." Pudge is a lot like me in a sense; he is a great student and easy child to care for. But even he put aside his "good boy" whims and went looking for his "Great Perhaps," and as he searched for it, Pudge began to live his life and truly experience it. That in turn made me realize that even though I'm doing well in school and at home, I'm not content with the way I'm living my life. I'm not saying I'm to go out and drink or do something reckless, but I'm going to stimulate my mind and experience what life has to offer. I'm going to challenge new ideas and culture my mind.

Another point I would like to mention is that Pudge's final outlook of Alaska's death is beautiful. He saw all of her flaws as a person, and he finally grew to respect that he would never know the exact events that caused her death. He just had to be glad that he knew who she was as a person and that he had found his "Great Perhaps" in Alaska. His wisdom of finally accepting her death and embracing his time with her made me discover a new way of grieving and perceiving death. It showed me that life is truly beautiful and that I should savor every moment of it and not take it for granted because one day I'll lose something or someone special. Most of all it showed me that not all good things will last forever; I should appreciate them in life and in death.

My last and final point to bring up is Alaska's question: "How do I escape this labyrinth of suffering?" As you know, Alaska thought the only way to escape the labyrinth was through death, and she also thought that life itself was just a labyrinth of suffering. When I pondered this question for a bit, I had an epiphany. The labyrinth isn't about escaping from issues in my opinion. There are some experiences in life you aren't meant to run away from, but you are to do the opposite and face them. This said, "labyrinth" is to be coped with. I believe you should look for optimism in life and hold your head up high through the tough times. Because when I think about it deeply, without pain and suffering there wouldn't be compassion.

To conclude, I would just like to say thanks for writing this spectacular book. It made me explore many different opinions and options in my life. It made me challenge my beliefs and my perceptions of the world. This book by far is one of my favorites.

Sincerely yours,
Katarina Richards

Coordinator
Karen Goff
2010 Letters About Literature Booklet by Young Writers

Dear 2010 Letters About Literature Writers,

Many people believe the old saying "Sticks and stones can break my bones but words will never hurt me". These people are wrong. Words are powerful. They can and do hurt. But as you and

thousands of other students across the country have proved, words can also transform. The words of the authors you read inspired love, courage, understanding, heroism, and acceptance in you. The words you wrote in your letters; the words that were read by national screeners, by state level judges, by friends and co-workers of those judges, by the staff of the West Virginia Library Commission, those words inspired admiration, concern, laughter, hope, and joy.

Words are at their best when used to inspire others to find the best in themselves. Your letters described how the words in certain books changed you. Some of you discovered appreciation for what you have. You discovered that you are not alone in your struggles. You learned that good can come out of bad. You discovered the magic of words and reading.

That discovery is why the West Virginia Center for the Book sponsors Letters About Literature. It is why authors are excited about coming to the awards ceremony and speaking to you. It is why the West Virginia Humanities Council provides cash prizes. It is why the First Lady attends whenever possible. This contest encourages students to discover that reading isn't something you do because you have to but because you want to. It is not about writing a book report but about writing about what you discovered. All of you learned that reading opens doors, opens minds, opens eyes. One of you wrote, "I felt you wrote the book about me". Another wrote "It made me picture life in a way I've never pictured it before". Another discovered how "to decipher good from bad a little better".

In his autobiography, Anonymously Yours, Richard Peck, an award winning author of books for young adults, echoes your words and feelings. He says, "*I read because one life isn't enough, and in the page of a book I can be anybody; I read because the words that build the story become mine, to build my life; I read not for happy endings but for new beginnings; I'm just beginning myself, and I wouldn't mind a map.*"

This year 582 students from West Virginia were among almost 70,000 students nationwide who wrote Letters About Literature to authors who had provided each student with a piece of that map of self-discovery. After reading all those letters the national screeners selected 82 letters from West Virginia for state level judging. Being selected is indeed an achievement of which you, your parents and your teachers can be proud. I know that some of you think "Notable Mention" is not a big deal. Please believe me when I say "It IS a big deal". Approximately 90% of all letters written were not selected.

Thank you for sharing your discoveries. Congratulations to all of you; to those who were able to attend the Awards Ceremony and to those who weren't; to those who achieved Top Honors and to those who received other honors. Congratulations to those who entered and whose entries did not get selected for statewide judging. Please don't ever stop reading.

Sincerely,
Karen Goff

Level One-Notable Mentions

Caleb Anselene-Fairmont Catholic Grade School
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone by J.K. Rowling

Tressa Bonasso-Fairmont Catholic Grade School
Loser by Jerry Spinelli

Cole Cochran-Mercer Elementary School
Old Yeller by Fred Gipson

Nicole Cook-Blackshere Elementary School
Green Eggs & Ham by Dr. Seuss

Mason Freas-Spencer Middle School
Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamilla

Andrew Funk-Bridgeport Middle School
Among the Hidden by Margaret Peterson Haddix

Jack Funk-Bridgeport Middle School
The Invisible Man by H.G. Wells

Ary'an Graham-Mercer Elementary School
Missing May by Cynthia Rylant

Michael Hagerman-Bluefield Intermediate School
A Series of Unfortunate Events by Lemony Snicket

Casey Hoy-Blackshere Elementary School
Bethany the Ballet Fairy by Daisy Meadows

Adia Kolb-Blackshere Elementary School
Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse

Fuller Lawson-Bluefield Intermediate School
Green Eggs & Ham by Dr. Seuss

Kelsey Majewski-Spring Mills Middle School
Girls in Pants: The Third Summer of the Sisterhood
by Ann Brashares

Halley Mosley-Spring Mills Middle School
Holes by Louis Sachar

Blaise Robson-Moundsville Middle School
Naruto by Masashi Kishimoto

Seth Siers-Bluefield Intermediate School
Holes by Louis Sachar

Abby Woods-Moundsville Middle School
Number the Stars by Lois Lowry

Level Two-Notable Mentions

MacKayla Boggs-John Adams Middle School
Junie B. First Grader Aloha-ha-ha by Barbara Parks

Nathan Burks-Princeton Middle School
Autobiography of Malcolm X by Alex Haley

Matthew Callaghan-John Adams Middle School
October Sky by Homer Hickman

Cam Elliot-John Adams Middle School
"The Highway Man" by Alfred Noyes

Name Withheld-Taylor County Middle School
I'm a Girl by Lila Lukes

Kayla Fraley-Harpers Ferry Middle School
Ida B...and Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster,
and (Possibly) Save the World
by Katherine Hannigan

Maddie Gilson
Ida B...and Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster,
and (Possibly) Save the World
by Katherine Hannigan

Robert Harless-John Adams Middle School
Lord of the Flies by William Golding

Destiny Harrison
East by Edith Pattou

Abigail Helmick-John Adams Middle School
Point Blanc by Anthony Horowitz

Jalica Hickman-Bluefield Middle School
The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton

Name Withheld-Taylor County Middle School
Twilight by Stephanie Myer

Brett Metheny-Fairmont Catholic Grade School
Percy Jackson Series by Rick Riordan

Caitlin Moore-John Adams Middle School
Maximum Ride by James Patterson

Kia Kennedy Moore-Taylor County Middle School
The Uglies Series by Scott Westerfield

Sarah Morris-Fairmont Catholic Grade School
Sarah's Key by Tatiana De Rosnay

Robert Pavalok-Walton Elementary/Middle School
Elixir by Gary Braver

Level Two-Notable Mentions continued

Graham Platz-John Adams Middle School
“Annabel Lee” by Edgar Allen Poe

Zoe Stoffel-Moundsville Middle School
The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins

Sara Tennant-Moundsville Middle School
Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbitt

Name Withheld-Montcalm High School
Firestarter by Stephen King

Brad Thompson-Bluefield Middle School
Mister Monday by Garth Nix

Jeffrey Williams-Walton Elementary/Middle School
The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook: Middle School
by Ben H. Winters and Robin Epstein

Courtney Wood-Moundsville Middle School
The Well and the Mine by Gin Phillips

Jade Worrels
Thirteen by Lauren Myracle

Name Withheld-John Adams Middle School
The Night World Series by L.J. Smith

Level Three-Notable Mentions

Rebecca Blair-Magnolia High School
“Snowbound: A Winter Idyll” by John Greenleaf Whittier

Cody Boone-Richwood High School
Icwind Dale Trilogy by R.A. Salvatore

Name Withheld-South Charleston High School
The Holy Bible by God

Katelyn Cottrell-Wirt Co. High School
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone by J.K. Rowling

Name Withheld
Freedom Writers Diary by Freedom Writers

Brittani Gaskins-Wirt Co. High School
Twilight by Stephanie Myer

Victoria Holcomb-Richwood High School
Bag of Bones by Stephen King

Name Withheld-Musselman High School
What’s Heaven? by Maria Shiver

Name Withheld-Musselman High School
How It’s Done by Christine Kole MacLean

Mikayla Phillips-Magnolia High School
My Sister’s Keeper by Jodi Picoult

Cecilia Sheppard-Wirt County High School
To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Hannah Watkins-Wirt County High School
Uglies by Scott Westerfield

JUDGES

F. ETHAN FISCHER
Adjunct Professor
Shepherd University
Shepherdstown, WV

ERIC FRITZIUS
President Emeritus
West Virginia Writers
Princeton, WV

PATRICIA HARMAN
Author
Certified Nurse Midwife
Morgantown, WV

JENNIFER SIAS
Director of Information Literacy & Instructional Svcs.
Marshall University
Huntington, WV

ROBIN TAYLOR
Literacy Program Director
Education and the Arts
Charleston, WV

GEORGE WALLACE
Journalist
Brooke County Review
Wellsburg, WV

From the Judges...

Judge-Level I

Robin Taylor

First and foremost, I would like to extend a sincere and heartfelt “Thank You” for allowing me to participate in this wonderful event! Just to know that these children are reading these books, and altering their lives at such a young age because of their interpretations of these books, is simply amazing!

I truly look forward to assisting with this program for many years to come!

Judge-Level I

Jennifer Sias

This was hard!!! But they were a pleasure to read! Thank you for asking me to participate.

Judge-Level II

Eric Fritzius

It was a good deal tougher than I had thought, but still very fun.

There were lots of compelling entries with respectable scores. Eventually I took the pile I had of entries scoring higher than 85 and reread and reevaluated them to try and narrow down the field. They all hung in there pretty strong, though, so there was definitely a lot more time and consideration to the process to finally get things focused down.

Judge-Level II

Patricia Harman

Thank you so much for inviting me to be part of the contest. You were right; the letters are truly moving.

Judge-Level III

Ethan Fischer

Judging was a pleasure (and heartening to see such accomplished writing/reading).

...With best wishes for WV contestants and all your good work for books. (The letters) are packed with candor and insight from young souls reading.

From the Teachers...

Teacher

Lisa J. Dirting-Spring Mills Middle School

The students have had the opportunity to explore and express their creative thoughts in an interesting and positive venue.

Teacher

Judy Hansen-Mercer School

Thank you for providing this opportunity for students to respond to books they have read. It never fails to be a challenging and growing opportunity for them.

Every other year, my Accelerated Reading/Language Arts students read Missing May by Cynthia Rylant. We also take a field trip to Deep Water, West Virginia to visit the setting for the novel and then travel to Charleston to the Capitol Building as did the characters in the novel. At this point in the year, my students have read at least five novels from which to respond. However, several of my students wanted to write about the novel that most touched them. Therefore three of my students chose to write about Missing May but with each reacting to it in a different way. This was a first and I wanted to let you know this was not a “class” assignment.

...Through this opportunity to react and reflect on a novel, I am sure my students have become more active readers.

Teacher

April Petrovsky-Wirt County High School

I appreciate the opportunity you provide for students to write letters to authors and reflect on books they have read. Students now recommend books for me to read, and I value their opinions.

Teacher

Mary Francis Williams-John Adams Middle School

...Some of the students wrote about selections we have read in class while others chose books near and dear to their hearts from childhood or a rough time in their lives....I absolutely love this assignment-it reinforces that reading is an escape, is educational, and is a place where students often find someone with whom to identify.

From the Author...



Robert Tinnell
West Virginia Author

2010 Letters About Literature
Guest Speaker

A short list of graphic novels:

EZ Street

Robert Tinnell, Mark Wheatley

Demons of Sherwood

Bo Hampton, Robert Tinnell

Abomination & Other Tales-Wicked West #02

Todd Livingston, Robert Tinnell, Neil Vokes

Sight Unseen

Robert Tinnell, Bo Hampton

Castle of Shadows-Black Forest #02

Todd Livingston, Robert Tinnell, Neil Vokes

The Faceless-A Terry Sharp Story

Robert Tinnell, Adrian Salmon

The Wicked West Volume 1

Todd Livingston, Robert Tinnell, Neil Vokes

The Black Forest

Todd Livingston, Robert Tinnell, Neil Vokes

West Virginia-native Robert Tinnell is a motion picture screenwriter, director, and producer. He is also the author of several comic books and graphic novels, notably with a horror slant.

His latest works include the graphic novels Demons of Sherwood and EZ Street. A feature film version of his graphic novel and screenplay, THE LIVING AND THE DEAD, is going into production with Brad Anderson directing and Tinnell will be directing the film version of his Eisner Award-nominated graphic novel FEAST OF THE SEVEN FISHES. Tinnell is also currently serving as the director of The Factory Digital Filmmaking Program at Douglas in Monessen, PA (www.DEC.edu).

Write about it...

Autographs...

Attach souvenir program...

*Although Letters About Literature honors students, we applaud
Parents and Teachers
for the support and encouragement given to these developing writers.
Without your contributions and direction,
many of these letter writers would have remained undiscovered.
Thanks to all who participated not only this year, but also in years past.*



*For future competitions and news regarding
the programs and events sponsored by
West Virginia Center for the Book,
please visit our website at www.wvcenterforthebook.org.*

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