

LETTERS  
ABOUT  
LITERATURE  
2016

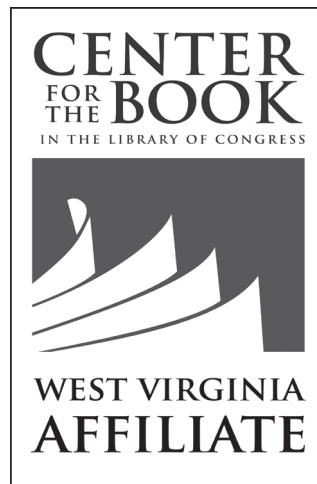
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**WEST VIRGINIA  
AFFILIATE**

LETTERS  
ABOUT  
LITERATURE  
2016



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A PROGRAM OF THE  
**WEST VIRGINIA LIBRARY COMMISSION**



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# LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE 2016

23RD ANNUAL WRITING CONTEST

**THEME: HOW DID AN AUTHOR'S WORK CHANGE YOUR VIEW OF THE WORLD OR YOURSELF?**



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

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

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

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

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

## **ROUND 1:**

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

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

## **ROUND: 2**

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

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

## **AWARDS**

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

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

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# DIRECTORY

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## LEVEL 1: GRADES 4-6

**TOP HONORS: KILEY HARMON**

**HONORS: PAIGE GALVAN, MATTHEW OLIVERO**

**HONORABLE MENTION:**

**ISAAC LOWE, SKYLAR ELLIOT, OLIVIA NOEL, ZOE GREEN, MELIA BECKFORD,  
ZABELLE DUFF, KANTLEY MCKOWN, JESSICA WEST, NICK BROOKS**



## LEVEL 2: GRADES 7-8

**TOP HONORS: MARYAM RAWASH**

**HONORS: PEREGRINE SCHRAY, ANA MARIA GAYTON**

**HONORABLE MENTION:**

**LINDSAY LENZ, CREED KIDNEY, HANNAH BEX, ALEXA BRAGG, ZOE BIZZARI,  
SOPHIE WOLFE, EMILY ANDERSON, ZHENDUO WU, SHAWNA LOCKARD**



## LEVEL 3: GRADES 9-12

**TOP HONORS: OLIVIA WHITE**

**HONORS: HANNAH HARDMAN, IMONE' VELEZ**

**HONORABLE MENTION:**

**HOLLY LLOYD, MACKENZIE CHAMBERS, ASTRID "CADE" FISHER, KAITLIN BUSH,  
JOHN ANTOLINI, MATTEO CERASOLI, PHILLIP SHEETS, KASSIDY BOGDEN,  
SHELBY SNYDER**



**NOTABLE MENTION -- PAGES: 44-47**



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 2016 Letters About Literature award ceremony. I'm sorry I can't attend.

Opening a whole new world, both reading and writing provide endless chances to meet captivating characters and travel to faraway lands. Exploring through words, you're transported to fascinating places and connect with people of all kinds. This experience is undoubtedly a key to learning; and those who avidly read and write excel in both academics and in life.

The Letters About Literature competition offers the perfect opportunity to showcase our state's most gifted students in grades four through twelve. I wholeheartedly commend your hard work and determination.

Let me also applaud those of you at the West Virginia Library Commission and the West Virginia Center for the Book. Your perseverance and effort have brought this wonderful contest to life.

Again, I welcome you to the 2016 Letters About Literature award ceremony, and I congratulate everyone involved. Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Earl Ray Tomblin".

Earl Ray Tomblin  
Governor



*Dear Letters About Literature Writers,*

*Congratulations to all of you who entered this year's contest. Special congratulations to those who received Top Honors, Honors, Honorable Mention and Notable Mention awards. You all stepped up to the challenge of sharing your thoughts with people you don't know and may never meet.*

*Why is this important? Reading makes us think. Writing about what we think makes others think. It is a wonderful cycle through which we learn about ourselves, others, and the world in which we live. The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress agrees. With a generous grant from the Dollar General Literacy Foundation, it promotes the contest nationally through its affiliate Centers for the Book, state libraries and other organizations.*

*"Write to be understood, speak to be heard, read to grow."*

*Lawrence Clark Powell  
Librarian, Literary Critic, Author*

*This year 768 students from West Virginia were among almost 47,392 students nationwide who wrote Letters About Literature. After reading all those letters national screeners selected 103 from West Virginia for state level judging. I know that some of you wonder if "Notable Mention" is a big deal. Only 13% of the West Virginia letters was chosen for state judging. So the answer is "Yes. It IS a big deal".*

*You have made your state, your parents and relatives, your teachers, and everyone who values reading and writing play proud. You have earned the title of "author". Keep reading. Keep writing. Keep thinking.*

*Warmest Regards,*

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

*Karen Goff, Executive Secretary  
West Virginia Library Commission*





# Anna Egan Smucker

## FEATURED SPEAKER

Anna Egan Smucker is a librarian and educator as well as an author. She has worked as a children’s librarian, public school teacher, college professor, and textbook editor as well as being a published poet and children’s book author. She has also written *A History of West Virginia*, a book and workbook on the history of the Mountain State for new adult readers.

Anna Egan Smucker was born in Steubenville, OH, but her family moved to West Virginia when she was young. Anna grew up in Weirton, WV, a steel-mill town in northern West Virginia. She attended Carlow College in Pittsburgh, earning a B. A. She then completed an M. A. at Michigan State University.

She published her first book for children, *No Star Nights*, in 1989. Based on Smucker’s Weirton childhood and beautifully illustrated with oil paintings by Steve Johnson, *No Star Nights* is a lyrical depiction of growing up in a 1950s steel town, when “the night sky glowed orange from the steel furnaces and she couldn’t see the stars” (Horn Book). The book received high praise from parents and educators, and is frequently recommended for use in teaching children about autobiography and the history of industry.

Her second book for children, *Outside the Window*, was published in 1994. The rhythmic, almost lullaby-like story describes the life of a young boy getting ready for bed as seen and told by a mother bird to her babies as they nestle in for the night. Hazel Rochman in *Booklist* commented that the book was an excellent one for children who “will enjoy seeing themselves from a birds-eye view.”

In addition to writing books for children, Anna Egan Smucker is also a published poet. Her poems have appeared in *Now and Then*, *The Best of West Virginia Writers*, *Wild, Sweet Notes*, and *A Gathering at the Forks*. She was also a contributor to *Hillchild: A Folklore Chapbook About, For, and By West Virginia Children*. She has also worked with her husband to co-author parts of numerous workbooks and student textbooks in reading and social studies for the Macmillan/McGraw Hill School Division.

Anna and her husband, Kim Smucker, live in Bridgeport, West Virginia. They have two children.

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# J U D G E S

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*Two (2) Judges Per Level, Six (6) Judges Total*

## LEVEL 1

**BELINDA ANDERSON**  
WEST VIRGINIA AUTHOR

**EVA MCGUIRE**  
CRAFT MEMORIAL LIBRARY  
BLUEFIELD, WV

## LEVEL 2

**CHERYL HARSHMAN**  
DIRECTOR, PAUL N. ELBIN LIBRARY  
WEST LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
WEST LIBERTY, WV

**JUNE ROBINSON**  
PROGRAM DIRECTOR, WVPASS  
WV DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION & THE ARTS

## LEVEL 3

**CAT PLESKA**  
WEST VIRGINIA AUTHOR

**SUSAN HAYDEN**  
(FORMER) ADULT SERVICES CONSULTANT  
WEST VIRGINIA LIBRARY COMMISSION  
CHARLESTON, WV



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## A NOTE FROM OUR JUDGES

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### Literature can truly and deeply change a reader's perspective -- and actions.

“It may seem odd that my inspiration came from a fiction book about the future,” said a letter writer who finished *The Hunger Games* determined to “help other people and be more conscious of what I have.”

“How you treat others is what will define you,” concluded another student after reading the *Harry Potter* series.

That’s a lesson a letter writer learned from author Merissa Meyer: “*Cinder* showed me how I was changing and that it wasn’t for the better... I was mean to people because I wanted to fit into a group ...”

One student who has been on both the receiving and giving end of unkindness wrote Jaqueline Woodson that “labels do not make you who you are,” after reading *Each Kindness*. “Kindness and character does.”

The letter writers who drew inspiration from the books they read are themselves inspirations to all of us on how to be better people.

*Belinda Anderson is the author of the middle-grade novel, Jackson vs. Witchy Wanda: Making Kid Soup, published by Mountain State Press. She has been designated as a Master Artist working with emerging writers through the West Virginia Division of Culture and History, and also with the Monroe Arts Alliance. She also makes presentations through the Carnegie Creative Classrooms program.*

# KILEY HARMON

FAIRMONT CATHOLIC GRADE SCHOOL

FAIRMONT, WV

*HARRY POTTER SERIES* BY J.K. ROWLING

Dear J. K. Rowling,

Your books in the Harry Potter series changed my life for the better. I remember reading the very first book and fell in love with it because I loved the story. But as I read the other books I began to love it for another reason its views on the world and the people in it. My brother (who is now 20) started reading your books when he was in first grade and my sister (18) in middle school and my mom has read them more times than I can count. My brother was in 1st grade when the 1st movie came out and decided he didn't want to watch them as he had already pictured what they looked like. Your books brought reading into our lives and we are better for it.

One of the main reasons your books mean so much to me is because Harry didn't care that one of his best friends was a different. She was a muggleborn or a "mudblood". He accepted her and didn't shun her for what she was because she couldn't help that she was born the way she was. Then there was Hagrid who was family even without blood, being half giant meant nothing to Harry or his friends. I know it's not the same thing, but my sister is gay. I believe she was born this way and truly don't see an issue with this or why we even have to have a debate on if it is true or not. Unfortunately not everyone believes the same way I do.

I am 11 years old and a Roman Catholic who goes to a Catholic school. There are some who believe that it goes against our religion. I have even heard people in my school say something derogatory things about this subject, although I never told my mom as she would have turned into Mrs. Weasley in the final book while fighting Bellatrix Lestrange and while that may be an unfair analogy, you don't know my mom when it comes to her children, she tends to go to extremes at times. Now I don't personally believe that the bible says it is against this, I think people see and read what they want. Much like when people read what Rita Skeeter wrote in the Goblet of Fire, although she posted outright lies, people believe whatever they wanted to. In moments they went from

loving Harry to thinking he was mad or addled minded because they were told this to be true, and didn't think for themselves. Of course there are always those who see beyond, who seek the truth for themselves, much like Luna and her father with the Quibbler to name one.

Harry shows us that although it isn't always easy, you have to stand up for what you believe in. That without your friends and those you love and love you,

you will not survive. That we need our friends as much as they need us and we need to be able to see beyond whatever prejudices people may try to label others as. That everyone has a story that is worth telling if you only take the time to listen and that in the end, how you treat others is what will define you. Thank you for showing me what a true friend looks like, to be able to accept someone flaws and all and that it is okay to lean on your loved

ones at times. They should hold you and build you up, not break you down.

ALWAYS,  
Kiley Renae Harmon



**PAIGE GALVAN**  
**HURRICANE MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
**HURRICANE, WV**  
*CINDER* BY MERISSA MEYER

Dear Merissa Meyer,

When I needed someone to open my eyes and wake me up and show me what I was doing, your book was my alarm clock. In the book *Cinder* I felt like I could relate to Cinder's character because I also felt as though I couldn't be myself and I needed to be like everyone else like she did. In the book you wrote that Cinder always had gloves on so she could hide the fact that she was different. I felt like I was the one wearing the gloves, I was mean to people because I wanted to fit in to a group of girls who were really just trying to be like the people they saw on T.V. I wanted to be someone else so bad that it made me become a hateful person to others and I started not liking myself. I was putting all my energy into trying to please people I really didn't even like. Cinder helped me realize that hiding yourself doesn't make the part of you that is different disappear you have to embrace it so it doesn't control you. Cinder felt lost, alone, different, and bad because that is what people told her. As I went farther into the story I started to realize that there are people all over the world who feel this way. If more people had the chance to read this book then maybe it would help them like it helped me. *Cinder* helped me grow and mature as a person. When Cinder found out who she was and that she has to survive to save everyone. That just made me realize that if I don't be myself then there is no way to figure out who I'm supposed to be to figure out who I'm supposed to become. If I hadn't picked up your book at the store then I would probably still be pretending to be someone else and hiding who I really am.

Cinder was told by her own family that she didn't deserve the same things as they did because she was different. The book thought me that there will always be people who try to bring you down but as long as you have one person to help and you believe in yourself then no one can bet you. If someone is bullying you do you give up and hate life or do you get right back up and not let it control your life? In life there will always be at least one person hoping you fail and fall down, but you

can't let what people say control your life. People can't control you unless you let them. Even if it is just a tiny part of you lets them start to control and manipulate you then you will become there puppet. Everywhere Cinder turns there is another person telling her that she is evil and bad except for this small group of people. She could have chosen to let this destroy her she could have said she doesn't have enough help, but instead it empowers

her it gives her more to fight for more to live for. People give you reasons to give up and fail and reasons to fight every day. It is really up to you to decide weather you win and fight or lose and fail. A person only hears what they chose to hear.

While reading *Cinder* I felt like I was growing as a person. Cinder showed me how I was changing and that it wasn't for the better. It is always better to be who you are then it is to try to be someone else. When Cinder finally embraces who she is she can

do amazing things. *Cinder* has thought me that when a person tries to tare you down you have to keep your head up and fight to stay strong. Your book has lit up my world and showed me the way to greatness. Without the book *Cinder* I wouldn't have seen the errors of my ways, I needed this book more then I could have possibly understood. I wanted to thank you for your help my showing me the world around me and how it can be better.

Sincerely,  
Paige Galvan



**MATTHEW OLIVERO**

**HURRICANE MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**HURRICANE, WV**

*THE HUNGER GAMES* BY SUZANNE COLLINS

Dear Suzanne Collins,

To understand the cruelty of the world is something I was never able to do. I always expected to have food to eat and a roof to sleep under. When I first picked up The Hunger Games. I thought I was just going to read about a bunch of people fighting over food. About that I was wrong.

When I finished The Hunger Games, I was amazed. I really began to question what I knew about the world around me. I began to understand the wrongness of many aspects of the world we live in. I felt different when I read about the poverty of the districts, and how they had to work for the benefit of someone else. I realized that this does happen in real life. Even in America people live like District 12. They barely have enough food and they have terrible living conditions. This is a very sad truth that came to me just by reading your book. I understood that I need to appreciate what I have because there are so many others who are less fortunate. I started to think about how I carelessly leave the lights on and waste food. I take long, hot showers and never think about it. When I saw how the districts have almost no electricity and no hot water unless they boil it, I was shocked. Again. I took for granted that this is something that we have and other people don't. I had to see that this isn't only in books, and that real people go through this. My mom had always scolded me for wasting food, and she always talked about people in Pakistan eating out of landfills. I couldn't picture it. I just was unable to see someone living like that. When I read The Hunger Games, I was able to get a mental image that no lecture or internet picture could give me. I then read about the brutality of the peacekeepers and realized that in many countries around the world, citizens are restricted in freedoms by law enforcement and their own government. I also noticed how the Districts had little to no infrastructure or buildings. I figured out that there are many countries that have crumbling structures and basically only have four walls and a roof if they are lucky.



It may seem odd that my inspiration came from a fiction book about the future, but this was really the eye-opener I needed. I feel as though this change in mind has empowered me to help other people and be more conscious of what I have. I can take away that when I think that maybe I should have something, or I want more of something, or I am just being ungrateful I will remember what your book taught me and I will definitely change what I say and think. I think this has made me a much better person, and for that I thank you.

Yours Truly,  
Matthew Olivero

MARYAM RAWASH  
JOHN ADAMS MIDDLE SCHOOL  
CHARLESTON, WV  
*THE FAULT IN OUR STARS* BY JOHN GREEN

Dear John Green,

I'm being given an opportunity by my school to share with any author of my choice the impact that one of his or her books has had on me. Not only did your story *The Fault in Our Stars* touch my heart, but it also inspired me to develop a positive attitude about situations we sometimes experience that are beyond our control. But first let me tell you a little about myself...

I am a teenager. That about sums it up! Emotions and relationships and drama, oh my! Sure, being a teenager comes with its own challenges, but I think that with the right attitude anyone can navigate its stormy waters. But what about when the challenges seem unfair or beyond our control? I feel that *The Fault in Our Stars* addresses this.

My tutor and I talked about the line from Shakespeare's play *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*. "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars / But in ourselves, that we are underlings," Cassius says to Brutus, when he feels that Caesar has total control over them even though he's just a man. Look at the line before it: "Men at some time are masters of their fates." I think this is what Augustus Waters was trying to describe to Van Houten at the end of *The Fault in Our Stars*.

Men at *some time* are masters of their fate. I don't know about fate, but I agree with Augustus. We do at least have some say in who or what hurts us. We do have some control over challenging situations, even if the stars line up against us, because we get to *choose how we feel* about those situations. We get to *choose how we channel those feelings*, whether it's in a positive way or a negative way.

Now for something a little more personal. I am an American Muslim. I know that for many people today, the word "Muslim" is synonymous with "terrorist." After the recent attacks in Paris and some U.S. politicians using that as a reason to not bring Syrian refugees into our country, I have started to realize that sometimes I feel powerless about how Muslims like me are viewed by many people. Even though Muslims lead lives just

like anyone else in the world, some people allow a very small minority to unfairly paint a picture of the entire group. And it hurts. But after reading your story, and using a general lesson that I took from it, I have a very hopeful attitude about the situation. "You don't get to choose if you get hurt in this world, [...] but you do have some say in who hurts you."

I choose *not* to be hurt by people's hurtful and ignorant statements. I choose *not* to feel powerless about how Muslims like me are viewed. And I *do* choose to be determined about showing people what Muslims are really like. I do choose to represent Muslims in my way, not the way that the bad apples choose to represent us. I have the power and the right to choose how I feel about the situation and how I respond to it. And that is what I got from your book, and that is just one reason why I am

so grateful to you as an author.

Thank you so much for your wonderful and beautiful and meaningful stories! I've read nearly all of them. I've gotten my tutor to read *The Fault in Our Stars* and he loved it! I'm giving him some more homework soon 😊! Take care!

Sincerely,  
Maryam Rawash





HUNTINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL  
HUNTINGTON, WV  
*DRAGON RUN* BY PATRICK MATTHEWS

Dear Patrick Matthews,

Your novel, *Dragon Run*, has changed my life forever. I read your novel at the beginning of sixth grade, during an especially challenging transition into middle school. For reasons I still don't understand, I went through a period of extreme anxiety. At completely random times during the day, I would start feeling helpless and overwhelmed, and I would have to go to the place where I felt the safest, which was our school library. I would sit down in a corner and lose myself in your book in order to ride the panic attack.

It wasn't, however, just a matter of escaping into fiction. I love reading, and almost any book could have done that for me. *Dragon Run* opens with a kid who has a lot to worry about. While Al's situation is far more perilous and much more complicated than mine, from the very first pages your novel showed me that I am not the only one with fears. That I am not alone. Al goes through a tough time when he finds out that he is a zero, and he's worth nothing. I recognized that terrible feeling of being worth nothing. I felt this way because I could not do anything by myself. Just as Al was deemed useless for his society, I felt useless to my family because I couldn't walk home by myself, needed to call my Dad from school often, and panicked during lock down drills.

Like Al, I come from a family that is well-liked and respected, and my parents are active members of our community. So I can understand Al's disbelief when he finds out his number. A zero. Wow. A zero. That is like finding out the world doesn't need you and, in fact, doesn't want you. But, as Al goes through his journey, he starts to realize that he is worth something. Even more importantly the people who love him must have believed that on some level. Even though his parents abandon him after the testing, they made sure that he had the basic skills and supplies to run and survive. For example, before the testing, his father made sure that Al had private sword lessons, and, after the testing, his father made sure that his duffle bag included a sword. As a result, when Al came upon people who wanted to kill him or bring him down, he used what he learned to protect himself.

Fortunately my parents and siblings never

abandoned me. Quite the opposite, like Al's family, they made sure I got the skills and supplies I needed to cope with my anxiety. The techniques included taking deep breaths, visualizing calm scenes, and even drawing pictures when I sensed the panic starting. My parents sent envelopes, each filled with a reminder of their love, with me to school every day, and my teacher would give me one an hour when I needed it. So, like Al, I used my training to help me.

But Al had more than skills and supplies; he also had friends, and thankfully, so did I. In fact, he even made friends during his darkest moments. In addition to catching up with Wisp and Trillia in Dockside, Al finds a devoted friend in Bird, a fellow *uldi'ira*, and Bull, the bar owner who gives him a job and a place to stay. Just as Al's friends helped him during his time of crisis, my friends helped me. They never thought of abandoning me even though it was obvious to everyone that I was a zero.

Everything changes when Al meets Magister Lundi, a man of the highest rank possible, a 10, who has power over all of the elements: ice, earth, air and fire. But more importantly, Magister Lundi also has information that no one else knows. He knows what the dragons are really like and that Lord Archovar is responsible for many deaths. Ironically, with all this power, Magister Lundi cannot neutralize the dragon overlords. Only a zero can do that. It turns out that in the things that matter most, Al is the most powerful character in the story.

So now we come to my favorite part of the book. Magister Lundi stands up to Archovar and talks not about his own power but about Al's courage. His final words are:

A couple of weeks ago, I met the most interesting boy, Archovar... he was the lowest of the low, what the people of the stone call an *uldi'ira*. But do you know what he did?...He fought. When any sane person would have dropped to his knees and begged for mercy, he fought. Even with no hope of victory, he refused to yield. It is a trait I have forgotten...No more!





I LOVE THIS PART. In fact, I made my book project that year on this scene, and I wrote those words out in big, bold letters. I learned from that moment that it is not my challenge that makes me small but my determination to meet that challenge that makes me big, bigger than I ever thought I could be. And it has made me a better person because now whenever I meet someone new or see a kid in my school who is different from everyone else, I know that there is something special about each one of them, that we all have something to contribute to make the world a better place and that a time will come for each person to shine. But I'm not waiting for that shining moment either for them or for myself; I'm going to accept people right away and appreciate them for just the courage to hang in there.

Thank you for writing this incredible book.

**ANA MARIA GAYTON**  
**JOHN ADAMS MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
**CHARLESTON, WV**

*NUMBER THE STARS, THE GIVER* BY LOIS LOWRY

Dear Lois Lowry,

I first read your book, *Number the Stars*, in fifth grade. It was one of my favorite books that school year. In sixth grade, I read *The Giver*. It also became one of my favorite books. I can't just choose one of those two books to write about. Although they are different in story content, they both show how human beings are treated for being different and have both impacted my life.

I first heard about being treated unfairly when I was in kindergarten when I watched a movie about Ruby Bridges. I was surprised to learn that people had been treated unfairly because of skin color or religious views. This is very sad. Now, I realize that people who do not fit the definition of "normal" in any society risk discrimination and possibly even death, as they did in both *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*. Although I have not read *Gathering Blue*, *Messenger*, or *Son*, I predict the same theme will continue as you attempt to enlighten young readers.

Today in our society and world, human beings continue to be discriminated against based on gender, sexual orientation, gender identification, personal beliefs, skin color, language, religion, ethnicity, economic conditions, jobs or lack of jobs, where they live, education level, and probably other situations too. It is unfair to human beings to judge them and treat them unfairly because of who they are. Our United States Constitution states that "all men are created equal" and everyone has the right to search for happiness. The United States was founded on religious freedom and individual rights. There are laws to protect people from discrimination, but sometimes people are still bullied and discriminated against in society because of whom they are. It's just not right to be mean to people even if you don't like who they are.

In the *Giver*, I admire Jonas's and Fiona's commitment, as well as Ann Marie's in *Number the Stars*, to risk their lives to help others so they can return to a normal society where people have feelings and differences are accepted. Even in the perfect communities in *The Giver*, there was still prejudice toward people in

some positions. Laborers and birth mothers were looked down upon. Even though the elderly were "respected," they were released, which secretly meant put to death, when they were no longer seen as useful to the community. In *Number the Stars*, Jews were killed because Hitler convinced others that Jews were evil. I admire Ann Marie's courage to protect her Jewish friends because if she didn't, they would have most likely been caught and died. My mom told me that my grandmother, my dad's mom, was born in Poland or Russia and many that Russians were also captured by Nazis and put in camps where grandma's mom was killed when my grandma was only five years old. I did not know this until just now.

I have learned from reading your books to respect and take up for all human beings. We never know what people might be targeted next. I have never felt discriminated against as a Hispanic female, born in Guatemala and adopted by U.S. parents who brought to this country as a baby, but it still scares me that one day I could be a target - or my parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, classmates, or even my pets could be discriminated against for one silly reason or another. Because of what I learned through *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*, I will always treat people fairly and respect them. One school counselor my mom knows well always tells her how well I am with others and that I treat everyone nicely. My dad says that too. They are very proud of me for the kindest I show others, regardless of their situation in life. This is the quality in myself that I am most proud of too.

I owe this to your books because they have opened my eyes to terrible situations that have happened and could happen again in our world. Thank you, and please keep writing!

Sincerely,  
Ana Maria Gayton



**OLIVIA WHITE**  
**ROANE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL**  
**SPENCER, WV**  
*LES MISÉRABLES* BY VICTOR HUGO

Dear Victor Hugo,

When I first decided to read *Les Misérables*, I was more than a little intimidated by its size and scope. I'd heard quite a bit about your unreserved style and many digressions throughout the novel, and, as a present-day teenager, I thought 19th century France would be completely impossible to relate to. Really, how could anyone understand an ex-convict or a cop with a one-track mind? Except, while there are in fact several details that go straight over my head, your book still manages to hold enormous meaning for me and, I think, for our society today. Literature truly has the power to change people, and even though I can't say if your book has changed my life when I have barely begun living, I can tell you, Monsieur Hugo, that your book has altered the way I think, both about myself and the world I live in, for good.

*Les Mis* has not just made me think - it has taught me, more than another person ever could, about love and redemption; through the kindness and mercy of the Bishop, the reformation and sacrifices of Jean Valjean, even the uncertainty and self-destructiveness of Inspector Javert. While I could focus on anyone in your book, I have to say that Javert is one of the most relatable characters I've ever seen in fiction. He is not really a villain; there are no true villains in *Les Mis*, rather the society that produced them is to blame. Javert is just a man - a very conflicted man, to be sure, as illustrated in my favorite quote from your book, which is actually printed on the back of my own copy:

"Before him he saw two roads, both equally straight; but he did see two; and that terrified him - he who had never in his life known anything but one straight line. And, bitter anguish, these two roads were contradictory."

While this sums up his character very nicely, as I'm sure you know, this quote has another, much more personal meaning for me. I'm hardly an 1800's inspector,

but as a high school senior about to enter college and then the adult world, I, too, must finally make the decision I've put off for so long: What am I going to do with my life?

All my life, I have only ever been on a single path, with fixed goals set by other people: learn these subjects, pass these tests, survive over twelve years of schooling. But now, with graduation looming closer and closer, I stand at a crossroads; two equally valid, but contradictory roads are before me. Do I take a chance and pursue a career in doing what I love, which might not be able to support me in the long term? Or should I take the safer, more employable route and study what can give me a secure future? I have a thousand other questions, and though I know you cannot give me any answers, M. Hugo, it is immensely comforting to know that someone understands what it's like to be so torn after reaching a fork in the road, even if that someone has been dead for well over a century.

As reassuring as this may be, however, I don't want to end up like Javert, so in doubt of everything he thought he knew that he breaks down completely. As a young adult already terrified of going into the real world, I want and need a more hopeful conclusion than one of self-destruction. While Javert's story does not and cannot end well, it serves as sort of warning or perhaps just a bit of friendly advice - that it is okay to change, to be uncertain, to choose a different course. And in this other choice lies Valjean.

Jean Valjean is obviously the other side of the same coin, so to speak, to Javert. Both were born at the bottom of society, having to claw their way up to their current positions; both were faced with a life-changing decision after being spared by a more merciful man than themselves and yet each reacted in different ways. The parallels between them are incredibly important, which I have no doubt you understood when writing *Les Mis*. Valjean's arc, so similar to but still contrasting so starkly with Javert's, provides hope for those of us who struggle to



**HANNAH HARDMAN**  
**ROANE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL**  
**SPENCER, WV**  
*EXPERT WITNESS* BY RACHEL DYLAN

Dear Rachel Dylan,

change. After all, if someone like Valjean can turn his life around, why can't we? I am so grateful that you went to such great lengths to prove Javert wrong; to show that you can change, that you don't have to be torn apart by indecision, that all it takes is a leap of faith -just not off a bridge.

Although I haven't figured out what road I'm going to take, I'm starting to think that's okay. My cross-road can wait until I've come to a decision, and I know that I don't have to do anything hasty just to set my future in stone, which may ultimately make me unhappy. The core of *Les Mis* is based around the idea that it is always possible to change, and while this, of course, refers to Valjean, it also applies to much more mundane and modern things -like college or career choices. Some things are timeless, after all, and I think we can learn a lot from your book and others like it no matter how old or wordy they are.

Despite this, I don't think your book (or any work of fiction) should be taken as some sort of career advice. Instead of telling you how to do things, it's more a suggestion on how to look at them. I fully admit *Les Misérables* didn't help me decide what path I'm going to take in life. However, it did teach me that, although it doesn't seem like it now, things will turn out alright. Things aren't falling apart; they're falling into place.

Sincerely,  
Olivia White



As a child he was there. Growing up, he was gone, all of him, gone. Until Sydney, I never had faith; I never believed God was there. Sydney, as well as the rest of the characters in *Expert Witness* have changed my life in so many aspects. Max Preston and I are alike in many ways. We both share a similar childhood and we are both cold deep down inside. No one knew just how badly I was treated as a child, and God was never there to help me. No one saw my drunk dad hit my mother or me. No one saw the bruises because we were forced to cover them up. No one saw the times my mother left the earth on her pills because I was an awful mistake, she would tell me.

I have always thought that you are what you are born into. Your father is an alcoholic and mother a pill head, that is what you are going to become. *Expert Witness* showed me differently though. With the grace of God you can and will overcome any obstacle life throws at you. Trust me when I say, life is not always peaches and cream. I felt as if it was my fault my parents were the way they were, and I could do nothing. The devil was in my house taking over slowly, day after day, and no one had seen that God was trying to shine in.

From a young age I was beaten on a regular basis. Sometimes it was my fault, I admit, but mostly it was for pure joy from my dad. From the moment *Expert Witness* introduced Rick Ward, I had shivers down my spine. Rachel, you put my dad into a character so perfect I had to stop reading your book until I could overcome the pain. Unlike Rick, my father did love me, but the alcohol made him do things he did not want to do. I remember praying to see morning after my beatings sometimes, and hoping my mother would be awake too.

I not only found faith in your book but also I found life morals. Sydney as well as Max, gave me hope of being loved and loving someone unconditionally. Coming from my background trust is hard to give. Sydney and Max have helped me with trusting. No

IMONE' VELEZ

WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

CHARLES TOWN, WV

*PHENOMENAL WOMEN* BY MAYA ANGELOU

Dear Maya Angelo,

matter how long you stay cold inside, you have to have love. Sydney finally found love again, and she knows that with love, the world is a totally different place. In this time that we live, trust is something kids are not taught. This is why, I believe, so many people do not know how to treat their friends. Davies really showed his true colors to Max just like one of my friends have done to me. They hurt me so badly I felt ashamed, but I should have known better.

I have learned so much about myself just by reading your book. I understand people when they say "I have a bad home life" rather than thinking "oh no you don't" like I normally did. I have opened up to my mother and told her how badly her addiction hurts me as well as herself. My father has been getting better about drinking and beating me. We have gone to a family therapist and we are starting to get our old lives back.

When I tell people about my story and what made me as well as my family change our lives, they think I am crazy. Many people are close minded to the fact that books are just books, not life lessons. *Expert Witness* was like a message sent from the heavens. God was telling my family and me to pull our stuff together!

I am seventeen now and the beatings have stopped. The pain has been slowly locked away in a diary I now keep. Writing for me is a way to let the feelings out without worrying about everyone finding them. *Expert Witness* was my gateway to happiness. I realized that other people have it rough and I am not alone. Thank you, Rachel, for helping me get my family as well as my life back on track.

Sincerely,  
Hannah Hardman

My mother and I watch Oprah quite often, and before your passing, we watched an interview/documentary on you. I had always known of you, but never really payed attention to what you were saying or payed it any thought before then. When I heard *Phenomenal Women* read, it changed the way I looked at myself.

I was going through a hard time in my life, and I was having some internal self-issues, but soon that changed because of your poetry. The poem shows how much pride women and girls should have within themselves. As females, we have so much power, grace, beauty, love, joy, style, and countless amazing qualities, to even think for a second we aren't worth anything. Maya, you showed me this.

The world is such a cold, dark, bitter place because there's too much negativity, especially towards women; whether it's about equal rights, the way they dress, the size they are, having too much make up, having too little make up, expressing themselves, or the awful need to impress. Females in society have to look a certain way to feel accepted or even be accepted, but in your poem you talk about your curves, hips, and big lips with such confidence; women need to hear that, especially African American women. Being an African American girl growing up in a society where European features are the epitome of beauty, makes the confidence you have in your looks a huge significance.

Women like you, who spoke the truth, who aren't afraid to take risks, tell their story, who give girls just like me to have the confidence to get up every morning and have opportunities, to be happy with who we are, to show off our curves, to put make up on for OURSELVES, to dress cute for OURSELVES, to be happy in our own skin, to love our features, and to not do anything for another man. Maya, you made me realize through *Phenomenal Women* that I love myself. We all should love ourselves because we are all phenomenal in our own way. I myself am phenomenal. That's me.

Sincerely,  
Imone' Velez





# LEVEL 1: HONORABLE MENTION

**ISAAC LOWE**  
**HURRICANE MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
**HURRICANE, WV**  
*UNSTOPPABLE BY TIM GREEN*

Dear Tim Green,

I love reading your books. But this book Unstoppable stood out to me the most. When this story started with a boy that lives in a terrible foster home and has to do nonstop work and gets beaten, it reminded me about what other people have to go through and how lucky I am that I don't have to go through what they did. At one point in the story, the boy went to a good foster home but got injured playing football. In the hospital he met his roommate that couldn't speak and also he couldn't move quite the way he wanted to. It made me think about something like this called Autism. Autism is a certain disorder in the brain that causes different behavior, different social interactions, and repetitive interactions.

Some kids in our school have Autism. It makes me mad when people tease these people or make them feel bad. Whenever things like that would happen I wanted to do something I just didn't know what to do. But your book taught me what to do. Sometimes when I look at these kids I question God. Why he did this to them and why did he not do these things to me. But the real question is, "how is this happening and how can we help people that have these kind of problems?" Your book Unstoppable has also taught me that.

When Harrison's roommate died it made me wonder if his roommate's life was really worth it. He probably got teased and bullied for what was wrong with him. That is why I set a goal for myself. The goal is to make friends with someone who isn't as lucky as I am or maybe someone who gets teased and bullied. One kid in my class with Autism who gets teased a lot, one day was tripped. This book taught me what to do. I went over to him helped him up and asked him if he was okay. Some people looked at me like I was crazy. I told them that he is a person just like you and me.

Ever since I finished reading this book I go over to him and ask him how his day is so far. I know that it makes him feel good while also making me feel good. I think that Unstoppable has taught me that one person can make a difference in the world. In fact, I think that one life goal for everyone should be "don't judge a book

by its cover." What that means to me is that it doesn't matter what is wrong with someone short, tall, disorder, or maybe even overweight. It's that everyone should be given a fair and equal chance to show who they really are. Without this book I probably wouldn't have been able to learn any of these things. Thank you, Tim Green for helping me make a difference in the world.

Sincerely,  
Isaac Lowe

**HURRICANE MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
**HURRICANE, WV**  
*THE WHOLE STORY OF HALF A GIRL*  
BY VERRA HARANANDANI

Dear Verra Haranandani,

Your book "*The Whole Story of Half A Girl*" is very meaningful and has completely changed my perspective on life. I can relate to the life of the main character in so many ways. When I was six my dad quite his job because he wasn't making enough money for our family to live off of. So he had to move away to find a new job. He returned shortly after my seventh birthday he returned with some news. He said we should all move to where his new job was. This job brought in a lot of money for our family and there was a lot more for me and my brother to do. The problem was it was four hours away and I had no friends just my two little cousins, but it wasn't up to me where we lived so we moved four hours away to Hurricane West Virginia.

When we arrived at our new house it was very stressful. We had to arrange all the rooms, but we were all so tired. When I went to my new school the next day I remember being very nervous. I knew no one everything was just so new. Just like the main character in the book I became friends with the cool girls of second grade. I went to their birthday parties, and we had lots of fun together. Then third grade came and we weren't in the same class, so we didn't talk much and eventually we just we not as close as we used to be. We all hoped that we would be in the same class every year, but for the rest of elementary school we weren't. So we drifted apart, and I was devastated.

Then I read your book, and it helped me relieves



# LEVEL 1: HONORABLE MENTION

that I'm not the only one that this is happening to, and that other kids were going through the same exact things that I was. My life has truly changed since I read your book. It inspired me to be a better and truer me. I am more confident now. I truly have a new perspective on life. I know now that it's not about the friends you have or the money that your family make or even where you live. It's about the way look at life and love and appreciate everything you have, but most importantly it's about how you look at yourself. Your book "*The Whole Story of Half A Girl*" has truly changed my life forever, and for that I say thank you.

**OLIVIA NOEL**

**HURRICANE MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**HURRICANE, WV**

*THE FAULT IN OUR STARS* BY JOHN GREEN

Dear John Green,

I am a huge fan of yours, and I have read many of your incredible novels. I am particularly fond of your life changing, inspirational book, *The Fault in Our Stars*. I just want to express to you how much you have changed my life. It showed me many things that I never realized about the world. You completely changed my perspective on life, and in a very spectacular way.

Before I read your book. I knew what cancer was and I knew that it was a horrible disease. But what I didn't know was how much suffering the patients have to go through. I was able to relate to your book, because at the same time my grandfather was battling cancer. It was too bad, and he didn't want to go through the intense pain of the modern treatments. He's still living today and he's fighting hard, just like Hazel and Augustus in your book. When reading your book, I learned things about cancer that I never knew before. It helped me to better understand what my grandfather was going through. Your book helped me get through so much and taught me many life lessons. You also showed me that even when you're going through tough times, you have to keep a straight face and try to be happy and optimistic. I'm not extremely optimistic, but after reading your book, it shocked me that if two cancer patients can be that joyful, so can I. I'm thankful that you could teach me that important life lesson.

Earlier I said that you had changed my perspective on life. Well, here's how. *The Fault in Our Stars* taught me that life is very precious, and that you can't waste it dwelling on how much time you have left. You also showed me that some people think that because they didn't live a long life, their life has been meaningless or unfulfilling. That however is not true. I mean look at Augustus, he died when he was only a teenager and he found so much beauty and good in the life that he had. He also found something else: The love of his life. This changed my life and taught me that this is the only life that I'm ever going to get, so I had better make it count. That was a very important lesson that I had to learn. It's a lesson that everyone should learn.

*The Fault in Our Stars* was truly the most unique book, what with the: comedy, tragedy, and the overall miraculous love of two teenagers fighting cancer. I also want to tell you that you have even inspired me to become an author one day just like you. Your inspiring novels and your thoughtful words have given me the push I needed to find my true passion. I believe that it's writing, because I enjoy it and it makes me genuinely happy. I just want to tell you that you will always be known in history as an incredible author as far as I'm concerned. I also want to say that when I'm reading your books, I feel as though I'm not so much reading them, as you're talking to me through the book. Your words cut deep into my mind and once I finish one of your books. I find myself continuously thinking back to them. I love reading, especially books that you write. You make me feel like I actually have power in the world, to make a lasting impression, similar to you. Your words inspire me all the time. In conclusion I want to say, Thank You.

Sincerely,  
Olivia Noel

# LEVEL 1: HONORABLE MENTION

**ZOE GREEN**

HURRICANE MIDDLE SCHOOL

HURRICANE, WV

*OUT OF THE DUST* BY KAREN HESSE

Dear Karen Hesse,

Your book impacted my life in many different ways. My friend suggested I read it and I am very glad I did. I have read your book at least three times. I will probably read it again in the future. Your book will guide me through life. Out of the Dust was a book of courage and strength. This book will give those two things in times I need them.

Your book taught me that someday I will have to live alone and be independent. The reason it taught me this is because Billy Joe's mom died and Billy Joe had to do things herself. It taught me to have a strong bond with my family. I learned to be strong in moments I don't think I can.

When Billy Joe burnt all the skin off her hands trying to save her mama. It told me I will have to do things I know will hurt or I may not want to do, but they are for the good of other people. When she tried to play piano and her burnt hands wouldn't play like they used to. Then by the end of the book she could play the piano again. It was because she didn't stop trying. This tells to not stop trying, even if I fail the first couple times or I don't think I can do it. When Billy Joe's mama died it taught me one day I will have to be independent. One day my mom and dad will be gone or I will go to college and I will have to do things on my own. It taught me to be strong and courageous.

Out of the Dust taught me things such as never stop trying something even if I fail the first time. It taught me the importance of courage and strength. While I was reading your book I felt many emotions, such as happiness, sadness, and both at the same time. Your book taught me about life and how to get through it. Your book really impacted my life. I hope to read more of your books in the future. Thank you for writing Out of the Dust.

Sincerely,  
Zoe Green

**MELIA BECKFORD**

HURRICANE MIDDLE SCHOOL

HURRICANE, WV

*EVERY CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING*

BY ANNE MAZER

Dear Anne Mazer,

Fun, intriguing, and relatable are all words that come to mind when I think of your book Every Cloud Has A Silver Lining. I especially think of relatable. I think of this word the most because the main character Abby is a lot like me. I'm not just talking about the wild and curly hair, or the fact that we were both in fifth grade at the time I was reading this. We're also alike in personality. We are both creative, kind, and love to write. Actually one of my favorite things about this book is that it's so relatable. I'm not just talking about relatable to me. This is the kind of book where even if you aren't in fifth grade, or you don't have curly hair you can still relate to her feelings about things. You can also relate to having that know it all older sibling or that bother some little brother/sister. Not to mention that the fact that she writes in a journal is pretty relatable to a lot of girls.

Speaking of writing: I want you to know that this book means a lot to me. This book is one of the reasons I love writing so much. If it wasn't for how much this book changed my thoughts on writing I would never have started doing it as a hobby. I also never would have started thinking about this as a career. But aside from making me love writing, this book along with the rest of the series helped me get through the end of fifth grade. It helped me realize that I would soon be going to middle school and that made me nervous. But every time I got worried about going to sixth grade I just started to read the book. It really calmed my nerves to read about how someone else was dealing with the end of fifth grade. Actually one day this book helped me a lot. It was a Monday and I only had a week of summer left before I started sixth grade. Although I wouldn't let it show I was really worrying about going to middle school. But I stayed up almost the whole night reading your books. By the next day I realized that even though middle school will be different it doesn't mean it will be bad. It actually helped me see what middle school could be like as I traveled through it with Abby. Having this new view on middle school helped me gain a little more confidence.

# LEVEL 1: HONORABLE MENTION

So I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm happy that I got the chance to read this book. I'm also happy that I found this at a time when I really needed a good read to calm my nerves. If it wasn't for your book filled with wonderful quotes I might be a little different. I might not have liked writing as much. Not to mention how scared I would have been to go to middle school. So thank you Anne for writing a story that had an impact on me.

Your friend,  
Melina Beckford

**HURRICANE MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
**HURRICANE, WV**  
*THE FANGIRL'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY*  
BY SAM MAGGS

Dear Sam Maggs,

People get bullied, a lot, and I got bullied. I was told I was a nerd and I was weird or even fat. It made think they were telling the truth they said it so much. I never showed any emotion around them, but every night I went home and cried. I didn't like school. I didn't do my homework. I didn't like the people that said those things to me, but more importantly I didn't like myself. Imagine being only ten years old and wanting to die. That is how I felt.

I am eleven now. I am in sixth grade, but I still don't like myself very much. My friends, the only people in the world who know how I feel, are the people that make me feel better when I am sad. They will always be there for me. We thought starting middle school would be a disaster, but it was the best thing that happened to us. I didn't talk to many people in the beginning of the year. I talked to my boyfriend (now ex-boyfriend) and some friends from my old school. Then one day I got kicked off our table and I had nowhere to sit. A girl that I had talked to a few times walked up to me and asked me to sit with her. I replied kindly and sat next to her and her friends. So I finally started to talk.

We were both the biggest nerds in the world (at least that's what we thought) and we felt like we had known each other forever. I ended up dating this girl after a while. I made new friends this year and I kept some of the old. Sometimes I even talk the people that made

fun of me. Something we all had in common was we were nerds. We went to the library every other day, and some new books came in one day. My best friend found your book *The Fangirls Guide to the Galaxy* and I started to like myself a little bit more.

We loved your book as soon as we picked it up. We would read it to all of our fangirl (and fanboy) friends every time we could, then everyone loved it. We would take turns checking it out from the library, and now all my friends have read it. We all love to talk about your book almost every day we mention it. Every day we say are nerds and we knew that it was okay to be a nerd. Most of my friends are Otakus, Superwholockains, Potterheads, and young readers (that is a lot of fandoms for us).

We have defeated all our trolls and now we can give other nerds advice too. I have been doing my work (most of it) and I love school now. I am more social and I talk to more people. I am a different person and some people may not like that. I am who I am, and that is a nerd! You gave me a reason to want to smile, to laugh, to love myself, and not wanting to leave this world. This was for you Sam Maggs, and all I can say is Thank You.

(P.S. All of this is the honest truth, and you better believe that!)

**KANTLEY MCKOWN**  
**HURRICANE MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
**HURRICANE, WV**  
*KRISTY'S GREAT IDEA* BY ANN M. MARTIN

Dear Ann M. Martin,

My parents are divorced like Kristy's are. I have had trouble and bad experiences in my life but your books have gotten through. There have been times in my life when it feel like a hurricane and tornado have run me over, and some days I just feel that I have a big black and gray cloud over my head telling me that I just failed and I suck. But as I've gotten older I have understood not to let people tell me what I'm good at and what I'm not. When I was little my mom had to force me to read or even pick up a book. These days she still has to but not as much. In second grade my reading grade was below a 1st grade level. I hated to read though I had to

# LEVEL 1: HONORABLE MENTION

start reading, so my mom told me that I should try the Baby Sitters Club books.

Your book Kristy's Great Idea gave me a great idea. When Kristy told her friends that they should start a babysitter's club I was thinking that when I was older that maybe I could even start my own. I'm a very slow reader and it takes me forever just to finish one of your books. Right now I'm on your book The Truth about Stacy and so far it's a great book. All of your other books have inspired me to be a great person and have a great personality. When my great uncle died I felt like someone had just ripped my heart out and tore it in to pieces. My great uncle was my best friend, but your book helped me though.

My favorite book by you is definitely Kristy's Great Idea. The book just inspires me and I think it would inspire other people too. Books that I think are inspiring make me want to read more of them. My favorite quote is "I wonder how you say goodbye to someone forever?" That quote always makes me think how do you actually say goodbye to someone forever?

I am very thankful for your book and can't wait to read more of your books. Like I said earlier in my letter, you have inspired me to be a great person. If it wasn't for your books I probably would have been in my room each day tear after tear falling down my face. I'm so glad that you decided to be an author because you write amazing books and make the world turn upside down! Thank you so much, your books have changed my world from being flat to now back to a circle.

Sincerely,  
Kantley McKown

**GEORGE C. WEIMER ELEMENTARY**  
**ST. ALBANS, WV**  
*THE BIRDS OF PANDEMONIUM*  
**BY MICHELE RAFFIN**

Dear Michele Raffin,

Your book was a gift to me in more ways than one. It was the best Christmas present ever. But I didn't like it just because of the parrots, or the humor, (I did like those, though), I loved it because it gave me the wings

of courage and hope.

I have to admit, your book was so touching, and at some parts sad, that it brought me to tears. "Birds of the Pandemonium" taught me a lot. I had no idea people would work almost their whole lives just for the birds. I know now how much these birds need my help. Your book inspired me to work hard for the birds, just like those people. It inspired me to build an aviary when I grow up (with knowledge about birds, of course). And lastly, your book inspired me to make a difference.

Since there are people in the world like you, people who care so much for the birds that they commit their lives for them, I know there's hope for our feathered friends.. It makes me sad to think about bird species, beautiful ones and smart ones, becoming extinct. But since people work to help them, it will get better. Now I have the courage to help these birds, no matter how hard. And because I read your book, I know I need to try my best. The birds need us!

Something in your book really hit me. It was how you talked about you and other people's mistakes with birds. I was always scared that I might make some kind of mistake if I took care of an important species. But I learned from your book that everyone makes mistakes and that I don't have to worry too much about it. Also, I can learn from my mistakes, so they can actually make me stronger. Now I don't have as much pressure, since everyone has slipped up a bit, even the best aviculturists.

I was hoping that for Christmas, I would receive an encyclopedia on parrots. "Birds of the Pandemonium" turned out to be a much more meaningful gift, at this point of my life. It gave me the gift of courage and hope that a book of random facts wouldn't give me. Thanks for writing that book, it changed my life.

**GEORGE C. WIMER ELEMENTARY**  
**ST. ALBANS, WV**  
*THE TRUMPET OF THE SWANS*  
**BY E.B. WHITE**

Dear E.B. White,

The Trumpet of the Swans calmed the storms within my heart. In the story, Louis taught me to how to face the struggles of life. I was eight years old when I first read your book. During that time, my mom was very

## LEVEL 1: HONORABLE MENTION

sick. She had to stay in the hospital for two weeks. I was very upset, but when I read your book in my room while my mom was away and it would make me feel a lot better. Like Louis, we were both going through hard times. Louis was trying to find his voice, and I was trying to piece together my life.

As time passes, your book continues to inspire me. It has helped me through many tough times. I know when life gets hard, I can find comfort in your words. A year later, my step-dad had a hernia he had to go back to the hospital nine times before they finally fixed it. I was very upset during this time, but I found peace in the familiar story of Louis the swan.

I want to thank you for all the times you have made me feel alot better. I have gone through a lot of hard times in my life and you have been there for each one of them. When my mom and step-dad came back from the hospital, we read your book together every night. While we read, I told them how your book helped me cope while they were in the hospital.

Like a favorite blanket, your book continues to give me warmth and comfort. I love my parents very much, and you helped calm the storm in my heart. I have read your book so many times and it never gets old. Just like a blanket, I know your words will always give strength and courage to get through the hard times.



## LEVEL 2: HONORABLE MENTION

**LINDSAY LENZ**

**LINSLEY SCHOOL**

**WHEELING, WV**

*LOVE ONESELF*

**BY CHARLIE CHAPLIN**

Dear Charlie Chaplin,

I found myself reading your poem, "Love Of Oneself," trying to drown my sorrows. For, my life has become more complicated in the past year and a half than I ever could have imagined. Every day I would surround myself with quotes and poems just to be sure that I wasn't the only one. The only one, who hated herself. When I was younger I was very confident and could not have been happier. My life is seemingly perfect .... from the outside. Even from my parents perspective because in theory, it is. Little does anybody know about the endless storm inside me. By the time I was ten the expectation of society began to set it. I realized I certainly didn't have the body of a supermodel but I didn't need that and I didn't care. I wasn't exactly body confident but I was fairly happy with myself. I was healthy and nobody had ever pointed out the fact that I wasn't exactly the thinnest in the class before. (Of course, I noticed it on my own but again, it didn't bother me.) One day however, all of that changed.

I was 12 and happened to mention my weight to someone who I thought was my friend. It got back to me that she had announced it to multiple people and that she had bragged that she weighed less than me even though I was younger than her. I looked up to this person and I wanted to be like her. Her approval was my goal. I had a sickening need for popularity. Since I was never necessarily self confident (body confident in particular) I began (what has become) the worst decision of my life. I stopped eating. The thought of food consumed me. I counted the calories of everything I ate. My own fork and knife were killing me from the inside out. People began to notice. Jokes were made. I couldn't believe my own "friends" we're making fun of me. They had "an inside joke" that I didn't find the meaning to until almost a year after. Since I was so obsessed I assumed it was about me eating too much or being too fat. It wasn't a want to be thinner any more, it was a need. Eventually, the weight loss came; along with the depression, fatigue and restless nights. I can remember looking in the mirror

and crying because I didn't have the results I wanted or maybe I had eaten too much of something. I had to put on a happy face though my friends and family could never know about my constant struggle. I was strong, confident, the friend anyone could count on, a good student. What would they think of me if they knew I let what one person said latch hold of my mind and push me past the point of no return.

Not eating had made me so moody. I was in a constant state of self loathing which caused me to have the want to be alone. My mother started noticing and the look of sadness settled on her face whenever she looked at me. It wasn't just sadness however, it was a look of failure. She thought she had failed as a mother. She thought she had failed me. That is the absolute opposite, however my mom is simply the best and I couldn't let her believe she failed! Perhaps that is why I had the want to get better? It certainly wasn't for my friends. They couldn't have cared less. It also wasn't for me until later in the healing process. When I read your poem. It helped me realize that to get better I had to truly love myself.

As time went on I began to realize that I had lost myself in trying to please my "friend." I wasn't even myself anymore. Was it too late? Too late to find (and then re-become) my former self? Almost. I was almost gone, drowning in the ocean of perfectionism, popularity and thinness that I had created within myself. I wasn't just trying to be healthier, or lose a few pounds. I had a problem. I took comfort in reading quotes about how it gets better, or how it doesn't. Being sad was easy and comfortable. Sadness was my new normal. I assumed the problem was with me. I can remember screaming at myself. "What is wrong with me?!" Finally, by some miracle I realized that it wasn't about me at all. It was about the people I was with. I had to separate myself from them before I got sucked in too deep to ever crawl back out. It was a slow process. It is a slow process. I would be lying to myself to say I am better or to say I don't get down on myself for no other reason than being me but I'm getting there.

I am beginning to see glimpses of the "old me." The best parts of myself that I haven't seen in a long time. I am happier, I have been sleeping better and I enjoy myself! I do what makes me happy again without caring about what anyone thinks. I have the satisfaction of knowing that if they like me for me they will make an effort to stay in my life and that I will meet the right people. Your poem embodies my recovery. I couldn't help smiling



## LEVEL 2: HONORABLE MENTION

and tearing up at the same time while I read it. “As I began to love myself I freed myself of anything that is no good for my health – food, people, things, situations, and everything that drew me down and away from myself. At first I called this attitude a healthy egoism. Today I know it is as LOVE OF ONESELF”. I no longer “crave for a different life.” I have gained “authenticity”, “respect”, “maturity”, “self-confidence”, “simplicity”, “fulfillment”, “wisdom of the heart”. I have regained the want for “life”. I am beginning to truly achieve “love of oneself.” Your poem has helped me to realize that I should love me for me and to embrace the crazy journey of becoming myself. Thank you Charlie Chaplin. Please know that you have been a part of me finding myself.

Sincerely,  
Lindsay Lenz

**SHERRARD MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
**WHEELING, WV**  
*TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE*  
**BY MITCH ALBOM**

Dear Mr. Albom,

Over summer break, during the transition between seventh and eighth grade, Tuesdays with Morrie. I would just sit and stare at the cover. “Tuesdays with Morrie; an old man, a young man, and life’s greatest lesson.”, what could this possibly be about? And why would it interest me? I knew you had a history of sports books, and I thought it’d just be another one of those, as those were the ones I’d heard your name from (and sorry but I didn’t read any. I’m not a big sports - fan). Maybe it was about some old baseball or whatever coach mentoring some starry-eyed lad and their journey to the big times, and that the big “life lesson” in all of it was some cliché sports saying such as; “Winning isn’t everything”, “It’s all about the game”, or “You’re number one in my heart”, and every time someone would see me with it out they’d just pass and say; “Oh, good choice”, “Love that book”, and “Hm, yea- that’s a classic”. And I’d say to myself- what? Well later, during my vacation, a sudden realization hit me – school started in three weeks, and I have two books to read. With this, and threats to finish or face

punishment from family members, I opened your book. Boy, was I wrong or what?

I’ve had kidney problems my whole life (quite ironic isn’t it?). I was born with a hydronephrosis surrounding the very small and disfigured left kidney. At one week of age my pediatric Nephrologist diagnosed me with severe Grade 5 Bilateral Reflux of both kidneys. That’s what started it all, the very first domino to fall. After that, there were surgeries, procedures, medicine, appointments, catherizations, you name it. I was on medicine from day one until, actually not to far back till I was ten. And when I was ten, that’s when it really hit. That Christmas, I was severely ill and no one knew what was wrong until they took a shot in the dark and sent a urine sample to Children’s UPMC in Pittsburgh. Yep, I had a very serious Urinary Tract Infection. The prophylaxis antibiotic that I had been taking to protect my kidneys had failed. Later that year, I had surgery to try and fix my ureters, bladder, kidney, etc. I was in surgery for eight hours, my Mom says it was the hardest day of her life. During the procedure, the Da Vinci Robot that was used during my surgery nicked a ureter by mistake. I know it was an accident, but ever since I’ve had a burning hate for that thing. The day after, I had not recovered at all and couldn’t walk or move; I was filling up with poisonous fluids. Dying, I was slowly, painfully dying. Emergency surgery came soon after and many more procedures after that. But that event changed my life, changed my outlook on life itself, well it changed everything. I had a new found appreciation for knowledge, learning, doctors, and medicine. I felt a deep sympathy for all the other children who were going through what I had to go through and anyone who was in that hospital or any hospital for that matter. I feel love for my family and friends like I’ve never felt before. I know that I was dying then – and it just makes me want to live even more now. There are so many flaws to me, but I’m fine to say that. It’s ok that I have melanoma in my body waiting to develop into cancer, it’s ok that at any minute I could have an asthma attack, it’s ok that yea I’ll probably need a new kidney someday, it’s ok that my eyes are terrible and no they won’t correct themselves, it’s ok...Because all those things are what make me unique, those things make me who I am. After that, so much changed. I’ve never been more close to God, and I know that I’m blessed. Heck, I wasn’t supposed to grow! Never to make it past at least five feet they said, he’ll never be able to participate in sports they said, he might be autistic they said. Well, I’m now six feet tall, I’m a competitive swimmer, I have a 4.00 grade average; and I’m happy to say that I’ve never felt better.

## LEVEL 2: HONORABLE MENTION

But when I read your book – when I read Morrie’s story...It all came back (possibly with an excess amount of tears). And I thank you for that, you gifted the world with your masterpiece and it was exactly what the world needed – exactly what I needed. A breath of fresh air, a cool cleansing cloth, and a person – well character, or book I guess – to really talk to (if that makes sense). But all in all - thank you. And now that Morrie and many others have finished their stories; it is now time for me to open my book, and continue to write mine.

**THE LINSLEY SCHOOL  
WHEELING, WV**

*DEAR BULLY*

**BY MEGAN KELLEY HALL**

Dear Megan Kelley Hall,

For the past three years I have been bullied. During one of those years, I came across your book *Dear Bully*. It’s not your typical bully story about a young boy who steals his younger sibling’s toy. This book is so much more than that, and it has really changed my life.

It all started in grade school with the small but powerful word, ugly. It never phased me that most of my “friends” would call me that. A year had gone by and the word never seemed to get old to them. My mind started changing its thoughts and before I could do anything, the stupid word they all called me, became my worst enemy.

In this book it has a lot more serious bullying stories than mine, but most bullying stories start by just one little word. Your inspiration for this book was after you witnessed a bullying problem that led to suicide. You and seventy different authors came together and decided to write an interesting book with each of you writing a part of it about a bullying problem you’ve had, have, or witnessed.

Becoming a teenager and being bullied is harder sometimes. The hormones kick in and then you’re questioning yourself about what you look like or even what other people think of you. Not so much boys, but girls tend to think their appearance isn’t good enough so they already have insecurities about themselves. When other people decide to call the names or put the down, they start to have more insecurity about it and sometimes

that leads to more serious issues. No one wants to be the names people call them and they try so hard to cope with it, but it only goes so far. Some people can’t take it as long as some others can.

After reading this book and discovering what those authors have gone through, it made me a better person. I will now, never let my appearance be my insecurity or let anyone try to tell me it is. Still to this day I have second thoughts on what I look like, but I don’t let it phase me that much anymore. I really hope this book will help others just as much as it helped me. It’s sad to hear about all the kids hurting themselves or others over little things people will say to them or about them. Thanks to your book, I believe more and more kids will learn to love themselves inside and out, no matter what anyone says.

**CRUM MIDDLE SCHOOL  
CRUM, WV**

*THE FAULT IN OUR STARS*

**BY JOHN GREEN**

Dear John Green,

I may only be thirteen years old, and I know I do not understand what love is or what life is about. However, reading *The Fault in our Stars* and learning about the bond of these two people, I feel that I have learned more than ever before. Watching the changes and challenges that both Hazel and Augustus experience is truly heartbreaking. They both have encountered and life threatening illness that could gain control of them any moment and take their life in mere seconds. As I traveled through the story, I wanted their journey to continue and never end. It drew me in to the point where I was in my own bubble, my own world.

While reading your book, I learned a lot of things. The most important lesson being that life is short, don’t take it for granted. Most people fail to appreciate yet another day of life to spend with our family, friends, and those we love. In fact, we don’t even really think about it that much. However, we need to understand something. We never know when our last day on this earth is, we never know when that day will come that we will be gone, forever. Therefore, we need to make each sweet moment of our lives count. Just as Augustus did.

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He knew that at any time, his life could be gone in the blink of an eye, so he made sure that every second was worth living.

Another valuable lesson, I learned while reading this book was the love can sometimes hide in the strangest of places. It can also wear a disguise that you must remove the mask from. When Hazel first met Augustus, I don't think that she expected what was coming her way. I doubt that she ever imagined she would meet some strange guy in the basement of a church who would eventually drive her crazy just trying to get her attention and she ends up falling in love with him just before he loses his life to cancer. I mean if you think about that's pretty unfair. But it is life. This exact scenario could really happen. I would never look for love in a focus group in the basement of a church, but apparently, it can be a really good place to look.

Additionally, you need to make sure that the ones you care about, know for a fact that you do care for them because you never know when your last day, hour, minute, or second with them will be. It was very unexpected for Hazel when Augustus became ill again and ended up losing his life. No one saw it coming and it was shocking as a reader as well. It really made me realize that if you truly love someone, whether it be a friend, family, or a love partner, no matter what you need to let that person know that you truly do care for them and the important part that they have in your life. Because you never really know when that part will be erased.

Let me give you a scenario, imagine you and your mother get into a big argument. You leave her house slamming the door behind you and do not ever turn around and tell her goodbye. As you are sitting in your apartment the next day still frustrated, your telephone rings. It's your brother calling to inform you that your mother has just been in a terrible car accident and is now in a coma in the hospital. You rush your very fastest, trying to get to the hospital as quick as possible while your entire body is trembling in fear. And as you enter the hospital doors your brother comes up to you and says that she is gone. She is gone now, and you didn't even get to tell her how much you loved her or how grateful you were for everything she has ever done for you. And now, you may never get to tell her.

In conclusion, Mr. Green your book *The Fault In Our Stars* changed my view on so many things. It taught me valuable life lessons that I will carry with me for a long time. These lessons are ones that everyone, every-

where needs to know. Because each and every one of them are true and can be put in a real life situation. Not just some book about two messed up teenagers who end up falling in love with one another. These things really can happen to all of us, whether you be a grown man making his own business in California, or a small town teenage girl in West Virginia. No matter who you are, what you do, or where you are from, these things can always happen to you and your family. So thank you sir for teaching me that life is short, so don't ever take it for granted, love can hide in the strangest places and can wear a mask that is nearly impossible to remove, and if you love someone, let them know that because you don't know if that is your last day with them or not.

**ZOE BIZZARI**

**THE LINSLEY SCHOOL  
WHEELING, WV**

*HOUSE ON MANGO STREET*  
BY SANDRA CISNEROS

Dear Sandra Cisneros,

When someone asks me what my favorite book is, *House on Mango Street* is not my first answer, nor will it ever be. I like unrealistic books about kids my age who always get their fairytale ending. This book was anything but that. But something about this book was different than all of the others I have read. Something about this book made me look at myself as someone who is very fortunate and ultimately, it made me truly grateful for the life that I have. However, I could relate to almost every story in some special little way.

Esperanza, a girl I assume is about my age, 14, is trapped, not physically, but mentally and emotionally. She is someone who takes all negative influences in her life and turns them into examples of what she doesn't want her life to look like. I tend to do that as well. Though I was adopted out of the horror, by the age of 5 months old, I was already exposed to drugs, negligence, prostitution, and overall just everything that no baby should ever have to be around. Esperanza's story is a bit different, in that she was in more of a struggle than a situation of exposure. She was involved in the circum-

## LEVEL 2: HONORABLE MENTION

stances rather than just having to see them.

One chapter of the book that always got the best of my curiosity was the chapter called "Born Bad". My first thought from a religious point of view, after looking at the title was that no one and I mean no one, is born bad. Behavior is a choice, always. As I read on, I realized that she believed she was born on an "evil day", because that is what her mom told her. And she says that she will go to hell because she is a bad person. I think this really hit me, because as human beings, we tend to believe that some things are just bad and there's nothing we can do to change them, but maybe our eyes aren't really open to what's good and what's bad. What we think is bad isn't always so bad. Esperanza doesn't realize this until the very end of the book.

Another situation that peaked my curiosity, was her relationship with Sally. Sally got Esperanza into things she never even dreamed of. So I asked myself Why did she put Sally in the book? I've always wondered how her character relates to the plot of this book. Why was she there, and why did Esperanza trust her? I have had bad influences in my life, with characteristics similar to Sally's and I always had struggles letting go of relationships, even unhealthy ones, until I read this book. It taught me that sometimes what you want isn't what's good for you. That's a lesson I definitely needed to learn and so does everyone else.

As inspirational as those stories were, the main theme of the story was always the window. Esperanza's grandmother was always physically trapped in a room looking out the window. Esperanza saw that and used it as a motivator to keep from being mentally trapped and looking out of a "window", but it's all just a metaphor. Her "window" is her "what ifs", "it could be's", and her "I wishes", but she recognizes that. This in particular, has really helped me because it makes me look at everything in a whole new way, I now find it easy to use other's mistakes as an example of what not to do, and I can see what led up to that mistake and make sure I follow another path. That is a value that I'll never forget all because of your book.

The whole book is about inspiration. It takes a story about something happening, and Esperanza uses it as something to remember and use during her daily life whether it be from seeing someone who has no life just smoking outside of her door, or being sexually abused herself. She learns so many lessons throughout the book and by reading through the lessons she learned, I

learned them too without the suffering part.

*House On Mango Street* was not at all what I expected it to be, and I'm glad it wasn't. This wasn't your typical light hearted fairy tale. It was the realest of reals. It let me take a look into the life of a girl, who's life was anything but perfect, and it gave me an idea for what the world is really like. So maybe it didn't meet my standards for "unrealistic books about kids my age who always get their fairytale ending", but it did meet my heart, and it managed to make me think, not many books can do that. I'm not a reader, but I've read this book 3 times, and now Esperanza is a part of me. But I've always had 1 question... Was this book about you? Does Esperanza represent you in the story? I guess I might never know, but who represents Esperanza isn't what's important. What's important is, she is now a part of me. My struggles might not always be as big as her's, but my eyes are always open to really now, and for that I am truly grateful. Thank you for changing my life forever.

Sincerely,  
Zoe Bizzari

**JOHN ADAMS MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
**CHARLESTON, WV**  
*RULES OF CIVILITY*  
**BY AMOR TOWLES**

Dear Amor Towles,

I believe that when two people love each other, they leave pieces of themselves inside one another. Your characters Tinker and Katey did this, each of them constantly being reminded of the other even when they were apart, keeping a piece of the other's soul in their pocket. Souls become intertwined. This is what your book did for me. I read *Rules of Civility* around two months ago, under overwhelming recommendation from my mother. I took her copy and read it to death. I wrote in the margins, I dog-eared, I underlined. I have even stuck autumn leaves in between the pages, and they have been safe there since early October. Their lives will end in between so many lives beginning. So, you see, a part of my soul is now in your book, and a part of your book is in my soul. We are intertwined, if I may be so bold. I spent the majority of what was supposed to be a family reunion



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sitting in the corner and devouring your book.

I have been to New York twice. Less than two weeks of my entire life has been spent there. The first time I went I was eight years old, we stayed in a hotel, and I was too interested in the American Girl Doll store to become fascinated with the skeleton of the streets or the lives that take place inside the subway. The second time, I was nearly 13 and we stayed in a friend's tiny apartment. It was July and we had no air conditioning. We kept the windows open, and all through the night you could hear the city and the way it breathed: laughing, yelling, the sounds of cars trapped in the street. But, rather than being annoyed by the heat and the noise, I loved it. I live in a classic town where nothing ever happens, and I was immediately fascinated by the chaos of this city. After we left, there was a tangible feeling of loss in my chest. We cannot be apart forever, New York and I. So I read about New York all I can, in an effort to feel closer to it. I read this book because of that.

It has only made my longing worse.

Somehow you manage to paint such an accurate picture of the time period, down to every detail. The descriptions of the clothes they wore, as Eve dressed herself in stolen garments, were absolutely doused in glamour. The clubs they haunted seemed like secret societies. Even the descriptions of Katey's apartment once she's living on her own causes a strange kind of envy. She sits in her studio, playing cards with a revolving cast of characters, and out of her window, laundry lines drift in the breeze. In the building across from her, a man stands in his kitchen, scrambling eggs at 9 at night. The entire scene is so very New York. Even their tragedies, which your characters have no shortage of, are not ordinary tragedies. The car wreck sets in motion a theatric relationship between Eve and Tinker, and Katey becomes tougher and darker as she scrapes and climbs her way to the top of Manhattan aristocracy, all the while with hair perfectly coiffed. The tragedy in Katey's life is ever-present, but she refuses to let it stop her. These characters are complex in that their sadness can not really equate to their being sad. It is as if they recognize that tragedy is a part of glamour.

The characters are what make the story. Katey, Eve, Tinker, they are all so incredibly and deeply flawed people. This is part of their allure. They have cracks, and we as the readers want to be their friend and share our own cracks with them. They are all comen of sorts, turning their ivory cheeks at the right moment, sharing only what they have to, selfish to a tee. As if they are soap opera characters, we giggle at the awful things they do and say, "Oh,

you're terrible," while still hanging on to see what they do next. Still rooting for them. You, as a writer, are able to see people complexly, a gift that so many people don't have. You wrote these characters cruelly, not giving the reader the ability to fully love them or to fully hate them. It is infuriating and maddening and magnificent.

Am I a different person because of this book? I'm not sure. I've read so many books in my life I have lost track of what parts of my being have come from what novels. But I know one thing: this is a book that has made me feel. It makes me feel longing for a fantasy world, and gratitude for the one that I have. The best books are the ones that not only make you feel alive, they make you happy to feel alive. This is not a happy ending kind of story, no. Not all questions are answered. You do not turn the last page feeling content and at ease. But feeling alive is not feeling at ease. Feeling alive is feeling everything and being ready for it. Feeling alive is apprehending sadness and tragedy and illness, as well as love and joy and excitement, and being ready for it, all of it.

And that, at least as well as I can explain it, is what this book has done for me. It is something that deserves thanks. Thank you.

**EMILY ANDERSON**  
**SHERRARD MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
**WHEELING, WV**  
*TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE*  
**BY MITCH ALBOM**

Dear Mr. Mitch Albom,

I am writing to you regarding your memoir Tuesdays with Morrie. Morrie Schwartz's lessons on life were not only touching but inspirational as well. Your willingness to share your admiration for Morrie openly drew me closer to him and to you as an author. Due to the content of your work, I have been inspired to have a more positive outlook on life.

"Love is the only rational act:" one of the most inspirational quotes of all time. The moment I read that line from your memoir, my heart was touched. I felt as if I needed to change the way I was living. As a middle school student, status is the only thing that makes you a somebody. If you are skinny, beautiful, or athletic, your status rises. If you wear expensive clothing and have



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popular friends, then, suddenly, you are considered better than everyone else. From your book, I learned that “status will get you nowhere. Only an open heart will allow you to float equally between everyone.” You have given me the wisdom to know that love is what really matters. Using this wisdom, I entered this school year with a greater confidence. I didn’t feel as if I needed to try to impress anyone. I knew that I could just be myself and that is great.

Also, thanks to your book, I learned not to hide my weaknesses. I should not be embarrassed because I’m not good at something; I need to try to improve myself or find something else that I’m good at. No one is great at everything, so why hide that you aren’t perfect? You, through Morrie’s words, have taught me that the negativity of others shouldn’t be a stumbling block, yet love should be our stepping stone.

I highly encourage others to read your masterpiece. The impact that your memoir could have on this dark world is limitless. To those who live a hateful life: “Love is the only rational act.” To those who feel they have no meaning: “The way you get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others.” To those who are fighting a battle that doesn’t seem to end: “Love wins. Love always wins.” Your memoir could help so many people. I believe that it already has.

To conclude this letter, I would like to thank you for allowing Morrie’s words to be at my finger tips. By publishing Tuesdays with Morrie, you have influenced my life in a very special way. I look forward to reading your other novels. Lastly, I would like to thank you for making your coach seem like my coach.

Cordially,  
Emily Anderson

ZHENDUO WU  
THE LINSLEY SCHOOL  
WHEELING, WV  
*LES MISÉRABLES*  
BY VICTOR HUGO

Dear Hugo,

The atmosphere around me is now warm and sweet. It is the 2015 Christmas eve and I am back home in China Nanjing from my U.S high school. I gathered with my parents and am ready to enjoy the Christmas break with my family. The melody of “Silent Night” spread all over in the night sky made my heart peaceful and quiet, my soul seems to be baptized and sublimated.

A scene came in front of me involuntarily. It is a scene from your novel *Les Misérables*. The holy light shines over bishop Monseigneur Myriel. At the time, a tramp with straggly beard and thin hair knocks at his door. There is a big sack on his shoulder and a heavy stick in his hand. He is Jean Valjean, who suffered because of holding a yellow ID which is a convict identity. He has been chased out of a doghouse, has no place to go and walked 12 miles with countless abuses and threats. The night wind of the alps rips into his ragged cloths. A person who used to be kind, honest and tolerant was sent to jail only because of stealing a piece of bread in order to rescue his sister from starving to death. He refused to obey; revolted and escaped from prison for four times as been recaptured as a fugitive back to the prison. After 19 years of prison life, Jean Valjean did not believe there is any benevolence, kindheartedness or integrity left in the world. His soul was tortured in physical pain and mental hostility.

With neither suspicion of anxiety, nor contempt or doubt, bishop Myriel treated Jean Valjean just like the others. He could tell Jean Valjean is “my brother” without seeing any of his identity. After Jean Valjean is arrested because of stealing his very own silverware, Myriel sent him his silver candlesticks instead of blaming. “Do not forget, never forget, that you have promised to use this money in becoming an honest man.” The bishop Myriel said, “Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I buy from you; I withdraw it from black thoughts and the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God.” Undoubtedly, Bishop Myriel is the embodiment of kindness.

## LEVEL 2: HONORABLE MENTION

At the moment, my heart was deeply shocked. Your literature made me unable to help myself from writing this letter to you to express how you influenced me.

What is *Les Misérables*? In my childhood, I thought it was simply a story about a bad guy catching a good person. When I was at middle school, I thought it was a novel about the class struggle. Today, I realized that it is an epic of love, grace and redemption, an epic which elucidates the relationship between sin and salvation, reason and faith, and free will and necessity. A true epic talks not only historical facts, but more importantly about the soul of human. The magnificent upsurge of soul is never fade compare to the magnificent upsurge of history.

Through your literature, I saw bishop Myriel rescue Jean Valjean out from the darkness, he is nearly perfect saint with Noble moral. Compassion, understanding, tolerance and dedication are his labels. In that tragic age, bishop Myriel is a savior who sends the glory of God He is also an embodiment of Jesus Christ who is willing to sacrifice for the suffering people. He guided Jean Valjean out of misery and shown him the brightness in this society shadowed with darkness. Because of bishop Myriel, Jean Valjean's conscience was rouse. His self redemption started. With no more despair or aversion, love grows in his heart.

Dear Mr. Hugo, your literature reflects the society background from the French Revolution of 1793 to the Paris Uprising in 1832. It is such a turbulent era that humans experienced cruel struggle! On the other hand, the Great Spirit and charisma of *Les Misérables* is the still positive energy and main melody although the modern society around us now peaceful and judicial.

We have to admit that human nature is complex and multifaceted no matter how the sociality we live is developed. The law is regarded as the supreme weapon in our society, which is also the bottom line of human morality. The abundance of people actually invests dignity of laws. Everyone has to obey the law; otherwise, punishments come right after. There is no doubt for sure! However, whether there is such one thing, it does not enforce people to "stop evil to submit good", but it influences and guides you spiritual to "abandon evil to inclined good"? After reading your novel, the answer appeared in my mind incredibly: which is love and forgiveness.

Love and forgiveness, the soul of your novel, is universal in our daily life. It melts everywhere that neither

on behalf of any classes or parties; nor representative to any people. Instead, it represents absolutely fairness and conscientiousness. It fights against anything that twists humanity, no matter how legal the thing is.

What a noble spirit guide! You pennit the existence of "evil" from the root of human nature as impelling people to turn to the virtuous side wholeheartedly. He said, moreover, "Teach those who are ignorant as many things as possible; society is culpable, in that it does not afford instruction gratis; it is responsible for the night which it produces. This soul is full of shadow; sin is therein committed The guilty one is not the person who has committed the sin, but the person who has created the shadow." You never judge simply whether a person's behavior is right, but by tracing their origins to point out the motivation behind the behavior. More importantly, you provide people opportunities to amend themselves.

What is "darkness"? As long as there is no light In the world of spirit, the light is love and forgiveness. You said this in the last second of your life: "Truth, brightness, justice and conscience, these are the personifications of God. God is a embodiment of splendor or daylight" The brightness of sun shines the light of love into people's soul to dissolve the evil. The way like Sister Simplicie who had never lie lied to rescue Jean Valjean from Javert. Deceiving is sin, but her rescue is motivated by love.

Dear Mr. Hugo, I started thinking about human nature after reading your novel, thinking about the value of laws. High-level laws are mercy and love; they can rouse the conscience of people to cut off evil. Low-level laws are simple punishments, they can only stir up people to rebel and deepen their sins. I deeply understood that compare to improving the judicial system, it is much more difficult and fundamental to perfect spirits of people. Your magnum opus, *Les Miserables*, did it absolutely.

While I am immersed in the melody of saintly song *Silent Night*, I prostrate myself in worship to you and write you this letter insuppressibly. As the church bells of Christmas rang, let us express our best wishes and forgiveness to the world and bless everyone to live in joy and peace.

Sincerely,  
Zhenduo Wu

## LEVEL 2: HONORABLE MENTION

CRUM MIDDLE SCHOOL

CRUM, WV

*THE TRUE CONFESSIONS OF CHARLOTTE*

DOYLE BY AVI

Dear Avi,

Reading has influenced me for as long as I can remember. When I was young, my mother would read me fantasy stories about beautiful princesses and tall towers, hearty pirates and buried fortunes, bewildering magic and wise sorcerers, brave knights and fearsome dragons; the list goes on forever. Each and every story took me on a new, spectacular adventure that no movie, play, poem, or song ever could. Even as I grow older and busier, I still spend most of my free time relaxing in my serene window seat overlooking the livid forest outside reading a novel while listening to the beautiful forest's soft, gentle breathing. Every single book that I have ever read has become a miniscule part of me – slowly shaping who I am. However, I honestly believe that there is no book in existence that shall have as big an impact as your book, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, has.

I have always been a soft, quiet person. I'd much rather read a good book in the comfort of my room than take trips to amusement parks or malls. I guess you can say that I'm antisocial, but despite being alone, I hardly ever feel lonely. Not as long as I have a book to lose myself in, that is. In most things I try my best, but when my best is not enough, I give up and try something else. I've never really invested all of my time and dedication to one particular goal, but rather its as if I'm sledding in a nice, polished sled along a soft, easy slope that goes on forever. Should I hit a bump on my smooth, gentle ride, I simply shrug it off, alter directions, and relax because there's nothing you can do once the damage is done. However, what I didn't realize is that all of the bumps and scuffs add up over time destroying your haven of a sled bit by bit, bringing you down, slowly and silently. I didn't know – no, that's not right. Somewhere deep down I always knew the truth, but I refused to acknowledge that no matter how comfortable the ride may be that it wasn't leading me to where I really wanted to go; it was missing something. I just couldn't understand what I was missing. *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, however, helped me understand **exactly** what I was missing.

Charlotte's stiff, formal relationship with her father began to open my eyes to the realities of the world. I never once thought that there was anything wrong with Charlotte's life in the beginning – she was an intelligent, pleasant girl with more money than she knew what to do with, with parents that encouraged her to do well, and a well-rounded demeanor about her. In some ways, I found us to be very much alike. I even sensed a certain emptiness about her, a feeling not quite unlike my own at times. I read on, intrigued by the shocking life of the young, classy girl. I couldn't help but feel awe towards her as she proved to be a light in the darkest of times, defying everything she once thought was important, and seeking out true freedom and happiness in the most unlikely of places. The astonishing change in her demeanor and outlook on life, as well as her newfound will and bravery, inspired me to want to be like her – to have the courage to make a difference and stand for what I desire, not what others want for me.

Avi, thank you so much for giving me the courage to do what I believe is right. I'm not going to say that I've gotten as brave and heroic as Charlotte, no, not even close. A fourteen-year-old habit of shyness and uncertainty is hard to break, after all. However, your book gave me the confidence to step outside of my comfort zone and give it my best effort. This is more than I could ever ask for, more than I could ever hope for, and your book has given it to me. It is a treasure that I will hold close to my heart, and like Charlotte, let it be my light in the darkness. I'm not quite sure how to thank you enough, perhaps it's even impossible, but know that you've made a tremendous difference in my life. Thank you.

## LEVEL 3: HONORABLE MENTION

ROANE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL  
SPENCER, WV

*A CHILD CALLED IT* BY DAVE PELZER

Dear Dave Pelzer:

I read your book, *A Child Called It*, when I was younger. In fact, I was too young to connect the events in my life to the events that you had lived and then written about on paper. Now that I am older I am able to compare the way I felt reading your book to the things that were happening around me. It took me a long time to really understand what was going on in the house across the street. Looking back on it, I believe your book helped me to move on and to get through the emotions I was feeling after my friends were taken by Child Protective Services, and to walk me through the weeks after the mother of a little boy I babysat took his life.

In elementary school, there was a family that lived across from me. The family included five children. I was friends with them and I would often go across the road to play. It's been so long that the most distinct memory I have of them is sitting on the sidewalk, holding the baby, Gabriel, while the social worker explained that they all had to leave. We all cried. I cried myself to sleep for months. I can remember the pain and confusion that I felt when they were gone. I didn't understand and neither did they. To my knowledge, they were never physically abused, but they were neglected. Their father would get drunk and he would call them names. I would slink back to my house, hoping that they wouldn't "get in too much trouble."

I realize now that this was different than getting in trouble. To get in trouble you have to have done something wrong. They didn't have to do anything at all. Their father would suppress his anger until he could dive into a bottle of whatever alcohol he could find. Then it would be taken out on the children.

After reading your book a few years later, I wondered how they felt. Were they scared? I can remember being embarrassed at school because they would eat two or three trays of food. My "friends" would make fun of me for talking to them willingly, and at times I was ashamed to be friends with them. Reading your book made me think about what it would be like to be in their position. It made me realize that I was being selfish. Again, I felt ashamed, not for what they were doing, but

for the way I felt about them. Things at home aren't perfect for me, but I've never been in a position where I had to eat all I could at school, knowing that was all there was that day. I can't even begin to imagine that feeling.

Your book made me think about what others felt. I wasn't just worried about myself anymore. Someone else's well being mattered just as much to me as my own. I missed them, and I didn't care about the way they ate at school. What my peers said didn't bother me anymore because those five children had been nicer to me than any of them had ever been. They were my best friends. Realizing that they were being neglected hurt me more than the thought of them leaving. I was hopeful that they would finally get to be the happy, cheerful, and loving people that I knew them to be. I think of them all frequently, now. I wonder how old the baby is, if they were separated, and if they ever get to see each other.

*A Child Called It* has made me think about so many things in my life. These are not the only people I have lost due to neglect. A few years after they were taken, I was about eleven, and I babysat a little boy. He was four or maybe five and he was the happiest little thing. We played tag in my backyard. To this day that is one of my favorite memories. Unfortunately, I never saw the little boy again. His mom took him home and a few weeks later she beat him to death.

I was shocked. Again, my mind traveled to your book, making me wonder how someone could do that to a little boy. Had he gone without food? Had she hit him before? Was that the only life that beautiful little boy knew? He would've been too young to remember a time other than that. Unlike you, nothing had changed for him. That is the only way he would remember his mother. He would never know his mother as "caring." She hadn't given him any memories of that. He was so innocent and she took him from my care and ended his life. I blamed myself for a long time. I kept thinking that maybe if I had noticed something was off! I could've done something to help him, like the school nurse helped you. Maybe I could've kept him from dying. It was the first time that I had met his mother, and it was the first time I watched him, but it ate me alive. I realize now that there wasn't much I could've done even if I had known. No one would've listened to the eleven year old that had only seen the child for a few hours.

Your book has kept me thinking, and I truly believe it has made me a more caring person. I am older now. I'll be eighteen December thirteenth, and so it's



## LEVEL 3: HONORABLE MENTION

time to start thinking about college. Yet again, I find myself thinking about your book and I'm sure it won't be the last time. I have decided to major in Behavioral Science and minor in Social Work. You never would have gotten out of that house if it wasn't for the social worker, and the nurse at school. I want to make a difference, too. I am tired of being helpless. A Child Called It has given me the initiative to be the change I want to see in the world. I don't want another child to be scared and helpless, or cry themselves to sleep at night. The thought of a child laying in bed at night with their stomach cramping from lack of food is just too much for me to stand. I plan to do everything that I can to make a difference.

I want to be the person who makes a difference in someone else's life. The thought of that makes me giddy! Being able to help those in need is such an amazing thing. Because of your book, I believe that I have chosen the right path for my life. It is what I am passionate about, and

I don't think I ever would've figured that out if it wasn't for A Child Called It. Thank you for sharing your story.

**RICHWOOD HIGH SCHOOL  
RICHWOOD, WV**

*TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* BY HARPER LEE

Dear Ms. Lee:

"She is the victim of cruel poverty and ignorance but I cannot pity her: she is white." That is a well-written quote by you, Harper Lee. Hello my name is Mackenzie Chambers and I admired your thrilling novel, To Kill A Mockingbird, as much as I did the life lessons that it brought to life. This novel changed my view of the world drastically. It showed me three very crucial things: the world is very harsh, you should never judge a book by its cover, and courage is physical and mental. Being a young teenager when I first read this novel made me question aspects on life and life itself. Now, being 16, I fully understand the concept and life lessons of your novel, To Kill A Mockingbird.

To start out with, my view of the world itself changed. It is very cruel due to very many ignorant people. In your novel, Atticus Finch agrees to defend a black man named Tom Robinson accused of rape. The

only real reason he was sent to court was because the female, that was the so called victim, was white. They were being prejudice. People believed and still believe today that skin color defines a person. It doesn't. Racist people have strong feelings that if you're not white, you are guilty or wrong. It isn't just white people, it happens to be a trait in many races. Another example of why I view the world as cruel is that in the book when Tom Robinson, the accused "rapist", was sent to court, Finch proved very well that it wasn't him that raped the young, white girl. It was her own father, who didn't rape her, but beat her and verbally beat her by whipping and slapping her, to calling her a whore. This proves that people, even family members, would hurt someone physically and mentally, and still blame someone else. The people in this world make it horrific and you helped me prove that.

Furthermore, your novel also made me realize that everybody judges people on what they've heard about them, what they look like, etc. It made me come to the conclusion to never judge somebody by what's on the outside. Boo Radley had never been seen or heard from, but stories were crawling all over the place about him. People were frightened by his mysterious life that no one really knew about. I can only imagine what that character was feeling. But after Tom Robinson's case, the two main children in the novel, Scout and Jem, started having a diverse understanding of Boo. "Scout, I think I'm beginning to understand something. I think I'm beginning to understand why Boo Radley's stayed shut up in the house all this time... it's because he wants to stay inside," stated the character Jem. They finally came to the resolution that people shouldn't be judged, especially when you don't know them or their story. People make false accusations about other people, but you made me realize that the world would be a better place if we didn't.

Courage is mental and physical. That is the final thing that your famous novel has taught me. When Tom Robinson was accused of rape, Atticus Finch had the courage to step up and be on his side. When Boo Radley had been bullied all his life, he had the courage to walk outside with Scout and actually start living. Those are both the mental attributes of courage. There are many places in the novel where courage is physical such as: Atticus Finch standing in the middle of the street, facing off with a rabid dog armed only with a shotgun. Courage is an excellent attribute to keep. You helped me remember that.



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Overall, your novel *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Harper Lee, has taught me several life lessons about the world and people in general. The way you wrote this wonderful story come alive in so many ways astonishes me. Racism, hard times, and happiness are all brought out in your majestic words. This novel brings problems to life and evaluates the many issues people still have and need to solve today. Thank you Harper Lee for making me evaluate more things about the world and my own life.

**ASTRID “CADE” FISHER**

**JAMES MONROE HIGH SCHOOL**

**LINDSIDE, WV**

*SELF RELIANCE* BY RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Dear Ralph Waldo Emerson,

It is quite unconventional, as it may seem, to be writing a letter acknowledging the positive influence your essay *Self-Reliance* has had on me. I say unconventional for the fact that many critics and everyday readers have found your work to be rather ardent toward the subject of self-reliance. For me, however, your essay has initiated a sort of inspiration within me; a flame of strong will and confidence that cannot be extinguished.

For the entirety of my life, all sixteen years, I have relied wholly on others to satisfy my needs and desires. Throughout elementary school, middle school, and even the first two years of my high school career, I would depend on others- rather it be friends, family, or someone that I was only mildly acquainted with- to perform tasks for me. I would load my duties onto someone else's back and expect them to be done by my own standards, even though it was obvious that the outcome would be far from how I wanted it to be. Although reading those previous sentences may lead you to believe that I was lazy or lackadaisical, I was, in fact, far from those harsh descriptions. I am a very introverted person. Many even believe that I am narcissistic- much too good and too pure to speak to those around me. However, social anxiety has a notably strong grip on my wrist, following me everywhere I travel. It became exceedingly difficult to escape from such a sinister grip as I grew older for I wanted nothing more to fit in and be like the “popular kids.” I ever became depressed during my eighth grade year in middle school once I realized that I will never

be like those other students. Anxiety had taken a toll on my body and mind. It was virtually impossible for me to escape from my secret hell. Things had to change.

I was in a constant battle with my own mind. I practically drove myself mad with the idea that I will never be good enough for anything and that I would be forever doomed with unsuccessfulness. My mind wearily danced around the concept of completely giving up on school and that measly excuse of a social life I endured.

One day, as I sat in my eleventh grade English class, vexed with the very thought of being there, my teacher passed out quite a lengthy essay with the title of *Self-Reliance*. I was repulsed with the fact that I had to read another essay; it interested me almost as much as a rock on the ground. To my surprise and enjoyment, I became very intrigued with your essay. One line in the first paragraph jumped off the page at me. You stated, “To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men- that is genius.” That statement alone sparked a light inside of me that has never been ignited before. As you contrasted relying on others to being self-reliant, my mind raced with joy in realization that I had finally found that work of art, that human being, that everyday object that inspired me. It inspired me to be the best thing that I could ever be. You spoke of great men such as Socrates, Galileo, and Newton and how, were looked down upon by others and disliked for their way of life. My anxiety melted away and cowered like a frightened dog in a corner as you mentioned those names and how they too were misunderstood. You wrote, “To be great is to be misunderstood.” That, to me, was the most powerful line in your entire essay. It spoke to me and told me that I am good enough and always will be no matter what anyone says.

I want to thank you immensely for writing this essay. It was written not for those who are self-reliant, but for those who may be slightly self-conscious and easily susceptible to the temptation of taking the easy road out and simply being the same as everyone else in a society, just as I was. With the help of *Self-Reliance*, I have finally discovered how great it is to be an individual. Your essay has taught me that if I want something, whether it is easily acquired or it takes patience and work to achieve, I should strive to accomplish that goal no matter what. As you stated at the end of your essay, “Nothing can bring you peace but yourself.”

This is me thanking you for ridding me of my beast of burden- anxiety- and showing me that I should always be myself and rely on myself. Thank you again,

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Ralph Waldo Emerson for endowing a confidence and a sense of pride so strong upon me that I know I will achieve any goal I set my mind on.

Cade Fisher

**ROANE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL  
SPENCER, WV**

*THE SKIN I'M IN* BY SHARON FLAKE

Dear Sharon Flake,

Your book, *The Skin I'm In*, has really been an eye opener for me and has helped me change the way I view myself and other girls of color. Before I read your book, I was so convinced that I was the only girl who was going through everyday racism in and out of school. Seeing that Maleeka was going through the same thing I was and how she dealt with it was very helpful. She taught me how to deal with those who tried to bring me down with them. But most importantly, Maleeka helped me learn how to love myself, no matter my hair, weight, or the color of my skin.

Although I wasn't the only biracial child that attended my middle school, I was the darkest in skin color. Boys would laugh at the way I looked, dressed, and talked. They made fun of my hair and my weight. Honestly, middle school was horrible for me. I thought that I could change myself into the thing people wanted me to be. I paid more than two-hundred dollars a year to get my hair relaxed, spent a fortune buying new clothes, and learned how to do makeup. Every morning I would get up thirty minutes to an hour earlier than usual to make myself look and feel pretty so that I wouldn't be bullied as much. But it was no use; in fact, it just made it worse.

Eventually, I convinced myself that the only thing I wanted to do was just drop out of school so that I wouldn't have to deal with any of it. Very few people would listen to me when I told them about the bullying, and those who did listen told me to get over it and that it was not a serious problem that needed to be addressed. Counselors, teachers, even my mother told me to "just ignore them," as if those three words would be the answer to all of my problems. Eventually I gave up seek-

ing for help. All the taunting and racial slurs that were thrown into my face became normal for me and in time I stopped paying attention to everything.

The earliest of the bullying began in elementary school, especially in fourth grade. Students would hold up black pieces of paper and say that that is what I looked like. I would then yell back "I am not black! I am African American!" because those were the only words I knew that meant mixed or biracial, or so I thought at the time. My teacher became so infuriated with the race wars that were going on that one day she held up a black paper and a piece of white paper and said, "This is black. You are not black." She then turned to the other student with the white paper and said, "This is white. You are not white. Now this is the end of the argument." Remembering that made me feel like I had my own Miss Saunders. The class went silent and I sat there feeling ashamed for getting in trouble but also happy that a teacher took up for me during a situation like this. The taunting simmered down for the rest of the year.

I remember one incident that to this day still burns like fire in the back of my mind. I was sitting in class and across the room was a group of boys who would regularly harass me. Something came up and our teacher had to leave the room for a few minutes. During that time the five boys all decided to call me one rude thing after the next and were laughing about it, with the rest of the class joining in, pointing and laughing at me. Mocking me. Although I was feeling very uncomfortable with the situation everyone else seemed to be enjoying themselves, which made me a bit happy with how pleased they were. The boys then made a drawing of a monster, labeled it with my name, and threw it at me. When I opened it, I didn't say anything. I just sat there. Our teacher walked in and the class went back to normal, as if nothing had happened. I didn't tell the teacher and acted as if I was completely emotionless, but when I went to my next class, I completely lost it.

I was taken to the counselor's office and was verbally forced to say what happened. I honestly didn't want to, in fear that the boys would hate me and the bullying would become worse. Eventually I told them everything, from the time it started up until this point. Six years of being bullied. Six. Once eighth period came around everyone was whispering but I didn't know for what exactly. It turned out that the school administration called the group of boys into the office and they got in trouble. My stomach started to chum and I had the worst feeling

## LEVEL 3: HONORABLE MENTION

ever. “*Dear Lord, what have I done?*” I said to myself. I was preparing for the worst to come the next day, but it never did.

It was the summer of 2012 and I had graduated eighth grade and was enjoying my summer vacation before my first year of high school. I started reading a lot more and came across your book in my mother’s room. Since my mother is Caucasian, obviously I was very confused as to why she had this since she would not have to worry about those types of problems. I took the book and started reading it a few months later and once I picked it up it was very difficult for me to put it down again. I stayed up during countless hours of the night reading, imagining and putting myself in the same positions. Once the book ended, I realized that other people also get bullied for something they cannot help, especially for the color of their skin.

Now I’m sure you’re thinking; “Well Yeah, I don’t know how you couldn’t have known that.” and I’ll be more than happy to explain to you how I didn’t know. Here in my hometown of Spencer, West Virginia, I am technically considered a minority. Although I don’t really think of it as a bad thing, I never really put that much thought into it either. My family is Caucasian except for my brothers and sisters, but that is because we were all adopted. I never saw a “white” person be bullied because of his or her skin, so when it happened to me I was very surprised and confused.

Although Maleeka and I connect on the bullying level, there are differences between us. Where she lived in an apartment with her older sister and mother in the city, I live in a house out in the country while being the eldest sibling. Our bullies were different too. Where I had what are commonly known as “hicks” and “rednecks”, she had other African Americans bullying her. One thing is for sure though, both bully parties were just plain ignorant.

I guess what I’m trying to say is that by the end of the book I was given a kickstart on how to love my melanin body. Living in a world where people will constantly try to mold and transform you into something you’re not will take an effect on most people, especially teenage girls, but it is up to us to stand our ground and remember who we are. *The Skin I’m In* truly made me love the skin that I am in.

**JOHN ANTOLINI**

**BUCKHANNON-UPSHUR HIGH SCHOOL**

**BUCKHANNON, WV**

*TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE* BY MITCH ALBOM

Dear Mitch Albom,

I would like to say, from the bottom of my heart, **thank you** for sharing the fond memories you created with your dearest professor and sharing them for the people – me in particular – to experience and enjoy.

Through your book, I have learned life lessons of great value that will stick with me for the rest of my life. The experience was as though Morrie was my personal mentor throughout; I put myself in his shoes, as a man whose time on earth is coming to a close, in order to amplify the effect that I was having. Because of this, Mitch, I often cried.

Morrie’s insight into modern culture and our way of life has caused me to rethink my own personal notions of the same. I have a greater appreciation of family after reading your book; I now believe that family is a very important structure because of the limitless amounts of love and support that come when tragedy strikes. When I imagined what not having a family to fall back on would feel like, I recognized the importance of family even more, and grew stronger as a person.

I was absolutely heartbroken when I lost a very close friend of mine, Lacey Warner, last May, and I still have emotional breakdowns from time to time. To my surprise, Morrie offered me a few words of advice: “You let go, let the tears flow, feel it completely – but eventually be able to [experience other emotions] (pg. 105)”, which just happened to be the same technique Morrie used to deal with all the emotions surrounding his impending death. Whenever a particularly strong memory comes up of me and Lacey, whether it was at one of her birthday parties, at school, or at Burger King every Tuesday (just like you and Morrie met every Tuesday), I simply remember this quote from the book: “Think of my voice and I’ll be there ... and if you want to cry a little, it’s okay.” (pg. 134). I realized that even though Lacey passed away, her memories are still alive. On a related note, my family was right there by my side at the memorial.

I became a more conscious individual, endowed with a greater appreciation and thankfulness for family, community, and love that will last the rest of my life.

## LEVEL 3: HONORABLE MENTION

Thanks be to you – and Morrie – for that.

Yours truly,  
John Antolini

**MATTEO CERASOLI**  
**WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL**  
**CHARLES TOWN, WV**  
*THE ORDINARY SPACEMAN*  
BY CLAYTON ANDERSON

Mr. Clayton Anderson,

For as long as I can remember, I've always been fascinated with space and the numerous mysteries it contains. Planets, distant stars, the sheer enormity of our universe; all of it fills me with excitement and curiosity to this day. At a young age, I became interested in certain careers associated with space such as being an astronomer or an astronaut and avidly attempted to do as much as I could to further myself down their paths. However, as I grew older, my dreams of going into space began to seem less and less feasible, but my interest in it never went away.

In the summer of my 9th grade year, going into 10th grade, I was on my way back from vacation at Disney World in Orlando. At the time, I thought that my vacation had come to an end. However, not only was it not over, but the best part was still to come. The flight back to Dulles International Airport seemed enough like the first to Orlando, save for a slightly different seating arrangement for my family, and that we were taking a different plane. Little did I know, however, that this nearly identical flight would prove to be indescribably more exciting than I could've possibly imagined; the person sitting in the seat in front of me was none other than yourself: United States astronaut Clayton Anderson.

It wasn't until after the flight when you handed me your business card that I realized your true identity and could barely contain my excitement. I immediately had dozens if not hundreds of questions to ask you: What is it like living in OG? How long have you been in space in total? How many missions have you flown? I somehow managed to stop myself from spilling out all of these questions onto you long enough to get off of the

plane and to the baggage claim where a fortunate delay allowed me to finally ask you all of my questions that were begging for answers. For what seemed like many incredible hours, but could've easily only been minutes, my father and I asked you questions we'd had forever, and you had both the knowledge and similar excitement, along with an exceptional amount of patience, to answer them. It was during this conversation that you told me you had flown to Dulles because you are having a book signing for your autobiography *The Ordinary Spaceman* at the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center the following day. Without hesitation, I exclaimed that both my father and I would be there, both to have another chance to talk to you and to purchase a copy of your autobiography.

The following day, I arrived at your book signing just minutes before you had to leave, and immediately recognized you at the table. I took my place in line and could hardly wait to get myself a copy of your book. When my father and I were finally at the front of the line, right at your table, we were both amazed that not only had you recognized us, but remembered who we were and greeted us almost like old friends! I remember that we had talked for quite some time about how the signing had been, and asked more questions about both your book and your astronaut career, while everyone around us seemed confused, wondering how we could've possibly known each other beforehand. However, we couldn't hold up the line forever, and when I did purchase a copy of *The Ordinary Spaceman*, not only did you sign your name, you actually wrote a message to me that still and will forever ring true and with significance: "Matteo – Never give up on your dreams – you define your future! - Clayton C. Anderson"

After reading *The Ordinary Spaceman*, I believe nothing contrary to that. Your story is one of continuously working towards your goals, pushing through any obstacles that prevent you from reaching them, and persevering until you reach the end, and in most cases even then keep going.

One of the events you mentioned in the book was how you applied to the astronaut program **fifteen times** before finally being accepted. I find this to be one of the most inspiring experiences that you talk about, as it truly shows dedication, determination, and motivation on a level that I have seen nowhere else. And this is only one of your many, many experiences that displays extreme levels of these qualities: your experiences in the American wilderness and your intensive training in Rus-



## LEVEL 3: HONORABLE MENTION

sia are two more instances where your story's recurring theme of extreme motivation, dedication, and determination are visible.

What I do believe is the most amazing part of your story is how its title, of all things, affects the way I see your story. To me, and hopefully most people, it is clear to see that being a Spaceman is anything but ordinary; fewer than six hundred people worldwide have been to space, and to be one of those lucky few is truly an incredible feat. Knowing this, the way that I interpret the idea of an "Ordinary Spaceman" isn't to suggest that a Spaceman is ordinary, but how a seemingly 'ordinary' person can become one. This brings me back to how important dedication, determination, and motivation are to anyone to accomplish their goals, and how prevalent these three qualities are in *The Ordinary Spaceman*.

If I had to choose one significant and important idea that I learned from your story apart from the many interesting facts about NASA, space, and the astronaut program is that, with enough motivation, determination, and dedication, you can truly accomplish anything- no matter how impossible or difficult it may seem. If I ever lack the motivation to get something done, whether it's as simple as doing my homework or as significant as keeping a difficult commitment, your story always comes to mind and gives me the motivation I need to get it done.

This relates almost perfectly to the message you wrote for me; how my dreams will define my future and that I should never give up on them. With enough motivation, determination, and dedication, my dreams **can** and **will** become my future, and, thanks to your story and the motivation it brought me, my old dreams of being an astronomer or astronaut seem possible after all, and even more in my reach than they ever have been before.

I will never stop working towards my dreams, no matter what obstacles stand in my way.

- Matteo D. Cerasoli

ROANE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL  
SPENCER, WV

*THE FAULT IN OUR STARS*

BY JOHN GREEN

Dear John Green:

It was the summer of 2014 when I had decided that I was going to be a volunteer camp counselor in Tucker County, West Virginia for a week. The camp was for underprivileged children around the state as a sort of vacation for them to get away from their troubles, which included anything from instability at home to the lack of a home at all. I knew that staying in the cabins with these children would also mean staying up late with them, so I decided to bring a book with me to at least keep me occupied on nights when the children couldn't be bothered to shut their eyes and go to sleep: *The Fault in Our Stars*. I had never once thought that your book would stick with me like it did or tie in so closely to my week with these kids. You taught me what it means to be alive; rather, you showed me how to give life meaning.

Throughout the week, I had become increasingly attached to a boy named Charlie. About 8 or 9 years old, he had blond hair and blue eyes and was very outgoing. I guess you could say that I really was a father figure for Charlie that entire week, but when a boy about half your age starts calling you "dad", you start to see the world a little differently. The day that all of the children had to leave, I could tell how distraught he was. He really didn't want to leave me or anyone else there to go back to whatever situation he came from.

Every night, I was kept awake until about 1:00 in the morning, obviously past the campers' bedtimes. We always were taking children to the bathroom way past their bedtime, which was ultimately due to the fact that the bathroom was its own building outside of the cabin, shared by all three of the boys' cabins. To make matters worse, my cabin was the furthest from the bathroom. Every other night, we had a disgusting, yet unfortunate problem. The showers were in a different room in the same building as the bathrooms. It would appear that one or two of the kids had trouble distinguishing the two rooms. A couple of nights of the week, we actually found that feces had been smeared on the wall of one of the showers by one of the boys, and, of course, we had to clean it up. I learned that week that fecal smearing in



## LEVEL 3: HONORABLE MENTION

children is often a result of some sort of mental disorder or a history of physical or sexual abuse. I suddenly realized that I hadn't been paying enough attention to the problems of others.

Like Hazel Grace and Augustus, the children at the camp were not at fault for the situation they were in. In a twist on the famous quote in William Shakespeare's "The Tragedy of Julius Caesar", the fault was not in themselves, but in their stars, so to speak. I understand that pain is a necessary part of life, for we would never feel joy if not for despair. However, does that mean that we as a species shouldn't do what we can to ease the needless pain of others? That week and your book made me realize what kind of person I wanted to be and what I wanted to do with my life.

The universe is insensitive to the thoughts and feelings of the ordinary human being. I had known this for the longest time, and my week in Tucker County reading your book only reinforced that for me. But not only did it reinforce this idea, it made me more aware of the struggles of the average person and made me realize that while we can't ever stop the carelessness of the universe, we should always do what we can, in vain or not. The combined force of that week and your book completely changed the course of my life from selfish to purely altruistic.

At one point in time, I was going to go to college for music, which, obviously, is very hard to actually find a job in. The music field is very competitive, and I felt that I was good enough to succeed. While I tried justifying that by saying I wanted to entertain people and enrich their lives with music, that wasn't true by any standard. I was going to do it for me. I liked being in the spotlight, hearing the crowd cheer, and the goosebumps crawling their way up my skin. Not once did I truly believe that I was doing something good for others by playing music for them.

I've now decided to go into the field of political science. I'm hoping to run for office soon, not in search of power, but in hopes of helping the everyday person and easing the burden of those in faultless pain. I want to someday enrich the lives of our country's youth, making the problems I saw that week less common. I feel that that is my duty to those around me and to my country, at the least as repayment for all the privileges I had in my childhood. Society is often too caught up in the idea of the American Dream, not even noticing that the American Dream is just that to the many people in pov-

erty: a dream. The privileged few refuse to actually take a look at the problems of the unfortunate lower class. I want to see that change and have decided do something about it.

I know that different people interpret *The Fault in Our Stars* in different ways, and that's okay. Literary meaning is often dependent on the reader, not the author. However, it just so happened that the meaning I got from your book and my week in Tucker County was probably more than I'll get out of any other work that I'll ever read. Truly, your book has changed the code that I live by in every way. Instead of looking to help myself, I seek to serve the public and help others in need. Since July 2014, I have developed into an entirely different person, and I just want to thank you for that. Perhaps I can now go on to inspire others as you have inspired me.

WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL  
CHARLES TOWN, WV

*A BAG OF BONES*  
BY STEPHEN KING

Dear Stephen King,

For as long as I can remember, reading has been a huge part of my life. My father and I always viewed it as a beautiful stress reliever to get your mind and soul lost in. A simple book can connect to you in an abundance of ways.

I grew up loving books. As I got older, I grew to love literature in all forms. Poems, books, short stories, you name it. Reading is something I will always treasure.

*A Bag of Bones* was a book I read in June of last year. I remember my dad bugging me to read it, it was his favorite book. After refusing it a few times I finally gave in. He promised me we would read the entire thing together. As we started reading it, I became more entranced with every page.

The way the book captures the heartbreak of Mike after losing his wife so suddenly was worded so beautifully. I could almost feel his pain myself. The suspense from trying to figure out what Joanna wants to tell him keeps you hanging from every typed word, and reading intensely. I didn't want to put the book down. Unfortunately I can honestly say the best part was spending time with my dad. Being able to connect with my best

## LEVEL 3: HONORABLE MENTION

friend over that book was the best feeling I have ever experienced.

Two months into reading it completely with my father, he passed away very suddenly. It broke my heart, I never thought I would lose my best friend. I could finally feel how Mike felt when he lost Joanna. This very reason helped me connect to the book that much more. We were only on chapter seventeen, we never got to finish it together.

My father used reading as an escape from his thoughts. I had never seen him more alive and emotional than when he was reading to me. He made the books seem to come to life, like he was telling me a story that he experienced himself. My father always told me that if I was ever stressed or blocked up with too many thoughts, just to pick up a book and not to put it down until I came to the end. Losing yourself in something like that helps relieve you.

As I read through the book, I hear my dad's voice with every word, sliding out of his mouth with ease and bliss. I get constant flashback of us sitting together reading all day, I feel my heart and soul fill with pure happiness. Whenever I pick up the book, it's like he's still here with me, reading, holding onto every word just like me. It's the most amazing feeling in the world.

Reading through this phenomenal work of art has helped me stay connected with my best friend, my father. Being so surrounded by his memory has helped me grow as a person. I could only hope that my dad would be proud of the strong, young adult I have become, and I don't know what I would do without this book.

This novel was a very suspenseful book that kept your heart racing the entire time. I have grown from this book, yet it still helps me to hold onto the past. I have grown to learn how to cherish the people you care about because they may be taken from you at any moment, This has taught me to connect with people because you never know when, or if you're going to see them again. This forever lasting memory I have received with this book will stay with me forever and I can't even fathom how to put my thankfulness into words.

**SHELBY SNYDER**  
**WIRT COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL**  
**ELIZABETH, WV**  
*A MILLION LITTLE PIECES*  
BY JAMES FREY

Dear James Frey,

While reading your book *A Million Little Pieces* I found myself realizing my dad's problems. My dad is a recovering alcoholic, from a young age just like you. My grandfather was also an alcoholic; my dad tells me stories about how my grandpa would go crazy from being in the military as well. My dad has started an AA meeting in my town because he knows that there are people in my county who cannot travel as much as others can. Now, I'm sure most people don't tell you about how they stumbled across your book, but I will! My mom and I always like to go to the Salvation Army to get great books we love to read over and over again. One day I was feeling adventurous and decided to try some new books. I saw the beautiful blue color on your cover and decided to pick it up. I read the back and I instantly fell in love, and I started reading that day along with every day for the rest of that week, every day I had the advantage to. School began and my ability to sit down and read got less and less, now I'm getting back into reading. I'm about half way through the book and I love every second of it. My favorite part so far is your battle with belief; I am currently battling with my belief due to the crazy, terrible things that life has handed me. Something that truly inspired me about your book was when you found out that Leonard was an organized criminal but you didn't care. All my life my mom and family have told me that the people that I spend my time with will impact the way people judge me. Day in and day out I get judged for my friends anyways, by reading this I realized that I'm not the only one who doesn't care about someone's past as long as they treat you right.

The struggle you were facing opened my eyes to the struggle my dad was facing. When I sit down and read your book I feel all the pain you feel. By reading your book I am starting to learn and understand why I feel a certain way. The amount of connection I feel towards your book is shocking. Also, your "Romeo and Juliet" like situation with Lilly was a great addition. I per-

## LEVEL 3: HONORABLE MENTION

sonally like to write, but I only write short stories. I hope to one day broaden my horizons and try to write a children's book. I've been told how I am very creative, and I have written several poems. Reading your book opened my eyes to not only my problems, but my dad's problems as well. My dad has had several different sponsors throughout the years. When any teacher gave us the opportunity to write to our favorite author, my mind instantly shot to your book. She continued to explain and I was just so lost in thinking of what I wanted to say. Now that I'm sitting here thinking of what to say, all the connections I had in your book keep running through my head. My dad never really did major drugs, but several times he had alcohol poisoning. I couldn't even count how many times my dad has wrecked a vehicle. I can remember my favorite story, my mom always told me this story when she would get upset. Back before I was born and my parents were married, my dad had harrowed my mom's car. (My mom had a job and a car, while my dad didn't.) My dad had been drinking and took a drive, well long story short. .. My mom had to call a tow truck to get her car back.

Reading this book has also helped me come to the conclusion that no matter how hard things get, I will never turn to drinking. After reading your book and seeing your struggles along with knowing of my dad's, I have come to the conclusion being that while drinking, it doesn't quite make your problems easier, but it makes it worse. I have found it crazy how much I wish I could help those who drink, but my mom tells me that people who are in AA never want to hear the stories from someone who hasn't drank, but sadly, with my struggles it's almost as if I did. I never really saw my dad drunk, but I saw the effects. My dad has lied to me several times and even called me names. When my dad was drinking he was a different man, and honestly I have a question. When you were drinking, doing drugs, getting wasted, did you ever think of how it would affect your family? I've always wanted to ask my dad that same question but my dad wouldn't truly understand. The way my dad is, is if someone tells him that his actions are effecting them, he tries his hardest to change, kind of like he cares more about how other people see him. My mom points out about how my dad is reliant on my opinion. Although you do not struggle with that it's understandable. My dad stopped drinking for a while when I was born, although you never stated using a drug like marijuana that was what my dad seemed to find as a release.

Sometimes when I find myself not understanding what is going on in my dad's head, I pick up your book and it kind of takes me off to a different world. I enjoy how you add what goes through your head. I couldn't even tell you how many times I have found something I enjoyed while reading and in that instant I picked up my cell phone, got on Facebook or Instagram and posted a picture of myself and quoted something you said. I remember one day probably about a month ago I was about to start reading and I found a piece of paper I used to mark a spot in the book that I wanted to read to my dad. I picked up my book walked into the kitchen and I read one whole section of your book to my dad. My dad normally doesn't show any response to me and most days it makes me feel as if I don't really have a good relationship with my dad. Sometimes when I feel that way I pick up your book and I read, and I realize that maybe he is struggling and doesn't want me to see him doing so. You pushed away your family in the book, did you do that for a reason? Or, did it just happen?

Sincerely,  
Shelby D. Snyder

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# NOTABLE MENTION

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## LEVEL I ~ NOTABLE MENTION

### **Mackenzie Boltz**

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

### **Hunter Burdette**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*What to Say When You are Talking to Yourself*  
by JK Rowling

### **Marcy A. Canterbury**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*Each Kindness* by Jaqueline Woodson

### **Sarah Daugherty**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor

### **Camree Davis**

Crum Middle School ~ Crum, WV  
*My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult

### **Phoebe Flenner**

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

### **Brooklyn Goheen**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*Stranded* by Jeff Probst

### **Skyla Hall**

Crum Middle School ~ Crum, WV  
*Dork Diaries* by Rachel Renee Russell

### **Alexis Hedrick**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*The Good, The Bad, and The Grace of God*  
by Jep and Jessica Robertson

### **Carter Jackson**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*Confetti Girl* by Diana Lopez

## LEVEL I ~ NOTABLE MENTION

### **Noah Justice**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

### **Jacob Lanham**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*Dragon Ride* by Cornelia Funkia

### **Carmela A. Lilly**

Fairmont Catholic School ~ Fairmont, WV  
*Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak

### **Alyson Long**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*Attack on Titan: No Regrets* by Hajime Isyama

### **Tanieca Newsome**

Crum Middle School ~ Crum, WV  
*Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Patterson

### **Samantha Oxley**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*Almost Home* by Joan Bauer

### **Macy Saunders**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*I Survived the Sinking of the R. M. S. Titanic*  
by Lauren Tarshis

### **River Sipes**

West Taylor Elementary School ~ Flemington, WV  
*The Boxcar Children Series* by Gertrude Warner

### **Trinity Sprague**

Sun Valley Elementary School ~ Lerona, WV  
*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

### **Olivia Tharp**

Overbrook Elementary School ~ Charleston, WV  
*The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins

### **Makayla Vaughn**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry

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# NOTABLE MENTION

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## LEVEL 1 ~ NOTABLE MENTION

### **Tessa Walls**

Hurricane Middle School ~ Hurricane, WV  
*Ninth Ward* by Jewell Parker Rhodes

## LEVEL 2 ~ NOTABLE MENTION

### **Ally Carson**

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*If I Stay* by Gayle Forman

### **William Copley**

Huntington MS ~ Huntington, WV  
*Mockingjay* by Suzanne Collins

### **Isaac Dillon**

Huntington MS ~ Huntington, WV  
*Jacob's Rescue* by Malka Drucker

### **Mackenzie Graham**

Huntington MS ~ Huntington, WV  
*Paper Towns* by John Green

### **Carissa Hennen**

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*A Night Divided* by Jennifer A. Nielson

### **Peter Kang**

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*Steve Jobs* by Walter Isaacson

### **Arella Kluitse**

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*  
by Robert Frost

### **Sadie Palmer**

Huntington MS ~ Huntington, WV  
*The House That Jack Built* by Simms Taback

### **Hunter Smith**

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher

## LEVEL 2 ~ NOTABLE MENTION

### **Demetrios Svingos**

Huntington MS ~ Huntington, WV  
*Wonder* by Raquel J. Palacio

### **Billy Tobin**

Huntington MS ~ Huntington, WV  
*It's Kind of a Funny Story* by Ned Vizzini

### **Luke Zwicker**

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*Seal of God* by Chad Williams

### **Jessica Angius**

Sherrard MS ~ Wheeling, WV  
*Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom

### **Alexandria Behm**

Sherrard MS ~ Wheeling, WV  
*The Maze Runner* by James Dasher

### **Andrew Clelland**

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*Believe: The Victorious Story of Eric LeGrand*  
by Eric LeGrand and Mike Yorkey

### **Faith Paull**

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman

### **Ryan Huff**

Sherrard MS ~ Wheeling, WV  
*Sherlock Holmes: The Legend Begins* by Andrew Lane

### **Andrea Kinneer**

Sherrard MS ~ Wheeling, WV  
*Heavier Than Heaven: A Biography of Kurt Cobain*  
by Charles R. Cross

### **Chance Knight**

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*Lord of the Flies* by William Golding



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# NOTABLE MENTION

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## LEVEL 2 ~ NOTABLE MENTION

### Lee Paul

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*Believe: The Victorious Story of Eric LeGrand*  
by Eric LeGrand and Mike Yorkey

### Ethan McDermott

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton

### Andrew Nairn

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*The Maze Runner* by James Dashner

### Eve Ridenhour

Linsly School ~ Wheeling, WV  
*Faceless* by Alyssa Sheinmel

### Zara Zervos

Sherrard MS ~ Wheeling, WV  
*Clementine and the Family Meeting* by Sara Pennypacker

## LEVEL 3 ~ NOTABLE MENTION

### Nathanial S. Bayless

Richwood High School ~ Richwood, WV  
*Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger

### Antonella Blanco

James Monroe High School ~ Lindside, WV  
*La Edad De Oro* by Jose Marti

### Kirstin Burwell

Richwood High School ~ Richwood, WV  
*Jesus Freaks* by Toby McKeenan

### Laura Dean

Buckhannon Upshur High School ~ Buckhannon, WV  
*Little House Series* by Laura Ingalls Wilder

### Rachel Fisher

Buckhannon Upshur High School ~ Buckhannon, WV  
*It's Not Easy Being a Bunny* by Marilyn Sadler

## LEVEL 3 ~ NOTABLE MENTION

### Tristan D. Hall

Richwood High School ~ Richwood, WV  
*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams

### Sydney Hosfield

Buckhannon Upshur High School ~ Buckhannon, WV  
*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

### Ali Householder

Washington High School ~ Charles Town, WV  
*Night* by Elie Wiesel

### Erin Jackson

Washington High School ~ Charles Town, WV  
*The Lighting Thief, Heroes of Olympus Series*  
by Rick Riordan

### Mary Kerby

Washington High School ~ Charles Town, WV  
*The Lunar Chronicles* by Marissa Mayer

### Dale Locklear

Roane County High School ~ Spencer, WV  
*Tuesdays With Morrie* by Mitch Albom

### Cody McCune

Roane County High School ~ Spencer, WV  
*Deathwatch* by Robb White

### Samantha Parsons

Roane County High School ~ Spencer, WV  
*Everything Happens for a Reason* by Daniela Ramirez

### Caleb Shirley

Roane County High School ~ Spencer, WV  
*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

### Jacob D. Sigley

Richwood High School ~ Richwood, WV  
*To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

### Emily Smith

Roane County High School ~ Spencer, WV  
*The Legend of Mammy Jane* by Sibyl Jean Jarvis Pischke

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# NOTABLE MENTION

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## LEVEL 3 ~ NOTABLE MENTION

### **Luke G. Smith**

Roane County High School ~ Spencer, WV  
*When Will The Heaven Begin: The Story of Ben Breedlove*  
by Ally Breedlove

### **Shayla Stanley**

Roane County High School ~ Spencer, WV  
*The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd

### **Ally Wharton**

Washington High School ~ Charles Town, WV  
*Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut

### **Samuel Womack**

James Monroe High School ~ Lindside, WV  
*The Shell* by H. Smalley Sarson

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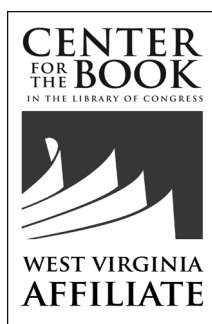
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