

*the James & Madeleine McMillan* FAMILY FOUNDATION

# Letters About Literature



# 2015

## Letters About Literature Anthology

*Winning letters from young Hoosier writers*

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Indiana State Library & Indiana Center for the Book

**RIVER OF WORDS**  
**LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE**

2015 Winning Letters and Poems by Indiana Students

Indiana Center for the Book Director

*Suzanne Walker*

Indiana State Librarian

*Jacob Speer*



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**Congratulations from the Indiana Center for the Book**

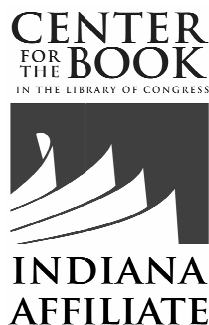
**River of Words Indiana Finalist**

**Letters About Literature Finalists and Semifinalists**

Level One

Level Two

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## SPECIAL THANKS

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

Funding for the 2015 *Letters About Literature* Anthology is courtesy of the Indiana State Library Foundation.

[www.islfoundation.org](http://www.islfoundation.org)



*the James & Madeleine*  FAMILY FOUNDATION

## **Congratulations from the Indiana Center for the Book**

We are excited to honor your work in our 2015 book.

*River of Words* is a national contest for young people that encourages them to reflect on the watersheds in their communities through poetry. *River of Words* is a project of the Center for Environmental Literacy at Saint Mary's College of California.

*Letters About Literature* is a national contest that asks young readers to write a letter to an author explaining how their book changed their way of thinking about the world. The program is sponsored by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, of which the Indiana Center for the Book has affiliate status.

These programs are held all over the nation bringing states, schools, teachers, authors, poets, artists, and of course, students together to have a national conversation about reading, poetry, and art and how they affect and enhance our lives. Thank you to the teachers, parents, students and schools for your participation in the competitions. We are always so pleased with your submissions and this year was no different. Thank you to the judges who had the difficult task of mindfully reading hundreds of letters and poems and reviewing dozens of pieces of artwork to arrive at the ones found here in this book.

We offer a special thanks to the James and Madeleine McMullan Family Foundation for supporting our *Youth Literary Day and Letters About Literature Award Ceremony* that was held on April 25, 2015 at the Indiana State Library. Our *Youth Literary Day* was a great event that included writing workshops, author signings, and readings of the letters by our First Place Winners.

We made the decision to keep the works in this book true to what the child submitted. Sometimes there are grammatical errors, but we like to think that these errors show humanity and also remind us of the youthfulness of our writers. Later in life students will be able to look back at their young writings as a testament to how far they've come in their writing journeys. It should also be noted that several letters won prizes and are not included in this book due to lack of permission by the parent at the time of printing.

The letters and poems in this collection are heartfelt interpretations from young writers that touch on a variety of difficult themes including bullying, growing up, cancer and health, death, racism, drugs, crime, self esteem, war, and other serious topics that our Indiana youth struggle with daily. The letters are collected in age groups and it is not surprising that some of the more serious issues; issues that would challenge the most well adjusted adults, are at the end in the high school section.

Millions of writers create new worlds for us to explore every day. Sometimes those writers have the honor of touching a young life. These letters tell those stories. Enjoy these letters. They are a gift.

Suzanne Walker - Director, Indiana Center for the Book

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**RIVER OF WORDS  
NATIONAL POETRY FINALIST**



River of Words / National Poetry Finalist  
Kendall Mann – New Palestine Elementary School, New Palestine

### **Warm Fire, Cool Rain**

Squeezing into bright yellow rain boots  
Which are a bit snug,  
Remembering the years of puddle jumping  
Remembering the years of fun.

As the others run inside for the glow of the TV,  
I dash outside for the fun of the rain

Remembering the last time I wore these boots-  
Two springs ago with my toes scrunched at the ends,  
I find the place where my friend Anna and I  
use to play.

Pondering the times when we had fun-  
Not giving a hoot at what we looked like  
Or how dirty we became when the mud attacked us.

Now I picture what Anna looks like-  
covered in coats of makeup with new friends  
instead of bundled in a winter coat stomping in puddles with me.

I jump into puddle after puddle alone  
With my big dinosaur feet  
Stopping and seeing  
my old kindergarten reflection in the water,  
Just remembering those times

Leaping and splashing in the rain  
with mud flying through the cool spring air.  
The loud boom of thunder startles me from memory.  
The flash of lightning reminds me it is time to go inside.

I tug off my boots at the door.  
I see a hot chocolate on the table  
With a note saying, 'Love you' from mom.  
I take the hot chocolate to the toasty fire.  
I watch the rain drench the lawn  
And wish I was there jumping in the puddles-  
  
with my old friend.



**LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE  
LEVEL ONE**





Level One / First Place

Grace Yang – Riverside Intermediate School, Fishers

**Letter to Lucy Maud Montgomery, Author of *Anne of Green Gables***

Dear Lucy Maud Montgomery,

Since I first came to America, a scared four-year old girl in a new world, I have always preferred my own company. Books became my main companions, friends, and teachers. Your book, *Anne of Green Gables*, was one of the first I picked up and the first I loved.

Your characters, stern, rigid, Marilla; meddlesome, kind-hearted, Mrs. Lynde; shy, gentle, Matthew; merry, laughing, Diana ...; in a way they were my first true friends. Each of them seem like real people to me, people I can laugh and cry and sympathize with.

Even among your other vivid characters, Anne Shirley stands out. The spirited redhead isn't perfect. She is proud, prone to daydreaming, short-tempered (as discovered when she yells at Mrs. Lynde and breaks a slate over Gilbert's head), and wishes to be beautiful and have a less plain name. These qualities, however, are what make her seem so human. After all, hasn't everyone at least once wished to be different, to be prettier, smarter, less awkward, or simply to have a more exotic name? I know I have.

*Anne of Green Gables* didn't make me feel like an outsider looking in; it drew me into Anne's life and made me feel like I was part of the story. When I read your book, I wasn't in Fishers, Indiana anymore; I was in Avonlea, Prince Edward Island. I held my breath in anticipation when Marilla was deciding what to do with Anne, shivered with fright as Anne described the Haunted Wood, cried in utter misery when Matthew died, and nearly screamed with fury when Anne's pride stopped her from forgiving Gilbert. Your book made me feel so much of that wide range of emotions humans are capable of.

As I continued to read, I saw that some of Anne's flaws were my own. When I stopped fuming about Anne's obstinacy, I realized I wouldn't have been able to forgive Gilbert in Anne's shoes. At that moment, I became aware of one of my own faults: pride and a tendency to hold grudges. I read how her failure to forgive and forget tormented Anne and I truly understood that holding a grudge isn't worth anything and pride fails one when it is needed most.

Even from a young age, I never really looked forward to adulthood, have always disliked change and feared the responsibility of being on my own. Anne's

message, that the best is just as likely to happen as the worst and to greet the “bends in the road” with joy and hope made me see that while the future is uncertain, it is full of opportunities and beyond each bend lies still more.

I have read Anne’s story many times over now and each time, I learned something new from it. Friendship, family, home, life...; Anne speaks of them all and much more. And Mrs. Montgomery, no matter how old I get, no matter how many bends I take, I know I will always love and remember your timeless classic, *Anne of Green Gables*.

Sincerely,  
Grace Yang

Level One / Second Place

Alayna Clark – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

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

Dear R.J. Palacio,

“I know I’m not an ordinary ten-year-old kid. I mean, sure, I do ordinary things. I eat ice cream. I ride my bike. I play ball. I have an Xbox. Stuff like that makes me ordinary. I guess. And I feel ordinary. Inside. But I know ordinary kids don’t make other ordinary kids run away screaming in playgrounds. I know ordinary kids don’t get stared at wherever they go.” These were the peculiar words that were spoken by August in your book *Wonder*.

My fifth grade teacher read your book to the class when I had just turned 11, and I resonated with August’s struggles. No, I may not have been born with a facial abnormality nor had multiple surgeries to reshape my facial features to be ‘normal’. But August’s story beautifully captures the struggles from kid to pre-teen.

August dreads school, like I sometimes do. To be honest, I would like to say I only go for my friends. Transferring to middle school has certainly been tough for me. The homework, the schedules, the large school, all of it made me want to hide forever. But as I’ve learned, changes can be painful and rewarding. I find it difficult to grasp that being different is okay. *Wonder* made it all clear to me. August was different, but he kept pushing through it. He made friends, built his self-esteem, and stood strong against a bully. If others heard my summary of your book, they might think it’d be just a boring book about normal teen drama. I find it more than that; I find it to have a meaning in my life.

I’ve suffered from anxiety. It’s hard believing I’m writing to you about this. No one really knows how it feels to be afraid to walk outside and be afraid of what others think or act. August pushed through all the judgers and fought for what he deserved, an education and a right to be “normal.” *Wonder* made me frustrated and hopeful at the same time; it seemed like I was comparing myself to what August did and upsetting me that I didn’t do what he did and made me feel I could still make it better. Although Auggie is a fictional character, I still think of him as a real person to this day. I also think of other pre-teens like me. We may have differences that others laugh or pick at, but we can stay strong knowing it’ll be all right.

When the teacher read the last words of *Wonder*, I felt a bit down, upset that Auggie’s book had ended. My story has yet to be finished until its final chapter.

So what if anxiety tries to hold me back? I know I can break its grasp with August at my side, pushing me through with his lessons of confidence. Thanks for Auggie, for *Wonder*.

With my sincere gratitude,  
Alayna Clark

Level One / Third Place

Fatima Khan – Sycamore School, Indianapolis

**Letter to Maya Angelou, Author of *Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem***

Dear Dr. Maya Angelou:

Every year at Christmas, like most people, we send holiday cards and receive many from our friends and family. One of the cards we received has a poem written by you it was “Amazing Peace: A Christmas Poem.” Your poem affected me on many different levels.

In the last few years, as I have become more aware of the world around me, I have begun to realize that there is a lot of sorrow in our world and not everyone believes in peace. Some people say that I am one of these people. You may ask why someone may think this of me, a ten year-old girl. It is because I am a Muslim and many people think that Islam is not a good religion.

Your poem came to me at a time I felt scared, anxious and uncertain of what the future holds for me as an American Muslim. This was the first poem that I have seen that included Muslims with all other religions as wanting peace. I know my religion is one of togetherness and teaches many good things, I just wish that other people understood true Islam and not what the extremists portray. The Islam that I have been taught respects all people regardless of color, faith, gender or status. It also teaches us to respect others opinions, even though they may differ greatly from my own.

Your poem showed me that even through the darkest times, there is still a ray of hope. The world is all one community, we are all blessed to be here to share the world together. All religions teach good, all people want harmony. There may be trials along the way in our life here on Earth as described in your poem, whether man made or not, but each one can be solved somehow with unity and brotherhood. In your poem you describe the sweet word of peace at first being soft and then getting louder and louder. At this part of the poem I could feel my heart beating faster as my desire for announcing to the world that our Lord made all of us, loves us equally and wants us to be in peace exploded from my soul.

Your poem has inspired me to have the faith that one day all people will come to realize that Muslims are peace-loving people. I will continue to be a good example of a Muslim, as the Prophet Muhammad has taught us that people learn about us most through our actions. So I will strive to be like him and demonstrate to the world the essence of a true Muslim, one that love humanity. I

dream one day all people of every faith can stand together like in your poem and say “Peace My Brother, Peace My Sister, Peace My Soul.” I thank you for giving me hope.

Sincerely,  
Fatima Khan

Level One / Honorable Mention

Maris Brail – Hasten Hebrew Academy of Indianapolis, Indianapolis

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

Dear John Green,

I'm not a normal kid. I used to be scared of what I would do when I grew up. How would I deal with the stress of being adult? Taxes, money problems, school, love life? But then a friend introduced me to *The Fault in Our Stars*. I was amazed. I was scared of the future, but Hazel isn't. She is worried about who she will hurt when she dies. She knows she doesn't have much time left, but she embraces it. She doesn't just mope around in her room. She goes out, meets her soul mate and travels.

When I read your book, it made me think of what the definition of normal really means. Hazel knows she isn't normal, but she doesn't let it stand in her way. She still has her sense of humor when not many people would. I don't think being normal even exists. Everybody has something that makes them feel "abnormal," but it is their choice to show it or not. But then again, I don't think abnormal exists either. Everybody is different in his or her own way. It's simple. We're all just human beings. Nobody's perfect, but no one is imperfect either.

I believe we have a couple choices of how we let people get to us. We can get torn down, hurt, annoyed, and angry. Or we can just ignore it. That is what Hazel chooses to do. When Mr. Van Houten screams at her, she does not get hurt. She ignores it. This is an important lesson we can all learn. Most of the time we get so caught up about what other people think about us that we convince ourselves that we can't do things we really can do. Unfortunately in the world we live in today the main focuses are popularity and looks. If someone's not popular, they are usually bullied.

Many times people get so angry and hurt by what people think, do, and say to them that they usually convince themselves that life is not worth living. Hazel doesn't feel this way. This is amazing. When Mr. Van Houten insulted her, he insulted her in the worst way by using her cancer as an arrow. But when he tried to fire, he got very far off the mark. I would not be able to contain my anger if this happened to me, but she did. If everyone acted this way instead, the world would be much more peaceful. If someone was shooting insults at me, and I just ignored them, I wouldn't just be choosing to ignore them; I would be choosing to avoid a fight that would end up with people choosing sides. Even if that wouldn't stop the wars and tragedies that affect millions of people, it's stopping at least one fight, and at least it's a start.



When I write something, I usually think it sounds really good and amazing, but then a couple months later, I look at it and it sounds terrible. There is only one reason why I start to think *this is terrible* when I look at my writing or old artwork: I change. My opinions change. My talent changes. That's what happened to me when I read your book. I changed inside. I realized that it's pointless being scared of the future, it's going to happen one way or the other, but I have a choice in how I respond to that inevitable change.

Like you said in *The Fault in Our Stars*, "My thoughts are stars I cannot fathom into constellations." For a while I didn't know how to explain my feelings to myself or anybody else, but this book helped me organize my ideas and feelings into constellations, and they shine brighter than ever before.

Thank you for this gift,  
Maris Brai

Level One / Honorable Mention

Emma Greenawalt – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

**Letter to Alexandra Moss, Author of *the Royal Ballet School Diaries: Lara's Leap of Faith***

Dear Alexandra Moss,

What do you want to do in life? That's a question that people ask kids my age a lot. It's a hard question for most kids my age to answer but not for me. I want to be a prima ballerina. It's my goal, okay more like a dream. I've been doing pliés, relevés, and sautés my entire life and I know that becoming a prima ballerina is hard, so hard that I sometimes don't even believe I can do it. I wonder what steps I can take to make my dream come true. Then, the answer came to me when I read your book, *The Royal Ballet School Diaries: Lara's Leap of Faith*.

While reading your book, I realized that going off to camp or school to learn ballet would help me to learn more about ballet. Take my sister for example. Peyton auditioned for many different ballet schools and camps. She never actually wanted to go to them, but she thought it was fun just to audition. I remember her getting her number, putting her hair into a bun, taking a deep breath, and then walking into the classroom filled with outstanding students wanting to get accepted. So, now I've learned that I have to go away from home somewhere to really study ballet. There's only one problem; I get homesick.

As I was in the middle of reading your book, I kept thinking that this was just another story talking about kids learning ballet, and there would be no real connection to me. Then, I started learning about Ellie's roommate Lara. They fought at first, but finally they stopped when Lara shared she was so homesick she didn't even want to be there. That's when I started feeling bad for Lara because I act very much like her. I want to go to summer camp, but I get to homesick and sometimes end up not enjoying it. The suspense was killing me when everyone had gone home, and they were wondering if Lara would come back. Fortunately, Lara took a leap of faith which, by the end of the story, was the thing I knew I had to do, take a leap of faith.

At the beginning of this story, I had a question. How am I going to learn more about ballet? By the middle, it was answered, but then I had an even bigger question. How could I go to a summer camp if I get homesick? By the end, I knew exactly what to do. If I truly want to get somewhere with ballet, I have to take a chance.

Your book inspired me so much. This summer, I'm going to be attending the Ballet Magnificat a two week summer camp; I'm really excited! I always knew that

I wanted to be a dancer, but I wouldn't have been able to muster up the strength to go, overcome my homesickness, and follow in my sister's footsteps, if I didn't have your book. Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Emma Greenawalt

Level One / Honorable Mention

Shefali Joshi – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

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

Dear R.J. Palacio,

Usually when families are out in public, people walk straight past them. However, my family is different. My ten-year old brother, Shaan, has a disorder called Joubert Syndrome. He is missing the vermis, a part of the brain and your control center. Other people stare and whisper to others when they see him. I always believed I was the only person with a sibling with a physical disability. *Wonder* reflected my feelings and helped me tell the difference between rude and curious. I used to let staring hold me back on family vacations and avoid having new friends know that he wasn't the average brother. That is, until I read your book.

Via and I share similar feelings about rude remarks and having eyes glued to August. Via glared at Jack and his brother for staring at August and making terrified noises. Whenever I see people staring at Shaan, I want to glare too. I used to become embarrassed whenever we would be in public. People stared at my family; it made me incredibly uncomfortable. Recently, I've realized that this only makes people stare even more.

Via taught me about standing up for others. She makes sure people staring at August understand it isn't his fault he is that way. I want to teach others that Shaan may look different and get irritated more easily than many ten-year olds, but he has feelings and understands when people laugh and mock him. Via keeps August's secret about how Jack and Julian made terrible insults behind his back that he overheard. She kept his secret because it would have caused more damage to him if his mom knew and made a gigantic deal out of it. I questioned, "Would Shaan trust me with a secret that large?"

Even though Shaan can't talk or walk, I wonder if he shares August's thoughts. It's hard to tell because we are the ones that speak for him. This makes it hard to tell what his personality truly is and what he wants when he's upset. Once, in an elevator, a boy leaped back when he saw Shaan. (He was startled by Shaan's appearance.) My mom said that Shaan "doesn't bite." Unfortunately, many people aren't educated about others who are different. At first, most kids who befriended August were asked to do so by Mr. Tushman. However, after spending time with August, they begin to see him as their friend.

*Wonder* changed the way I look at Shaan and how I stand up for him. It affected how I handle situations in public whether someone is mocking Shaan or making rude remarks. Your book has changed the way I think about myself, Shaan, and

people who don't understand. It made me wonder how the people just like me deal with similar situations. I guess I've never noticed how there are more people like me than I thought.

Sincerely,  
Shefali Joshi

Level One / Honorable Mention

Emma Mann – New Palestine Elementary, New Palestine

**Letter to Jordan Sonnenblick, Author of *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie***

Dear Jordan Sonnenblick,

Your book *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie* is one of my all-time favorites, but I will never turn a single page of it again. Let me explain. Your book brought tears to my eyes. It made me remember a very sad time. This book made me remember when my Aunt Julie was diagnosed with cancer just like little Jeffrey in your book. Just like Jeffrey my Aunt Julie was strong. She was very strong, but cancer took her unlike Jeffrey in your book. She died right before my birthday. Unlike your book not all stories in real life have a happy ending.

The last time I saw my Aunt Julie was in South Dakota at the Laura Ingalls museum house where Laura grew up. I remember her long, black hair neatly combed and her smile that seemed to stretch from Washington to Florida. Your book and my experiences have taught me that sometimes bad things happen to us, but we should never stop believing in miracles and chasing our dreams. Though your book isn't as well known as some of the other books my friends are reading, it deserves more than someone just picking it up and laying it back down. It deserves someone saying something more than, "oh this was a good book" It deserves to be treasured.

Just like Jeffrey's older brother was always trying to cheer up Jeffrey, I wanted to do something to cheer up people with cancer too. So I started something called Emma's Peace Bears. It all started when I gave my Aunt Julie a teddy bear with peace signs on it. I knew I could do nothing to cure her, but putting a smile on her face meant everything to me. I have now sent dozens of bears to people with cancer in seven different states. I'm going to try to keep that going for the rest of my life - giving out bears and smiles.

This book was very meaningful to me. It helped me understand how hard going through cancer can be. Maybe in forty years I might pick up your book and read it all over again, but in the meantime *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie* will be sitting in the middle of my bookshelf waiting for me.

Your pal,  
Emma Mann

Level One / Honorable Mention

Kendall Mann – New Palestine Elementary, New Palestine

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

Dear Sharon Creech,

No book has ever, I mean ever, made me cry before, but your book *Walk Two Moons* was the first. It reminded me a lot about my cousins' life out in Idaho. Their mom died from colon cancer and I miss my aunt every day. I was reminded of this event when Salamanca sees the bus crash where her mom died out west.

This book was breathtaking. It taught me an important life lesson: never take your friends and family for granted. I knew instantly when Sal saw the wreckage of the bus crash that she knew her mom was gone forever - like my aunt. Abraham Lincoln once said, "Live a good life and in the end it's not the years in a life, it's the life in the years." Sal knew her mom had lived a good life. And my aunt lived a good life too.

I have a mom and dad whom I love, and I would do anything for even if I don't act like it. I just take everything they help me with for granted and I shouldn't. Towards the end of the book my eyes began to well up with tears, and at the end my eyes began to rain with tears. Coping with death has always been difficult for me, and just as I felt like I was getting to know them, the book ended and the characters were gone. This happens in real life too.

When Sal moves back to Bybanks, Kentucky after Gran's death with Gramps and her Dad, it is still happy. But it is not the same without Gran. "Walk two moons in someone else's moccasins" is an important quote in this book. This saying means everyone should try to understand someone else's life and see the challenges they face- even if just for a couple of days. This is important, so try walking in your teacher's shoes, your *mom's* shoes, your *dad's* shoes, even your best friend's shoes. It would be very hard and difficult to do this. This is how I felt at the end of the book how could I walk two moons in Sal's moccasins?

Yours truly,  
Kendall Mann

Level One / Honorable Mention

Katherine Tessendorf – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

**Letter to Janet and Geoff Benge, Authors of *Heroes in History: Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Storybook Life***

Dear Janet and Geoff Benge,

Broken hearts and sorrow. Laura Ingalls Wilder had bad times in her life. Everyone does. About two years ago, I read your book entitled *Heroes in History: Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Storybook Life*. Your book had a big impact on my life when I read it and helped me get through a time in my life when I wanted to hold on but couldn't.

Laura never really had much and was constantly making sacrifices like having to trade their family's horses for an ox, or having to give up friends from moving. She even had to let her brother go when he fell ill at only nine months of age. In fourth grade, my great-grandmother died, and I was heartbroken; I loved her a lot. When I reached the part about Laura's brother, I realized that I needed to stay strong because she was staying strong when her brother died. Yes, Laura had been sad, but she acknowledged it as reality, where as I wanted to hold on to my great-grandmother. Your book had really helped me because I had held onto her for a while, didn't want to let go, didn't want to accept reality. Then I realized that she was not going to come back no matter how much I wanted her to; I had to stop wishing that she would.

Your book encouraged me and helped me a great deal throughout that part of my life. I have quite a few memories with her that I will cherish even though I have moved on. Yes, I still miss her, but I believe that I will be able to see her in Heaven someday. It may not be soon, but it will come. If weren't for your book, I would probably have not accepted it as reality as soon as I did. Your book made a huge impact on my life; as I read, I could not stop turning the pages. Combined with the fact that it helped through a difficult time, I know for sure that your book can only be described with one word: phenomenal.

Sincerely,  
Katherine Tessendorf



Level One / Honorable Mention

Jian Zhang – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

**Letter to Lois Lowry, Author of *The Giver***

Dear Lois Lowry,

*Dystopia. Utopia.* A dystopia is a place where everything is unpleasant or bad. A utopia is a place where everything is good and perfect. So, how can such strong antonyms both seem to describe Jonas's community?

At first, the community seemed like a perfect place where everyone was pleasant towards one another, a place with complete order and no troubles. There was no pain or fear. All of the problems we face today were resolved. It was strange, though. Why didn't the people know about animals or snow? Why did they not have other books or understand the importance of war? People did not have the freedom to choose their spouse or job, and there was no music, color, or deep emotions. The Giver was the only thing that connected me and my life to Jonas's community. As the utopian mask was removed, I grew more and more troubled about this community's way of life. However, I was not greatly affected until I found out what Release really was.

How could people do such a thing yet not understand what it truly meant? I was desperate for the process to just be a crazy sci-fi suggestion, but I knew that it was possible, that one day, it could happen to someone. All it would take would be a little injection. A lethal injection. The idea was terrifying, especially if you think of your family sitting right inside the Releasing Room.

I didn't want your book to end; I needed to know more. Why would people choose Sameness? Sameness is almost incomprehensible to me, but then again, the people in Jonas's community could not even understand the concept of color. Also, I had begun to connect with Jonas Sure, I had enjoyed reading about other characters, but I never felt like I could actually be friends with them. I remember when Jonas had to leave his friends behind to go beyond the community, I felt his sadness in having been unable to say goodbye to the Giver.

Well, like all good things, of course your book ended. That's when I noticed a change in myself - a shift in my attitude. I started to take in everything, appreciate my freedom, sight, feelings, and all that I have. I'm especially grateful for my parent's love for me. Little squabbles don't seem like a big deal anymore; it's better than nothing. Without realizing it, I had perceived your book as a warning.

What if *we* gave up everything that makes us human for painless days without fear? Everything good comes with a price, and to me, profound joy is worth all earthly pains.

Sincerely,  
Jian Zhang

Level One / Semifinalist

Zohal Atmar – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

**Letter to Laurie Halse Anderson, Author of *Chains***

Dear Mrs. Laurie Halse Anderson,

In my vast world of books, *Chains* was my little, unique piece of writing created by you. It made a big impact on the way that I currently write as well as read. When I was first assigned the book in class, I honestly had decided that it would be a monotonous, unoriginal piece of work after a brief glance at the cover. It certainly looked like all the other books that I had read in the past. It wasn't until I first opened the new world of pages when I realized just how wrong I was. Your book was in a whole different category on the endless bookshelves in my brain. It was one of the first books that sent my brain running a marathon. It felt like I was just snapped out of a trance.

Your book gave me questions that I had never thought to think about. Why would they do such a thing? Will they do it again? Was there proof? Was there a witness? These questions filled my brain until I was mentally exhausted to even think about it anymore. But after thinking about those questions, I felt strangely refreshed, as if someone dumped a bucket of ice water on my head on a scorching summer day. I also had never read something about the past where we still had slaves. It was something new to me. I did not think of the hardships that those people had to endure.

It gave me new thoughts about those people and new feelings. At that time, I felt a great wave of sympathy wash over me for the people who had to go through that. I never thought that I would actually feel something for characters, but then I remembered that this was something that actually happened. Another feeling I had was gratitude. Now, people aren't forced into slavery, abused, and ordered around. I decided to read on and see what happened next until I turned the last page. It was over before I knew it. I felt the realization hit me like a brick. Your book was the first book to make me feel like that. It was a unique feeling. I knew that it had changed the way I think and feel.

Thanks to your book, I now know how to feel sympathy and gratitude. Now I also have new feelings, new questions, and thoughts about the books that I read. This also effects my writing in the best way. Now I know about the things that people went through when there were slaves. Your book has changed me into a real reader and writer. It gave me wings to fly. And now here I am, floating above the clouds and reaching for the stars.

Sincerely,  
Zohal Atmar

Level One / Semifinalist

Becka Bash – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

**Letter to Richard Paul Evans, Author of *The Michael Vey Series***

Dear Richard Paul Evans,

I am not like any of the characters in your book. I do not have electric powers, I am not the smartest kid in the whole school, and I am definitely not in charge of saving the world. As I read the book I was drawn in instantaneously. It was amazing and inspiring. But one thing about it: it especially drew me in. I was amazed because of one quote that grew into a connection with all the characters. To want to figure out how to help people. The quote that drew me in was “As long as you remember the whys the haws will work themselves out” I connected to this because I have always wanted to cure cancer.

I still have a dream of curing cancer. I have heard of so many people having family member passing from cancer but luckily for me no one in my family has cancer. Still this quote inspired me because I have seen these families struggle. I always wanted to find a cure for cancer but when I once told someone they just stared and said “Ummmmm ... That is kind of hard. How are you going to do that?” Of course we were five and everything that didn’t involve colored pencils and class parties was hard back then. It’s weird that something somebody said when we were five would stick with me for so long.

After they said that I honestly had no idea what I was going to do. I was confused and I felt helpless. I had been pondering this for a while. Then I heard this quote and I realized something. I have been so worried about how I can’t remember why. All I wanted was to find a cure but how can I think if my head is clouded with doubts about what I am going to need to do. There are many families out there who have lost someone to cancer. Thinking of this helped me remember that I am twelve and scientists of a much older age haven’t been able to solve this.

Thinking of this quote helps me remember research now, test later. I haven’t really started getting too deep into my research and I haven’t really told anyone about this dream. I just wish that one day people can live without having to go through such I struggle. Even if I do not figure out the cure I hope I get the world somewhere so that it can at least be solved in this century. I hope that I can someday be the person to cure cancer. I want to help in any way possible for people suffering from this disease and your books taught me how anything is possible. Thanks to you I will always remember the whys and find a way to make

the hows work themselves out with a little push. I understand that I can't just want to but I have to work to get somewhere instead of procrastinating too much about how hard it will be to accomplish a hard task.

Sincerely,  
Becka Bash

Level One / Semifinalist

Austin Bell – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

**Letter to Christopher Paolini, Author of *Eragon***

Dear Christopher Paolini,

Worry. Anger. Regret. That's all I felt while my great uncle was in the hospital. He was a very happy man all the time. A few weeks later he passed away. The same thing happened to the character *Eragon* in your book, *Eragon*. I have found that I am like him in many ways.

When my grandpa's brother went into the hospital, we were all worried. I couldn't think about anything else. *Eragon*'s Uncle Garrow died when the Ra'zac blew up the farm house. We were both shocked when we found out they passed, or in his case, murdered.

*Eragon* was so angry he wanted to find who did it and set out to avenge his uncle. After my uncle passed, I didn't take it too well. I started to lash out at people and was just in a bad mood all the time. When my uncle died, I felt as if I should have done more for him, visit him more. I was mad at myself for not doing more. I realize now, because of your book, lashing out at people wasn't going to bring him back.

*Eragon* was more adventurous than everyone else. He went out hunting on most days. I was different but not necessarily in a bad way. I have far exceeded the grade level average ever since preschool! I was always getting picked on about my grades. I was happy when the teacher assigned math homework.

*Eragon* has taught me a multitude of things. I now understand lashing out doesn't fix anything. He makes me feel like I'm not the only one who feels like this.

Sincerely,  
Austin Bell

Level One / Semifinalist

Payton Bledsoe – Milan Elementary School, Milan

**Letter to Karan Jamzen, Author of *Dolphin Tale***

Dear Mrs. Karan Jamzen,

This is a true story about my life. When I was a little girl. I have worn glasses almost all my life except for when I was little I wore contacts. I was not allowed to play outside or playing in the sand.

The book *Dolphin Tale* inspired me because of what my parents found out when I was 18 months old I was blind. That meant that I would have to have eye surgery. I have had four eye surgeries. When Winter lost her tail I thought she was just like me. Winter went through some very hard times like when her tale had to be taken off. I was truly inspired. In less than a month I am going back to the eye doctor to see if I'm able to wear contacts. Your book was very inspiring.

Thanks to your great writing I was able to be more confident in myself .I read your book almost every month. I am now starting on *Dolphin Tale 2*. Your book was incredible it changed everything. Thank you for writing this book.

Sincerely,  
Payton Bledsoe

Level One / Semifinalist

Karley Bushhorn – Milan Elementary School, Milan

**Letter to Jenny Lundquist, Author of *Seeing Cinderella***

Dear Jenny Lundquist,

Your book, *Seeing Cinderella*, has brought multiple emotions to me. It has made me think of the way I draw conclusions about people because I used to judge people. Before reading your book, I would draw conclusions about people before getting to know them. Reading *Seeing Cinderella* made me judge people less. The book has shown me to feel better about who I am. Everyone should be treated equally.

Your book digs deep into real peoples' lives. Let's take a look at the main character. Callie was often embarrassed throughout the book. Here is a little information about Callie going to the optometrist. In the book Callie states, "Starting school was tough to begin with, especially getting glasses the day before we start. Today is the day I go to the optometrist, and I am not excited. The optometrist took me to the examination room to test my eyes. I was shocked when I heard I needed glasses. When the optometrist handed me my glasses, the reaction on my face was unexplainable. They would make my face look like a mixture of weirdness and freakiness."

Just like Callie, I was nervous when I had to go to the orthodontist to get my braces. I thought they made me look like a dark. I was nervous of what people were going to think of my braces. I didn't want people to call me Braces Face, but after getting used to them, I thought they looked pretty good.

Your book states that Callie was scared to start school and to see the reactions on people's faces. Callie says, "I can't believe I started school today. I was scared of the reactions that would be on people's faces. When I arrived and walked down the hall, I realized that bubbles with words inside of them were hovering over people's heads. At that moment I discovered that my glasses had magical powers."

When I started 4-H, I was really scared like Callie. I didn't want to talk to anyone except my sister because she was the only person I knew in the room. Just like Callie, I had to overcome my fear of shyness. Hard decisions are a part of life, and Callie had to make a hard one. Here are some words from Callie, "Life became a little weirder with the glasses. I had to make a hard decision for my friend Ana, who had a rough time at home- *Stay in the shadows of life and hide behind my glasses, or step out of the background and stand up for my friend?* When I have to make hard decisions, I think of Callie.



I believe *Seeing Cinderella* could help young people through tough times. It is a good read because it addresses problems young people go through. When I read *Seeing Cinderella* it made me feel good for whom I am. That is why I liked *Seeing Cinderella* so much and would recommend it to girls my age or older.

Sincerely,  
Karley Bushhorn

Level One / Semifinalist

Alaina Carr – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

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

Dear John Green,

The name-calling, the teasing, and the bullying all started in the first grade. I felt alone, scared, and worst of all, like no one would accept me for who I am. *The Fault in our Stars* changed the way I think. It shows me not everyone is perfect and not everyone has a great life. Some people might think they do but everyone struggles in some kind of way.

Augustus shows true friendship and loyalty towards Hazel throughout the whole book. This inspired me because today I have amazing friends that care about me and will always be there for me no matter what happens. They will never turn their back against me and will never say anything to hurt me. Those things made a difference in my life.

I now know that it is okay to be different. My whole life I have had horrible allergies, bad asthma, and terrible skin conditions. In elementary school I was teased and made fun of for these things. Whenever someone said something that hurt my feelings my heart dropped because the things they said were very hurtful. I now live through the pain and forget the past.

When I read your book, Hazel reminded me of myself. Hazel believed in herself. When someone or something makes me feel like I am not good enough to be their friend, I think of her. Augustus knew she had a great heart and I know my friends truly care about me. They make me feel important. The name-callers now realize what they have done because they don't have any friends. I would not ever do that because I know how the words feel. It felt like I was being stabbed in the stomach 100 times. The name-calling would make you feel like no one would ever accept you for who you really are; on the inside and the outside.

Overall, *The Fault in our Stars* is now my all-time favorite book and has changed myself esteem and my personality majorly. What I took away from this book is it is okay to be different, everyone struggles in some kind of way, live through the pain and forget the past, and not everyone is perfect. Thank you for writing this book. It has helped me through struggles and inspires me every day.

Sincerely,  
Alaina Carr

Level One / Semifinalist

Tal Friedman – Hasten Hebrew Academy of Indianapolis, Indianapolis

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

Dear R. J. Palacio,

When I first read your book *Wonder*, I immediately thought of my cousin, Ben Stillman. He has a disability called Familial Dysautonomia (FD) or Riley Day Syndrome. Reading about August in *Wonder* helped me understand what life is probably like for Ben and how I should treat him.

Ben is sixteen years old. He usually just stays in the basement and sits on the couch. He is gloomy most of the time, but when my brothers and I visit Maryland to see him, he gets a sudden sweep of happiness. When I first found out that he was disabled, I thought he couldn't even move. I didn't really understand what it meant to be disabled. I was afraid of meeting him and thought that I was going to get scared when I met him. Because of his disability, he has to drink from a tube that connects to his belly button. If he drinks normally, it would go through the wrong pipe. Otherwise, he can move just like me.

When little August Pullman starts elementary school in *Wonder*, no one likes him. Things get worse when he overhears two other boys talking about his disability. But then a girl named Summer comes. You can tell she has feelings for him and doesn't care what other people think. Summer stands up for August and that takes a big amount of courage and bravery. Before she came, no one really hung out with him or did anything with him. I hope that I can be like Summer for my cousin. Summer helps everyone in sight. She taught me to love Ben more. She helps me understand disabled people better. Last summer I got upset when Ben was being mean to his brothers.

While I don't think he should be mean, I can understand him more now and be more patient with him. I know now that the little things that he does don't really matter. I know life is harder for him than for me, so I can forgive him. But I still have one question that I have been wondering for a while, why do people still make fun of others?

Sometimes I think about people like magnets - big P magnets that stand for "people." I'm a P just like a disabled person is a P. But two of the same magnetic poles coming together repel. Some people have trouble being friends with disabled kids. But like magnets, they could attract each other if one of them is

flipped around. People can change other people's feelings. Your book changed me and flipped me around. I hope that all the people who read your book are fantastically flipped.

Sincerely,  
Tal Friedman

Level One / Semifinalist

Mike Fussnecker – Milan Elementary School, Milan

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

Dear Gary Paulsen,

I recently delved into the overwhelming complex world of your novel, *Hatchet*. To say it was good would be a massive understatement. It not only made me realize the fact that we as humans overlook the small things and under appreciate co-species interaction, but the description from page to page stimulated areas of my imagination of things that I had no clue even existed.

Now back to what I had stated previously. The series of events that had unfolded in the plotline of the story was not only awesome in a sense of depictive writing but was oddly applicable to just my life but nearly all around me. For example, when he boarded the bush plane, I would bet that the very last thing flowing thoroughly his mind was, the pilot was going to go in cardiac arrest mid flight and crash has changing his life forever.

But as Murphy's law states, anything that can happen will happen now. For me after he experienced the crash it immediately made me realize that life is too short and we are far too ignorant, when it comes to knowing what lies ahead for us, to sit idly. Are we ignorant or intelligent? By this I do not mean go crazy and become a stereotypical hipster. I mean to love and respect my other people always because for all we know something terrible can happen and we might never again speak to the people who we love. Unlike Brian who was eventually...eventually what?

Sincerely,  
Mike Fussnecker

Level One / Semifinalist

Emmy Gottsman – Delaware Trail Elementary, Pittsboro

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

Dear Rick Riordan,

Your work, *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, has changed the way I see and think about people. As I read through your book, I found out Percy had dyslexia and had trouble reading. My art teacher, Ms. Whitton, has dyslexia too. I know that your work has changed me because before I read *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*, I did not understand much about dyslexia. After I have read your novel, I understand what my art teacher goes through every day with her daily activities.

Despite of her dyslexia, Ms. Whitton has accomplished many things. She became an art teacher and the 2013 Indiana State Teacher of the Year. She tries her hardest to make sure my classmates and I are ready for middle school. This is also how Mr. Brunner prepares Percy in your book. I have more respect towards Ms. Whitton after reading your book. In your book, Percy Jackson struggles to get through his reading challenges. While he was studying he threw his book across his dorm and said “Words started swimming off the page, the letters doing one-eighties as if they were riding skateboards.” This example from your book made me understand the challenges that dyslexic people face in their daily lives.

Your book has showed me some of the ways that disabled people battle their challenges. It also shows that they can get through it with great success and be noticed. I am different after your novel because now I am more aware of others with disabilities. Even though they have disabilities they are just like you and me. They can do things like you and I even if it takes them a bit longer. I have learned to respect everyone.

Sincerely yours,  
Emmy Gottsman

Level One / Semifinalist

Maddox Hoskin – Park Tudor School, Indianapolis

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

Dear Sharon Draper,

I was born into a perfectly normal family. No wheelchairs or medicine. I had no idea what it was like to have a hereditary or personality disorder. Of course I had met people with disorders, but I had always looked at and judged them on the outside. I had never looked deeper; I had never looked on the inside. My whole view changed when I read *Out of My Mind*.

One of my fourth grade classmates has autism. Once I learned that, sadly, I looked at her in a whole new light. I tried to keep my distance and came to the point where we only talked when it was crucial. Now, I only just read *Out of My Mind* in fifth grade, I realize how horrible and not understanding I was in fourth grade. This must have been how Rose felt when she told Melody why she didn't call her at the airport. I did learn my lesson about treating people differently with disorders like autism, but that wasn't the only thing I learned.

I had always thought that Ms. Violet was one of the most amazing characters in your book. She was an almost ordinary person with no experience with cerebral palsy, yet she helped bring out all of Melody's potential. I thought that most people, including me, couldn't be as amazing as Ms. Violet. But I was wrong. I participated in a robotics competition with nine other fifth graders on November 22nd. It was our school's first time competing. We tried our very best. At the awards ceremony we didn't get any awards at first. We began to lose hope. Then, we got first place and landed a spot in the state finals. At that moment, I felt as excited a Melody was when her team got into the Whiz Kid nationals. It shows that hard work and hope can do amazing things to anyone, whether you're completely ordinary or extraordinary, just like Melody.

*Out of My Mind* is a life changer and fable all in one. Though I'm still working out the kinks in my relationship with my classmate, and I'm not fully latched on to my belief about the ordinary doing the extraordinary, I feel like *Out of my Mind* helped me think a little deeper about my actual thought and my wrongs. I will try harder to act nicer to everyone, not just people with autism, and hang on to my beliefs.

Sincerely,  
Maddox Hoskin

Level One / Semifinalist

Sarah Howard – Brandywine Elementary, Greenfield

**Letter to Neal Shusterman, Author of *Bruiser***

Dear Neal Shusterman,

Your book, *Bruiser*, has changed me like no other. It helped me to love, to be calm when nobody else was, and to help someone when no one else did. Now, I never get mad or lash out until I know their story. Some bullies are being abused or their parents are getting divorced. They have so many emotions bubbling up inside that they don't know what to do "so they take it out on other people. My friend's parents got divorced when she was three years old. She still gets upset when people talk about it a lot. I also learned that nobody owes you anything. No one has to be nice to you. When they do, you need to be nice back. Just because you were nice to someone you don't like, doesn't mean you earn a prize. That is just what you are supposed to do.

My mom is a doctor, and a truck driver was her patient. He was talking to her and told her a story while his medicine was coming in. This story was about a traffic jam. In the traffic jam, there was a car speeding and racing and swerving around cars and numerous trucks. This truck driver blocked the path of the car and asked him why he was cutting in front of all the cars. The husband was panicking and said his wife was in labor and he needed to get to the hospital quickly. The truck driver said "Okay, I can help". He then took his radio down and told all of the truck drivers in the area to make a path for the couple. All of the cars soon followed the trucks move and did the same. The baby was born safely. When I heard this story, it reminded me of the fact that one truck driver had a place to be, and took time out of his day to save this baby and he didn't get a prize, nor did he get mad at the couple until he knew their story like the other cars that were honking and saying bad things about them. It also reminded me of your book, and how everyone has a story. Now I see the world differently.

*Bruiser* was an inspiration to me and to my life. It has changed me into a better person. I read your book and couldn't feel how it changed me until a year and a half later, when I understood everything that happened. I never realized how a book could change me so long after I read it, but your book did.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Howard



Level One / Semifinalist

Gwennith Kim – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

**Letter to Madeleine L'Engle, Author of *A Wrinkle in Time***

Dear Mrs. L'Engle,

Maybe there are such things as a fourth or fifth dimension, aliens, countless other planets, or different kinds of elements. Extraterrestrial organisms are what we usually see in sci-fi movies or read in books, and they create a credible reason that makes a slight chance that there are things beyond this world. While reading your book, *A Wrinkle in Time*, I realized that the entire universe is much more extensive than anyone could ever imagine; it goes way beyond the limit of everything in existence. Perhaps there was never a limit, but the rules that made “our” universe and others limited the bonds of infinite creativity. All I know is that there is more to the world than what I originally believed.

Your idea of space travel shows that there is a deeper meaning to the world. Mrs. Who explained to the children that they travel through the fifth dimension in order to reach their destination instead of traveling in a straight line, since the fifth dimension brings that line together for the shortest possible distance in space traveling. How do we get ideas like that anyway? I understand this concept of no boundaries in the universe. I thought about how Mrs. Which tessered. After she explains that to Charles, Mrs. Which, Mrs. Who, Mrs. Whatsit, and the children they all vanished to the fifth dimension.

Since I imagined myself in the planet (the group tessered to first) and its radiant sky, I thought about Mrs. Whatsit's true form which, in the book, Meg and the other children believed unimaginable. You said, “She was a marble white body with powerful flanks, something like a horse but at the same time completely unlike a horse, for from the magnificently modeled back sprang a nobly formed torso, arms, and a head resembling a man's, but a man with a perfection of dignity and virtue.” This quote convinced me that the different aliens and their planets supported the fact that there are extraterrestrial beings.

Sometimes I feel that everything is possible, even on Earth, though this planet has stacks of rules to follow. In your book, the universe seems unlimited, and it may be true that in reality all things are possible. Maybe scientists figure out the deep meaning of the world? In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the universe had similar rules (these rules prevent us from doing the impossible) to ours. However, these limit laws in your book seemed almost unlimited. Or maybe the universe is too vast that our human minds can't handle it.

Many scientists may disagree with this theory, space travel, or even countless dimensions could actually be real. What is a universe without other inhabitants

neighboring it? Why are worlds created? Where does space come from? The real question is...How are we supposed to know the meaning of the universe if we don't have the imagination?

Sincerely,  
Gwennith Kim

Level One / Semifinalist

Ellie Lindeman – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

**Letter to Sheri Berk and Carrie Berk, Authors of *Peace, Love, and Cupcakes***

Dear Sheri Berk and Carrie Berk,

I know what it is like to have that horrible feeling in your stomach. I know the feeling of wanting to go home and cry and crawl into a ball. Your book, *Peace, Love, and Cupcakes* is a book that I found helps kids like me get through the tough times when being bullied. I was bullied, and I know how it feels. It is awful when someone is making fun of you. Your book helped me to stand up for myself. And your book also helped me to continue to spread kindness.

I really related to the story, and I especially connected with the character, Kylie. I liked that she was a strong character. She was bullied in school, but she had the strength to make the best of the situation. Kylie also found new friends that were kind to her. It is not easy to stay positive, especially when people who you thought were your friends turn against you.

I really connected with Kylie when she had to fill a cupcake order for the girl who was bullying her. Kylie knew she had to make the cupcakes for her club, but she didn't want to because the girl was so mean to her. There were times when I still had to be nice to the people who were bullying me even though I didn't want to. It was the right thing to do.

During the book, Kylie had to stand up for herself when the bully was being mean to her. I also had to experience that. And stand up to the bully to tell her that she was being mean. The fact that Kylie was such a strong character and stood up for herself made a difference on how the bully treated her.

There is always going to be trouble and difficulty in life. There will always be mean people. I have to remember to be kind to others even if they may not be kind back. I can see a little bit of Kylie in me. Thanks again for writing your book.

Sincerely,  
Ellie Lindeman

Level One / Semifinalist

Maria Luciani – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

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

Dear J.K. Rowling,

When I started reading *Harry Potter* I never knew that a skinny boy with messy hair and green eyes that lived under the stairs would change my life so much. You helped me love reading and before I read *Harry Potter*, I didn't like reading. But I was also taught me some very important life lessons. Reading all seven *Harry Potter* books had a huge effect on me, but I think the one that I liked best was the last one. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* had the biggest influence on me and it was the one that I could connect most to. I think that is because of many good friends I have and the friends that Harry has. At a time when I was reading it helped me with just about anything hard that rolled my way. I used to hate to read, and then I read Harry Potter. Now I read at least 100 pages per day. I have a very strong connection to your books that I won't find anywhere else.

To start off, connecting to situations in the books made me love to read. I can really connect to the characters. One situation in your books that I could connect to was when Dobby the house elf died. Not only was he my favorite character, Dobby reminded me of when my first pet, Wendy, (she was a cat) died. We're not exactly sure what happened to her, but she ran away and we like to think that she ran away happily, but sadly we know the reality that she probably died. My family and I think she was eaten by wolves in our neighborhood. Cedric dying also reminded me of many friends I've lost. There were strange elements of enjoyment in the story and the thrill I had while reading excited me, but Harry helped me understand the reality of situations and how it doesn't always turn out the way I suspect or expect.

Another thing that helped me develop a liking for reading was the fantasy, magic, and hope in the books that inspire me in my everyday life. *Harry Potter* was like a dream of magic that is beyond the simple single minded children's' stories. It is a magical yet fun and exciting book to read. One of my favorite parts was that one night in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* where Remus told Harry that Tonks had her baby and Remus and Tonks decided to make Harry the godfather. I really like this moment because there were some events in the book already that made it so solemn and Tonks giving birth lightened the mood. Since it was such a dark time, a happy event showed hope.

One lesson that *Harry Potter* taught me is to be loyal. There were so many loyal people to Harry in his life. That is also true for me. I have friends, family, and even my dog that are loyal to me just like many are to Harry. They are always by my side. They are much like Ron and Hermione promising to be friends with

Harry for a long time and even in his darkest hour, when he was either to be murdered or murder; they stayed with him until the end. It was far from a perfect friendship; there aren't such things, but it was a faithful one. I can relate to Harry because that's exactly what I have.

One element that Harry and his friends helped me to understand is fun. The Weasley twins were so mischievous and had so much fun with so many laughs; it's hard not to want them to be real. They rose above their "perfect" older brothers that they had and decided to throw all their mother's life plans for them away to open a joke-store and help other people have as much fun as they did. If I didn't think of a Fred and George prank in a while, I would lose a very important element of life. Even after George went through a tough time losing Fred, he overcame it and continued on with his fun.

Another thing that I loved and could definitely try to apply to my life is the humor. I just love it when I'm searching Pinterest and I find a witty little joke. They always lift my spirits and make me happy when I'm sad.

Above all things; Harry Potter taught me friendship, bravery, and love. Ron and Hermione were there for Harry no matter what, Harry faced death for others thinking that he would die, and Lily gave the sacrifice of her life just to save Harry and didn't have second thoughts. She made the ultimate sacrifice for Harry. On that night that Harry's parents were brutally murdered, Lily wasn't the only one to make a sacrifice; James also went to fight Voldemort unarmed to try and save his wife and child. My life would be completely different if I didn't know that Hogwarts would always be there to welcome me home.

Sincerely,  
Maria Luciani

Level One / Semifinalist

Chandler Manusky – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

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

Dear Gary Paulsen,

*Hatchet* really inspired me to never give up even in the worst situations. In my life, one of my siblings makes bad choices which leads to my family fighting. I detest to see them fighting but, then I remember in the book *Hatchet* when Brian became one of the victims of a maybe life threatening situation, yet he overcame it.

He became stranded in the jungle after a plane crash. He kept thinking about death and how he is never going to be found. My sibling doesn't really think about death but he does think about going away. One time he left our house with his bag packed but he came back 1 hour later. Brian lives for a good amount of time in the jungle and finds how to do many things like build a fire, find food, catch fish, and create things using what he has. Brian had given up all hope until he is finally discovered, which turns everything around for himself. I learned that even though Brian was in a situation that was so scary, hope is something that should never run out.

Brian used his brain to help him survive the treacherous jungle. He sometimes was in a spot that was pretty scary for him, but he took many risks because has never been in these setting and he didn't really know how to handle them. For me, I now know that even though my sibling makes bad decisions he could turn over a new leaf and start a new life. He has gone to therapy and many people have helped him on his rough journey. It is tough for me and my family to see this happening but everyone in my family tries to help him as best as we can. Gary Paulsen thank you have changed the view of myself and also my take on the world.

Even though the world may be a cruel and frightening place, everyone should always have hope and should never give up. That is what your astonishing 195 page book taught me. Some people just think this book is for entertainment and it is but, what's more important is that you taught us about hope. Thank you for teaching me about something this vital.

Sincerely,  
Chandler L. Manusky

Level One / Semifinalist

Simon McCrary – Pike Central Middle School, Petersburg

**Letter to Kat Falls, Author of *Dark Life***

Dear Mrs. Falls,

I read your book, *Dark Life*, at school for AIR points this year. I was looking for an intriguing, in depth book from the shelves. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a book labeled *Dark Life*. I picked it up and turned to a random page in the book. It caught my attention just by skimming the page. It is wonderful, professional work. I couldn't put it down.

This book was mostly an inspiration for me because I am just fascinated by sea life. I've never really been able to explain it. The sea is just so calm and mesmerizing. The idea of subsea civilizations is amazing. I would have never thought about it. The book was also an inspiration for me because it taught me that someone's life will always be worse no matter how poor or abused you are. Even your parents can cause problems if they drink too much.

I always believed as a small child that I had the worst life ever. My parents had got a divorce and my grades were horrible. I stayed awake at night and cried sometimes. But compared to most people, I had a life of royalty. Just look at Gemma. She's a ward of the state living on an overcrowded continent. All she wanted was to be released from the dorm. All she needed was her brother's signature. Since her parents died, He was the only one who could take care of the family. Then, later in the story, she finds out her brother is a criminal. Leader of the infamous Outlaws called, "The Seablite Gang." Until she took a jet fin undersea and met Ty, the main protagonist in the story, she was probably having an impossibly miserable life. My life is a small matter compared to hers.

This book taught me that when you think it can't get any worse, think of the other people out there that are much less fortunate than you. There are people starving, homeless, orphaned, and discriminated. Even those are only a few. Your book told me to move on. It told me I need to accept it and live with it in order to be happy. Whenever you're feeling sorry for yourself, remember the people who are probably dying just because of the course their life took. Just work with it and you'll eventually get over it. Just like in the story, Gemma eventually got over her misfortune. She lived in Benthic Tenitory with Ty and his family. You see, when you accept Things and live with the consequences, good or bad; you can feel better about yourself.

This book is an inspiration for me and probably is or will be for many other people. I hope you keep writing, because if you do, people all over the United

States and maybe even the world, will be inspired by your writing. Keep writing and inspiring (Hopefully at the same time.)

Sincerely,  
Simon McCrary



Level One / Semifinalist

Caitlin Nugent – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

**Letter to Wendy Mass, Author of *11 Birthdays***

Dear Wendy Mass,

Friendship. It means someone you like and know well. It means friends are together for everything. It means friends are inseparable. It means you have the same interests. It means you trust your friend. It means you talk to your friend. I am just like Amanda in *11 Birthdays*. I am smart, nice, and didn't talk to my best friends, Madison and Morgan, for a long time. It started when I got an invitation to go to a program called EXCEL (Expanded Curriculum for Exceptional Learners). We did not hang out anymore, see each other, or even talk with each other for a long time. Yet, I craved to hang out with them.

When Leo gave Amanda the note that said, "Meet me outside the cafe at lunchtime," I realized that Madison, Morgan and I had not spoken to each other in a long time either. That little piece in the book made me want to find a chunk time in my busy schedule to spend with them.

Starting to talk to them didn't happen overnight and it took a little while, but now we talk almost every day. It feels good to know you have friends to talk to about anything. Your book helped me to take action and get the strength to reconnect with them. This strength that I found inside me made me think, "*I will not wait for tomorrow to make myself a better friend to Madison and Morgan.*" Some of the other lessons I learned in the book were, not talking about other people behind their backs or not assuming things about other people. All of these lessons have helped me on my journey to becoming a better person and better friend.

Sincerely,  
Caitlin Nugent

Level One / Semifinalist

Alex Parrish – Park Tudor School, Indianapolis

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

Dear Ms. Palacio,

After reading your book *Wonder*, I felt like I had become a different person. I felt like I could see the world in a new way, with a totally different perspective. The way the book delivered its overall message made me truly feel the emotions of the characters and what the book tried to make me feel. It made me feel more aware of my surroundings and how the world could be when it wasn't always showering you with luck and fortune.

As a constant reader, I know it's very hard to do what you did in a book, or any form of art. *Wonder* showed me the advantages and power of being kind and trying your best. Although August had many challenges doing ordinary things we usually don't even think about, he still tried his best and was determined to get things done. I take him as a role model for when I'm feeling down or insecure.

August always tries to hide his face, and I think every human being does that in some form. Everyone has a dirty secret, an embarrassing story, or something they feel ashamed or guilty about that they want to hide from other people. At night, August would sometimes lie in his bed and cry about his misfortune, and every once in a while, I find myself in a similar situation, feeling sorry for myself about all the things that aren't perfect about me, all the bad stuff, instead of focusing on the good qualities and my skills. I feel sorry for myself and think about all my woes, instead of being grateful for being so lucky to have what I have.

But, after finishing *Wonder*, I realized everyone has their flaws and disadvantages. I found out it's those flaws that define who we are; they're a part of who we are, they make us. Without them, we'd be missing a part of ourselves. It's those flaws that can bring out the best in us, help us show who we are. *Wonder* answered a lot of my questions about the world, and inspired me to be like August and not give up when life throws challenges at me. Just because of this book alone, I feel confident that I can accomplish great things, even with all my flaws.

Sincerely,  
Alex Parrish

Level One / Semifinalist

Hydra Ressler – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

**Letter to Polly Shulman, Author of *The Grimm Legacy***

Dear Polly Shulman,

Your book, *The Grimm Legacy*, had a great impact on my life. For one thing, it brought back so many wonderful memories of my childhood. When I was younger, I would act like random objects were magic and that they could do magical things. I would go on adventures with my “magical” compass that could let me float above the clouds. I would never leave the house without my “magical” eraser that could shrink me down whenever needed; just like the shrink ray, in your book.

Remembering this memory made me feel as if I was the main character, Elizabeth. *The Grimm Legacy* took me on a journey to the respiratory, to the school, in the woods, and every other place that she went. For another thing, it left me thinking about how magical things close to your heart can be.

For example, my aunt once gave me two beautiful porcelain dolls. I would pretend as if they were magical and could do crazy things that dolls normally wouldn't do. I did this not because I was little and liked pretending things, but because they came from my aunt whom I love very much. The dolls now sit on my dresser and whenever I look at them I think of her.

Sincerely,  
Hydra Ressler

Level One / Semifinalist

Samarrah Sanders – Homeschool, Marion

**Letter to Bruce Wilkinson, Author of *The Dream Giver***

Dear Mr. Wilkinson,

Picture this. You're sitting in your bedroom, reading the newspaper while the television is on, when suddenly you hear, "Hello! My name is Samarrah Sanders, and welcome to Sweet and Savory Sensations. Today, it's all about desserts! I'll show you how to make double chocolate-chip cookies, turtle cheesecake, and we will top it off with some homemade banana pudding that's out of this world." ...While this is on paper now, I hope that one day it will become a reality. You see, my dream is to become a chef with my own cooking show, just like Alton Brown on 'Good Eats'.

Your book, *The Dream Giver*, gives the perfect example of how to follow my dream by taking risks, leaving my comfort zone, and defeating whatever tries to stop me. Your character Ordinary did all those things to pursue his dream. He was inspired by *The Dream Giver* (God) to be somebody and achieve great things. A while back, I gave an inspirational message in front of people I had never seen before. Although I was nervous, I gave a message titled "Inspired to Move." I referenced *The Dream Giver* by saying all people have a dream, and we have to do what it takes to pursue it.

Right now, I'm not looking for a spot on the cooking channel, I'm still learning how to cook ! While I don't have a cooking audience, I've stood before and spoken to congregations of people. I may not be the best writer, yet I enter writing contests such as *Letters About Literature* that promote literacy and writing for young readers. I have already begun to learn about leaving my comfort zone and taking risks and believe I am well on my way to pursuing the dream that God gave me.

I appreciate your book *The Dream Giver*. It helped me to see myself as a person with a purpose; a person with a dream and the importance of following it. Thank you!

"Not surprisingly, the place we're most likely to experience testing is exactly where we struggle most to trust God." -You, Mr. Bruce Wilkinson.

Yours truly,  
Samarrah Sanders

Level One / Semifinalist

Madisen Shackelford – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

**Letter to Judy Blume, Author of *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret***

Dear Judy Blume,

Confidence. As a young girl, that's one thing I lacked. I always cared too much about what others thought of me. In fact, I never stopped to think about how I viewed myself because I thought it didn't matter. My main priority was to be liked, no matter what I had to do. Then I read, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*.

Margaret was the new girl that no one knew. She was new to the town, and she wanted a friend badly. Besides wanting friends, Margaret wanted to belong. The idea of going to a new school frightened her. I too, wanted to be the girl that everyone liked. I wanted to be pretty, popular, and athletic. To sum it up, I wanted to be the best. Reading your book made me realize that there's so much more to life than being perfect.

Your book also showed me that I shouldn't try to grow up too fast. I should live my life in the present, rather than constantly worrying about the future. Margaret and her friends were just entering the adolescent stage, where you have to be the best at everything in order to be popular. They often tried to look more mature and popular. That's how I felt for a while. I felt the need to be perfect in everything I did, but, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* changed my view of not only myself, but life too.

Besides realizing I don't have to be perfect, your book brought me closer to God as well. Margaret always went to God whenever she needed him. She never hesitated to take her problems to him and to ask him for help. I was never too close to God. I never knew much about him, especially since I haven't been to church lately. Margaret's relationship with God got me thinking about how I should feel more comfortable coming to God when I need him. I think that is by far the best thing that your book has taught me, and I plan to start return to church.

Overall, your book has been a huge inspiration to me. It has taught me many lessons about life that I will never forget. I still re-read it when I get the chance. Thanks to you, I love myself more than ever. Plus, your book has brought me closer to God, and I couldn't be more thankful for that.

Sincerely,  
Madisen Shackelford

Level One / Semifinalist

Olivia Smith – Fall Creek Intermediate School, Fishers

**Letter to Lois Lowry, Author of *The Giver***

Dear Lois Lowry,

Choices. Feelings. True happiness. Before reading *The Giver* these were just something I had. I never thought anything could take these ways of life away. That was until I read this powerful book. Before reading *The Giver* I never recognized how many choices we make, and how little we really appreciate them. How everything we decide, everything we undertake are all a gift given to us. Jonas and his family had never experienced anything worth living. Love was not precious enough. Being different wasn't accepted. Without choices we wouldn't appreciate life itself. In Jonas' community everyone thinks they are happy and content with life, but this is because they have never anything different, anything worthwhile. Always sameness. The governments of this distrustful world were scared of *sorrow*, anger, *war*, and life itself. If I were living in a world so colorless and dull my life would be the same as everyone else's. In my mind that is completely boring and stale.

Complete sameness.

Being different is what makes me me. Without choices my life would be done, ruined. Sometimes I regret choices I've made. Those bad choices are mistakes I learn from. I *can't* be afraid of life just because it isn't painless, like Jonas' world. We have made bad choices, but that doesn't mean we have to run away from them. Ever since reading *The Giver* I will always be thankful for the world around *me*, and the choices I am free to make. I will always be open to the pure gift of choice, the one thing that makes us different, the one source of true happiness.

Your reader,  
Olivia Smith

Level One / Semifinalist

Jordan Strachan – Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

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

Dear Frances O’Roark Dowl,

Your book *The Kind of Friends We Used to Be* had more of an impact on me than you could ever imagine. I was having a tough time with a friend. She would lie to me and talk about me behind my back. For the longest time, I was scared to let go of her because we had been friends for so long. I read your book and it showed me that just because you might not be best friends, doesn’t mean you can’t be just friends. Marylin and Kate were best friends and started hanging out with different people. Marylin hung out with the more popular people, just like my friend did. Over the years she and Kate hung out less and less. Then they weren’t best friends anymore, but they were still friends. This book made my jaw drop. I felt like it was inside my head because everything that happened in that book mirrored my problems, *even* the part about how Kate wants to play guitar! I do too! I have a bit of each of your characters in me, so this book profoundly affected me. My friend and I aren’t as close as we used to be. I have been hanging out with different people more often.

Everyone always tells me that if you have true friends and a family, you have everything. I was having trouble finding true friends. I would think I had found true friends, and then I would lose them. This year I found my true friends, and your book was part of it. I had to stop holding on to nothing. That’s what I was doing. My “best friend” didn’t care if I was happy because she cared about being popular. Marylin realized that the cheerleaders weren’t good friends and backed away. In time, I hope my friend comes back to me. I loved my friend like a sister, and so did my family, but things have changed, just like they did for Kate and Marylin.

I used to think of not having a best friend as a bad thing. It’s really not. Your book taught me that. I still don’t have a best friend, but I do have true friends now. They are there when I need them and always make me laugh. They are honest and never lie. They tell me the truth too, which I think is important. They tell me when I overreact; they tell me when I am being dramatic; and they tell me to be me, which I think is the most important quality in a friend. Your book helped me through a hard time, and I will always be grateful for that. You taught

me that *even* if you don't have a best friend, you still have a friend somewhere, and most importantly, true friends may be closer than you think. It may have taken me awhile to find true friends, but now that I have, I definitely think it was worth the wait.

Sincerely,  
Jordan Strachan



Level One / Semifinalist

Autumn Walston – Milan Elementary School, Milan

**Letter to Patricia Polacca, Author of *Thank You, Mr. Falker***

Dear Mrs. Polacca,

*Thank You, Mr. Falker* helped me to see that many people can't read. Some have diseases that can make it hard to read or they just can't read as well as the other kids in their class. That is upsetting. I think everybody should get a fair shot, so I joined a club called job squad to try to help students who are struggling with reading. I get to tutor, just like Mr. Falker.

I think tutoring is a great way for me to learn and for the students. You think that might be a big job for a fifth grader, but I don't think so. It might be a challenge but I like a good one once in a while. In the story, Mr. Falker helped Patricia learn how to read. You shouldn't be ashamed of not being able to read.

In the story Patricia was getting bullied so Mr. Falker stepped in. If I were Mr. Falker, I would have stand up for her and made that person go to the principal's office. People learn in different ways even, I do. After reading this book I was inspired to help people, and I enjoy it to.

Thank you,  
Autumn Walston

Level One / Semifinalist

Skyler Winchester – Milan Elementary School, Milan

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

Dear Rick Riordan,

I love school! Being kicked out would be the worst thing that would ever happen to me. If I were Percy I would ask my mom for help and see what she says about it.

The reason why Percy gets kicked out of so many schools is because there's always a harpy there to make his life miserable, and I've never seen one in my life but it's probably because they are not real. Even if I did, well, I wouldn't even notice it because I would be human.

Although I've never had any powers I've lost my real-father and I have a stepfather. When Sally, Percy's mom, told him about his father, it got me thinking of when my mom told me about my dad. It made me so mad I couldn't forgive him! Well, untilll forgot about it at least!

My real-father was never there for me nor my sister, but what Percy thought was wrong. He thought his father never cared for him, but actually his father loved and cherished him with all of his heart as did mine! My father's actions lead to mine, my mom, my sister, and him to suffer the consequences that he made! Percy had to do the same thing! Except his father wasn't drunk all of the time, like mine. His father went on a ship because of his work and the ship sunk in a storm on the sea.

Rick Riordan your book taught me that even if something bad happens in life just forget about it and move on! There's no way to fix the past once it's written. You have to write your future! Don't let the past hold you back! If you do you can't have fun or graduate college because there's something that won't let you. Just let it go.

Sincerely,  
Skyler Winchester

Level One / Semifinalist

Katie Wright – Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

**Letter to James Buckley, Jr., Author of *Who Was Milton Hershey?***

Dear James Buckley Junior,

Some people say they don't honestly change or make any connections to their life from reading a book, but I know that I changed when I read your book because your book really inspired me to do new things and believe in myself.

I really loved your book, *Who Was Milton Hershey?* It really inspired me to try new things, follow my dreams, never give up, and get a good education. Ever since I read your book, I started to try new things. I tried a new food called spice cake and it was outstanding. I have even tried to cook some new things like homemade macaroni and cheese with three different kinds of cheeses. It was delicious.

I have always wanted to be an artist, so now I am drawing everything that comes to my mind. My friends and family say that I should be an artist someday. I am also never going to give up on getting good grades. I really want to get a good education, so I can get a great job and make a lot of money just like Milton Hershey did.

You also inspired me because I really would like to make something that everyone will remember just like Milton did. Knowing that people are happy makes me even happier: Someday I would like to make a difference in the world where people are happy.

Sincerely,  
Katie Wright

Level One / Semifinalist

Vanessa Xiao – Park Tudor School, Indianapolis

**Letter to Kathryn Erskine, Author of *Mockingbird***

Dear Kathryn Erskine,

Before reading *Mockingbird*, I never realized the true meaning of community and friendship. Now I do. I've learned that to have community and friendship means having someone there for you when you're in need. Community and friendship are incredibly important parts of our lives. As someone who rarely interacts with others, I felt inspired by this book to break out of my shell and talk to more people. *Mockingbird* also helped me appreciate everything around me. I appreciate my siblings a lot more now. Ever since Caitlin cried for Devon, I've changed on the inside.

Not only is community and friendship important, but so is closure. When you lose a loved one or a close person in your life, it hurts. I know personally. But closure is what you need to move on from a tragedy, like in *Mockingbird*. (As they say, the journey is more important than the destination.) The path to closure makes a family or community closer. This book taught me the real meaning of closure.

I've also discovered that we all need that one person in our life who will always be there for you. For Caitlin, it was Devon. For me, it is my whole family, actually. They help me and encourage me, just like Devon did for Caitlin. I understand her and everyone so much better now.

Not only is this book heartwarming, but it also felt very close to home. A tragedy like the one in *Mockingbird* happened at my school. On a Saturday, we received terrible news. Our beloved Lower School principle passed away due to cancer. We were all very close to her, and it hurt all of us. The school community mourned for her and cried. Every day was hard to get through. But slowly, we managed to get back on our feet and support one another. We found closure by caring for each other like Caitlin's community. The tragedy brought our school closer than ever, and now we are always there for everyone. *Mockingbird* assisted me in the moments when I was sobbing, and gave me a helping hand when I was especially sad. The book guided me through my pain. *Mockingbird* will always have a special place in my heart because of that.

*Mockingbird* has altered my view of many things. I never thought much about the struggle people with autism and Asperger's go through to be "normal." Being in Caitlin's shoes has made me think long and hard about what I can do to help them. As I read the book, I learned that the most important part of someone is

the inside, not the outside. With this book, I felt what Caitlin felt when she finally found friends, a loving community, and closure. Because of this book, I became a better sister; friend, student, and person. Thank you for opening my eyes and changing my life.

Sincerely,  
Vanessa Xiao

Level One / Semifinalist

Jaylan Yard – Blair Pointe Upper Elementary, Peru

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

Dear Mrs. Sharon Draper,

Sometimes people with disabilities are misunderstood. We can't tell what they are thinking too well or what they know. I realized this reading your book *Out of My Mind*.

I have a cousin named Wesley who can't walk or talk. Since he can't talk, we can't really tell what he is thinking or what he knows. Reading your book gave me a new perspective on people with disabilities. Maybe they know more than we can see, and they just can't tell us. Maybe Wesley is SUPER smart, we may not know.

To me Melody is an inspiration, for doing what people don't expect from someone with her condition. I liked how she bought a system so she could type words and a computer would say whatever she typed. She was able to show people what she knew.

I learned to not judge a book by its cover. You can't truly know how a person feels unless you lived their life. A stranger might have thought that Melody was just a girl with disabilities, but she was much much more. She was a genius.

Sincerely,  
Jaylan Yard



**LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE  
LEVEL TWO**





Level Two/ First Place

Meghan McMullen – Wisdom Builders, Indianapolis

**Letter to J.R.R. Tolkien, Author of *The Lord of the Rings***

Dear Mr. Tolkien,

Your books have always been my favorite books; I love your trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*. I loved the books all the way to the shire, and the heart of Mordor. As I grew older, I began to realize the story disguised in the story. But even though I knew that part of the story, I came to realize that my life connects with the story. Not necessarily into the characters, but the plot as well. My family struggled of traveling into a dangerous path. And still are struggling leaving the safety of our old dwelling.

We left behind the relative safety of our “Shire” in North Carolina to journey into a path full of thorns and rocks. We had the blessing of an idyllic cul-de-sac home on a creek in North Carolina. It was the state of perfect weather, not too hot or too cold. Our peaceful home was the shire to us. Unfortunately our little safe haven was soon to be abandoned for a distant and strange land and a journey filled with pitfalls.

In the summer of 2009, we packed up our belonging and bid farewell to the only home I ever known. We had to move to Indiana, leaving family and close friends. My father had felt the calling to help heal sick children with a type of radiation that would cause them less harm than what he had been able to do. Even though we moved to heal children, my dad’s own children became sour and clouded with emotions. The move had hit my brothers and I drastically.

Like Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin, traveling far away from home to a city full of strange and different dangers was hard on all of us. We had set down deep roots into the soil, feeling content in our childhood home. Having to adjust to a new area was difficult, and the move made my 2 elder brothers particularly bitter and irked. It all just fueled their anger and hatred for my parents. All in all, it was hard and painful to let go. Like Boromir, they descended into hatred and temptations that caused pain for my parents and chaos in our new home. Instead of falling for a ring, it was money, smoking, addiction and a desire for a speedy exit from our home for all that the world had to offer.

At home and at my dad’s work, there were struggles my parents never saw coming that felt like daily interaction with orcs and uruk-hais. Daddy struggled with work relationships that seemed so poisoned and toxic from the start that he wished he had some way to access the power of Athelas to bring healing to a wounded workplace. My brothers battled with my parents, and one swallowed the poison of the world so deeply that my parents had to send him away for

treatment—to a “Rivendell” of sorts—in hope that friends could help him heal. We made a few close friends on our new journey who were like the elves and aided us in our times of deepest need. Although my parents feel like we have gotten through some really tough times, it does not feel so much like a great victory but more like we were all of us amount the fallen and wounded at Helms Deep.

On our journey it felt like our little group of friends and family were a real life version of *The Lord of the Rings*. As a group we were struggling and fighting against temptations and hardships at every turn. We were losing and gaining companions continually, which was so different from our more stable life and relationships in North Carolina. Getting scraped, stabbed and scarred with every new challenge has left us feeling like Frodo when the Ringwraith stabbed him. My Parents feel very much like they walk with a limp and have wounds that will be very slow to heal, if ever.

I cannot say that my family’s story is finished, because we still have time left to live. Nor am I a mystical wizard who can recite the future, as I am just a human. My family has gone through hard things that won’t be forgotten and *The Lord of the Rings* remind me that there still is hope. The pain we all carry can become as powerful over us as the Ring of power if we let it makes us bitter. We can’t control our circumstances, but we can refuse to put on bitterness that will eat us up and overpower us like the Ring would. There shouldn’t be a reason why I can’t hope for a Rivendell. Some may have found Rivendell in their lives and relaxed, but not me. I am still journeying through days that feel like Mordor, hoping and believing that after this, there will still be a Shire left for me.

Sincerely,  
Meghan McMullen

Level Two/ Second Place

Elise Nachlis – Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

**Letter to John Boyne, Author of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas***

Dear John Boyne,

I am the average preteen, who cares little about the rest of the world problems, only mine. Watching the Pacers play next or studying for my math test are my biggest concerns. People killing each other in Syria is not the first thing on my mind. Sometimes I don't realize how many problems there are in the this world. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* taught me that I need to know what is going on. I live a life like Bruno, only half aware of what is going on. I realize there are problems in the world but I don't realize the problem within the problem. For example, hunger is not the real problem, we are. We are the ones spending more on new clothes instead of feeding the children in the world who don't know when the next time they are going to eat is. Young people need to be aware of these things. We are the ones who will make a change.

Bruno had no idea what his father and the other Nazi generals were doing to the Jews. This exact scenario is happening everyday in this world. Israel is one of the most beautiful places in the world, but is also one of the most hated states on the earth because of the Jews that live there. In the past few months a person had been killed or severely hurt almost every day in Israel. This is not right and it needs to stop.

When Bruno was in the crowd with Shmuel and thousands of others, he had no idea what was going on. He had no idea that he was being marched into a gas chamber and was about to be killed. Similar situations are happening today. For example, Peter Kassig was captured and beheaded by ISIS. Kassig moved to Syria to help people who were being mistreated. Bruno was doing the same thing. He went into Auschwitz to try and help Shmuel find his father. Both of these boys were killed while trying to help others.

This book taught me that helping and taking risks for others is always the right thing to do even if the end result is bad. Even though Bruno died, he changed the lives of so many people like me. This story shows people that taking risks is worth it if you are helping people. Bruno and Kassig both died for the good of others. This book has made me think that I should take more risks for the people that I care about. I hope by the end of my life, I will have done something that will have impacted others.

Sincerely,  
Elise Nachlis

Level Two/ Third Place

Amy Cruz – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

**Letter to Justina Chen, Author of *North of Beautiful***

Dear Justina Chen,

Perfection: it's a word often used to describe something without defects or flaws; or maybe even something perceived as being the epitome of "flawless." Your "flawless" and my "flawless" aren't exactly the same. Like Terra in your book, *North of Beautiful*, I feel trapped inside my own skin like a bird locked in a cage. The judging eyes lurking in every corner taking up all the air in the room, suffocating me.

Terra felt as though if she were to change herself great things would come her way. To her, things would be easier and better if she followed this route. Before reading your book I had the same perspective as Terra. The only thoughts that plagued my mind were of being the best. That may not always be a sour thing, but there is a fine line between improving yourself to be a better person and changing yourself for others.

I've always been sensitive about the way I look because I don't have the most perfect skin or most perfect body. When I read your book, I was at a cross road in my life where I would restrict myself on the things I would eat. It became so awful that I would limit myself to a meal a day. Your book saved me in all honesty. I would have never come to my senses if I hadn't read your book. It opened my eyes; I glanced around and I saw countless worried faces from my loved ones. That's when I realized, just like Terra, that people who truly love you won't care about the way you look.

I've started going to the gym this year, but for myself. I want to begin a healthy lifestyle, so why not start at an early age? Going to the gym is also very therapeutic to me because it gives me a chance to relax and to ponder over my day. After going to the gym my confidence has really grown; I'm very happy with where my life is at this moment.

My parents raised me to believe everyone was equal no matter the gender, race, or religion. I've come to the conclusion now that I'm older and no longer look through the eyes of my parents that although this is what most children are taught, it isn't always true. Jacob who is an Asian boy in your book can attest for this. The harsh glares people receive for being who they are is malicious and unforgivable. They shouldn't be judged for things they had no say in.

Being a Hispanic living in America, I can relate to Jacob. I don't honestly look like a stereotypical Hispanic because of my light hair, green eyes, and pale skin.

There, I don't get the extremely harsh racism thrown at me. But I have seen it and I am not blind. I remember my dad speaking about the racist comments he received at work from time to time. I took it personally; I'd never before then wanted revenge so badly. It ate at my core. I would have my revenge, but in nonviolent way. I will show them just what a Hispanic can be. I will surpass my expectation they have of my own people. To most people the stereotypical Hispanic is a High School dropout, but the people who presume that really need a reality check because here I am writing this letter as a 4.0 student.

Just like Jacob wanted to make his foster mom proud, I thrive to see the day my parents can watch me glide up to a stage and receive my college diploma. I want to set an example for my younger cousins as well because I've begun to discern how closely they follow what the older kids do. I want them to be able to have someone to look up, someone that they can say pushed them to succeed, someone that helped them envision their future while others left them in the dirt because of their race.

Your book has helped me relinquish any negativity I have in my life that would stop me from succeeding and prosper as a person. After losing myself in your novel my confidence has grown, my outlook on society has changed, and I feel more determined than ever before. The cage that had been holding me back in the past has finally opened. I can now spread my wings, soar, and go beyond the stars.

Sincerely,  
Amy Cruz

Level Two/ Honorable Mention

Michaela Geller-Montague – Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

**Letter to Margaret Peterson Haddix, Author of *Turnabout***

Dear Margaret Peterson Haddix,

The balance between independence and dependence in a teenager's life is like the balance of Yin and Yang in the world; there must be both. On one hand, we can't wait for the day that we finally get to walk around the mall with friends alone. But on the other hand, we want our parents to pick us up as soon as we're done shopping. We still want to be able to rely on our parents to do things we consider basic, such as paying for our clothes and helping us with our homework. But eventually we will have to do these ourselves.

Growing up means more independence and responsibility. It means working paying bills and doing your own laundry. But what about... growing down? As adults, Melly and Anny Beth had accepted responsibility and become independent. Now that they are getting younger, they are forced to depend on people more and more. They must find someone they trust to take care of them when they start forgetting how to do basic tasks such as feeding themselves, getting dressed, walking, and talking.

I, like most kids my age, want to do as much as possible by myself. There are videos of me as a toddler whining, Mom, I want to hold the camera. I can do it myself. I want to show that I am strong and most, most of all, I do not want to be thought of as childish. Eventually, I will move out of my parent's house, start a new family, and have to take care of myself and my family. Melly and Anny Beth also want independence, probably even more than I do because they've already experienced it. But, as they grow younger, they are treated like children and are not granted the independence that they crave. I can only imagine how frustrating it must be to know that there is no hope for getting older, that, in fact, you are only getting younger.

I loved this book because I can relate to Melly and Anny Beth's hunger for independence. The younger you are, the less freedom you have, and the more you are forced to depend on people. This book has made me think more about being independent, and how lucky we are to be allowed this opportunity. It is important that we don't take it for granted. Thank you for teaching me this.

Sincerely,  
Michaela Geller-Montague

Level Two/ Honorable Mention  
Laurel Hubster – Jasper Middle School, Jasper  
**Letter to Jodi Picoult, Author of *Nineteen Minutes***

Dear Mrs. Picoult,

I've never been bullied. I've never tried to purposely bully someone. Yet, on several occasions, I've stood back and watched certain peers of mine get bullied by others. At the time, I didn't realized what was going on. Now, after reading your novel, *Nineteen Minutes*, I'm more aware of what is happening during my daily agenda. The definition of "bullying" is suddenly clearer to me, and I've realized, by standing up for others, I can make a difference in a lot of lives.

I have a very close group of friends, some of which I've been acquainted with since second grade. I would do anything for them, and I know that they would do anything for me. Why then, when I figured out that some were bullies, was it so hard for me to confront them? In many ways, I find my situation similar to Josie's. She loved Matt, just like I love my friends. Yet Matt bullied Peter, a long lost friend who was close to Josie at one time. Josie knew that it was wrong, but she couldn't find the courage to confront Matt, fearing that she would lose him. I have certain guy friends, who, in the past, bullied some other students. This bullying wasn't the notorious "Meet me in the parking lot after school" bullying, rather it was the indirect bullying such as furtive comments that everyone can hear except the teachers. One day, in algebra class, when I heard my friend say a very rude comment to a fellow classmate, I told him to knock it off and focus on his own work. It was not enough, though. He stopped for a couple of minutes, but moments later, he was continuing the vulgar comments toward Sully, and then laughing with the other guys. I then ignored it; I didn't want them to think I was a stick-in-the-mud that couldn't have fun.

Weeks later, when you could physically see the effects the bullying had on the victim, I finally drew up enough courage and confronted them. I didn't want to be associated with the "bullies" of the school, and I knew that the real side of them were a lot kinder; I just wanted everyone else to see the kindness in them too. I told them if they didn't stop now, they'd lost respect from others, my friendship, and many other friendships in the future. They knew I was serious, and I could see that they were at least trying to make an effort to eradicate the rudeness. Slowly but surely, they began to stop. They were minimizing the bullying. One day, I noticed it had stopped completely. I was overjoyed and continued to notice that during the days following, there was no more bullying. Now that they've stopped, I wonder if I've helped those students who were getting bullied. Maybe I'd stopped a situation that was similar to Peter Houghton's.



I've never lost anyone close to me except my grandfather, but he didn't die in a tragic situation or event like a school shooting. Losing my grandfather to a simple heart-attack was hard enough, so I can't even imagine anyone in my family getting murdered at a place where they considered to be safe. My family is very involved within the schools and the education of children. Within my family, there are two principals, three teachers, a guidance counselor, a band director, and two lunch ladies. They're dedicated to their work, and I don't think any of them would even consider a school shooting going on at their school. My father, who happens to be the principal of my school, is the type of man that would give up his life just to save the 800 students who're at the school. He wouldn't contemplate someone getting bullied so badly that they'd resort to murder. After reading your eye-opening novel, it's dawned on me that any school, anywhere, and anytime, could be the next victim of a school shooting, just because certain jerks decide to bully others. My father, my sisters, or my friends, could all be the next victim of a victim. Standing up to bullies, even in the littlest ways possible, could help diminish the threat of these school shootings. It could also make the school a happier place, and the people within happier beings!

More recently, those who have gotten bullied have found no other help than that of suicide. This breaks my heart, and I cannot fathom that amount of bullying those must have gone through. Nearly 30 percent of students are either bullied or have bullied others, according to ABC News. After finishing your book, I realized I needed to help stop this. As my school, I am a part of a leadership group named R.O.O.S, which is an acronym for "Respecting ourselves and other students." I had proposed an idea to my fellow members, and they all had agreed that we should take part in it. We had made about 20 posters, all to be hung around each hallway and in the cafeteria and gyms. Each poster had a little positive saying on it, such as "You are special. Keep your head up!" We also have a day called "Thumbs up Thursday." Every Thursday, The ROOS members will stand in the front of the school and personally greet everyone who walks in, telling them how great of a job they're doing and to keep up the great work. We all try to be positive and to encourage others, and the effect it's had on the school is obvious!

Lastly, I want to thank you for writing such a remarkable novel. Not only has it impacted my life, but also others at my school because of the positive things you have inspired me to do. It has truly opened my eyes about bullying. And now, when someone asks for a book, *Nineteen Minutes*, is always the first to leave my mouth.

Yours truly,  
Laurel Hubster

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Laura Bras – Klondike Middle School, West Lafayette

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

Dear Linda Sue Park,

I read your book *When My Name Was Keoko*. I am Korean-American and was forced to read this book by my mother, and I actually found it enjoyable. I liked how the view point changed every chapter, and I preferred the view give by Sun-Hee. My grandmother on my mother's side actually lived during this time period and was a child when it ended. This causes me to feel a special connection with this book because I have heard and can compare her story to Sun-Hee's.

Another reason I loved this book is because it is historical fiction which is one of my favorite genre. I have read many historical fictions, but this one stood out from the rest because of the realistic personalities the characters had. This was shown in the ways you had them think and assume with the average intelligence levels of their age group and have emotion that fit their personality.

This book changed me by allowing me to get closer with my grandmother and helping me enjoy my Korean name more. My Korean name is Jinju, and it means Pearl. I try to understand and appreciated it due to your book which shows how your name means something. Before this book, my Korean name was just a thing that made people mispronounce it with no sentimental value at all. This book allowed for me to find more of your works, and I adored all of them.

My mom could say great things about my name and not change my views one bit, but this book taught me to study Korean more and get more in touch with my past and my heritage. I want to thank you for helping me find my identity when I needed it most, I and want to tell you that I will be thinking of you on my trip to Korea this summer. *When My Name Was Keoko* will always have a special place in my heart, and I will never forget it.

Yours Truly,  
Laura Jinju Bras

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Alex Butrum-Griffith – Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis

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

Dear John Green,

Before I read your book I was a girl that always put on a thick coat of armor and didn't let anyone in. I didn't want to get hurt again. If I let someone in they would just tear me down and I would be left to pick up the pieces. Your book taught me that just because you have numbered days with someone doesn't mean that you can enjoy them, because everything is temporary. Nothing will go on forever but by the same logic everything is infinite just some infinities are smaller than others.

When I was ten my mother got diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer in her right breast. Little did they know that her cancer was spreading and was already in her left breast. When they got the news my parent's kind of sugar coated it but I know there was something very wrong by the look in their eyes. I overheard the doctor saying to my mom that she would be surprised if she live a year. I would never tell it to the other kids but I was scared and I didn't know what to do. I put my armor up. I didn't want anybody to know what I was feeling. Your book changed that.

When I read your book, *The Fault in Our Stars*, I really connected with your characters, especially Hazel. I was faced with a similar situation that she was. While not the exact same I too was faced with the impending demise of someone that I loved very much. I saw the way that Hazel handled every emotion that she felt. She was strong and wasn't fazed by what was happening. She didn't shut the world out, she opened it up. This is what I wanted so dearly to be able to do.

It was in this way that you made me see the world differently. Before I thought that I couldn't let anyone in because I would either get hurt or hurt them. But afterward it gave me a sense of empowerment because nothing is guaranteed. Not me, not you, not today and not tomorrow. For all we know I could get hit by a bus on my way to school because life is crazy and not forever so it is better to use what we have today then wish for something to happen tomorrow.

Now I am not afraid of the world around me because when you worry about something that is out of your control you will always fail. I would be like a dog chasing its tail, even though he would never reach it. I learned that worrying about how something will end make you forget about things that are going on in the middle which in my opinion is the best part.

Sincerely yours,  
Alex Butrum-Griffith

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Alyssa Conrad – West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

**Letter to D. J. MacHale, Author of *Morpheus Road***

Dear D. J. MacHale,

Your book *Morpheus Road* has inspired me in so many ways! It shows me that there is a place following life! It also helped me develop my future! Inspire let the work swim your mind for a while. What does it mean to you?

Last year my Great Aunt Wanda died. Every memory I have is a similar to a short film that cuts off in the middle. Marsh in the story says something at Cooper Foley's funeral that completely changed my thoughts of death! He gave me hope I've been seeking my whole life. The hope that everyone you observe come and go you'll see for the rest of your life. Marsh says that memories live inside us all and we eventually forget about them, but they are always there for us.

Thank you for understanding and giving me something to believe in. Everything I believed evolved and became something more than just a dream. I know my Aunt Wanda will always be there for me, keeping me safe from the wrong life approach! The lesson I gathered from the book is that even if someone close to you passes away, they are always there to protect you! Also I really love to create paranormal writing and poems! This book helped me create a whole new world in my stories! The way you made every horror an illusion is truly amazing. I always focus on the fear and suspicion of my characters, in a way I think I should focus (or spotlight) on the actions and doubts of the nightmares I create. Everything you achieve and everything you created is fascinating.

The gravedigger is my favorite illusion of the whole book or what inspired me. I thought that he was the number one fear and terror guy in this story. He wasn't, he was just pulled out of Marsh's nightmares to make him scared, get him to the point of going insane! I love your nightmarish creatures and their simple words impacted the whole book! My life has been full of tragic events that I use to create my stories. Your imagination must be vast and bizarre because I never would have thought of let's say giant snakes, Gravedigger! The very small reason of all of these is I have never finished a book.

My own writing and others! I always get lost and confused in the middle and give up. Or I might get bored because the excitement of the story goes away after a while. It might say they all lived, saying all this boring stuff about their lives! Then I don't finish it, it's horrible I just get so bored! Your book *Morpheus Road* holds on to the excitement all the way though the book! It isn't a happy ending; sad ending its simple the little part is over the big part has just begun! I love your

writing. It's fascinating how to keep going. I suppose maybe you couldn't think anymore on Gravedigger so you made a whole new person Damon! He was the number fear and terror guy of the story! I love it. I get bored with a killer or ghost and run out of thing to say and do. I don't like to go all love and compassion at the end either. Your book completely holds my attention. There is no love and such at the end. It's amazing! I know now I will finish my book, I know I will complete my creations, I know I will have a different point of view! Thank you.

Inspired, what does that mean to you? To me it means someone or something that has impacted my life and others to do immense things! The real definition is to fill with the urge or ability to do or feel something, especially to do something creative. In a way all of this is true about you, and this book. You inspire me! Please keep inspiring people in the light or in the dark, if you know what I mean. I know you do.

Thank you,  
Alyssa Conrad

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Nataly Davidsmith – Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

**Letter to Christopher Curtis, Author of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham***

Dear Mr. Curtis,

The book, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*, was emotional for me because the white people acted badly toward black people. They sprayed water with hoses at them and made them sit in the back of the bus. It was very bad what the white people did to the black people. It made me angry to read about white people beating up the black people. I got very upset. The white people could treat the black people better by treating them the same way they want to be treated themselves.

I would not have wanted to live in that period of time because I am black and Jewish. The white people would have most likely have acted violently toward me and my family, and possibly have killed me. I would not have been able to go to a private school or have been able to sit where I want on a bus. Being black can sometimes be very painful. People make jokes about me because of being black. It is hurtful because people look at me in a different way, possibly they think, “He is a very bad person, maybe I should get away from him.” I wonder why white people have such a reaction to black people.

It doesn’t make sense why white people react so violently! I get very upset when I see movies where black people are whipped, beat up and killed. I wonder if I was a white person, would I be equally violent toward people of color? Although, there are times when I see black people and white people together. In this instance, I feel very happy that white people are still our brothers and sisters. My parents, for example, are married, and my dad is black, and my mom is white. All of this makes me hopeful about the human race. I am very glad that I did not live the 60’s because society at that time had some gloomy elements. There was a group called the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) during this time period.

The Klu Klux Klan was in Indiana, which is where I live. The Klan membership in Indiana was the largest in the U.S. until a violent act happened. In 1927, a white man was charged with the rape and murder of a young school teacher. During the trial, it was discovered that Klan members were bribing public officials and making other secret deals. All of this finally led to Klan members leaving the KKK. There is a very dark work out there. The world with blacks and whites has come a long ways since the 60’s. I can be grateful for not living then, and more hopeful about the future.

In the future, I would like to see black people and many other racial groups live together peacefully. When you were growing up, did you have violent racial experiences that led you to write this book? How do you feel about racism in our world today? How would you write this story to how *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* now?

Sincerely,  
Nataly Davidsmith



Level Two/ Semifinalist

Sophia Delgado – Wisdom Builders, Indianapolis

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

Dear Sharon Draper,

In my life, I've faced struggles. Since when I was young, I've had Tourette's syndrome, which gave me various tics, attracting many stares. Growing up, I had few friends, and am now left with only one good friend, whom I can truly rely on to be there for me. Many times, I have wondered if I could possibly see through the darkest times. I have always searched for answers. Some I've found, and many more still I haven't, but your book *Out of My Mind* has given me a deeper perspective on my life that has changed my way of seeing through trials.

Melody has a true gift. Not just her intellect, but also her courage to face the oncoming troubles of the world. She sees hope in the darkest corners, and reading of her undying faith, I long for a confidence like her—confidence that everything will turn out for the best. But life isn't always like a fairytale. Not every story has a happy ending. I cling to the knowledge that everything is not as bad as it could be. I can talk and sing, I can walk and run; I can communicate and share my ideas easily.

But those are things Melody can never have, and I am reminded of how blessed I truly am. For three years now, my family has lead worship songs at church for special needs children. Though I was at first uncomfortable to be around children with disabilities, I soon found that each child, if you take the time to reach out to them, has a special talent... One particular girl can hear a song once and replay it perfectly on a keyboard; another eight-year-old boy is an expert in mechanics and engineering. Reading your book, I felt a connection with Melody, and felt even more compelled to reach out to these kids who need more friends to recognize how special they truly are.

Many thanks and blessings,  
Sophia Delgado

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Emily Dubon – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

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

Dear David Pelzer,

It's hard to believe that such cruelty exists, and it breaks my heart that children have to go through that. My best friend was begging me to read *A Child Called It*. When I did I was sobbing and praying for all the kids that were being physically, sexually, and verbally abused. I read the whole series because I had to know this stuff sooner or later, and I had to make sure that the mother got punished. Reading your book was like a wake-up call; I would always complain. For everything! If we didn't have what I wanted for dinner, or when I got grounded for not doing chores, or for not playing with my brother. I soon realized that I was just a brat that was never satisfied and grateful. I take things for granted, like the time my mom wouldn't let me get a tank top that went with a fluffy sweater.

I remember when my mom and I went shopping, and I got a sweater. There were tank tops that went with the sweater and my mom wouldn't let me get it. Money was tight with my mom not working because of my new baby brother, plus we had barely moved here 3 months ago. "You have tons of tank tops, you can wear one of those." my mom declared. Once we got home I kept complaining and bothering my mom. She finally had had enough; she stood up from the couch and threatened to return the sweater. "No!" I yelled "Evansville is an hour away and you wouldn't drive up there just to return something!"

"Then I'll just give it to the salvation army." she said. "No! I hate you!" I exclaimed. "Emily, please, don't say that just because of a sweater." Mom responded. "No!! You are not my mom anymore...Jessica! I should just run away and find a new family!" I cried. After I had said it the words ringed in my head. I regretted it; I saw the hurt in my mom eyes. I wanted to apologize but I couldn't let her get her way; I tried to but nothing came out, not a word. "Fine then. Go ahead." She said knowing that I wasn't brave enough to do it.

I walked out of the house and ran as fast as I could, probably the fastest I've ever ran. I stopped and looked around me. I was in the woods in front of my house; I cried and yelled to the top of my lungs. My mom was right; this was a silly thing to argue about. I walked back home and snuck in through my window, I didn't want her to know that after all of that I finally agreed. I was selfish, spoiled, little brat I am so disappointed in the way that I used to be. That was a while back though, after I read your book I changed my ways...Forever.

Sincerely,  
Emily Dubon

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Taylor Gramman – Greensburg Community Jr. High School, Greensburg  
**Letter to Diana Blokzyl, Author of *Gone Away***

Dear Diana Blokzyl,

Fate. Destiny. Whatever you want to call it, things like this don't just happen every day. One day, I was looking in a jewelry box that I look through regularly when I came upon a bracelet that at the time looked like any ordinary armlet. As I examined the wristlet, I discovered that it had the name "Carolyn," my late grandmother, engraved into it. I found an opening which any curious person, like myself, would open and found a picture of my deceased grandfather in it. I have never seen this bracelet in my life, but it was found in a location I look at all the time. I knew there was a deeper meaning to my discovery.

My free time as a child often consisted of being confined in a hospital room. When most kids my age were playing with toys, outside, or with friends, I was having the adventure of a lifetime, and not a good one at that. My grandpa died in 2003 of pancreatitis. Soon after his death, my grandmother was diagnosed with leukemia and decided to move in with my mom, dad, and me. I often read books to her or we would watch TV together, just her presence was enough. She had to undergo chemotherapy and her hair slowly fell out. I often remember her wearing hats to keep her head warm in the winter and I have those hats in my room to this day as a token of her life. My mom tells stories of how she had to help her. She says that cancer is a horrendous thing that no human being should have to fight through. She died in the year 2004 and in that moment, as your poem "Gone Away" says, "An angel whispered take my hand and come with me you're work here is done."

During the holidays most kids spend time with their family, including their grandparents. My friends discuss what they do with their grandparents and what gifts they receive, but I got the best gift to them all: two angels watching down on me every day for the rest of my life. Your poem, "Gone Away" tells, "...As I move amongst the clouds, I'll look down and smile upon you..." I often get the sensation that they are watching out for me, not only when I am in need, but they also celebrate my greatest achievements with me.

When I read your poem, "Gone Away," everything made sense. Why I wear the bracelet I found every day since I uncovered it. Why I can feel their presence in my life. Why I still grieve over my family's loss to this day. Why I feel miserable because my grandparents never got the chance, nor ever will get the chance to see their grandchildren develop and grow up to become adults and the grandchildren of two amazing people in person. My grandparents and I will be reunited one day, but for right now I want to live a life that will make them, my family, and

myself proud and honored. I want to have experiences, adventures, and discoveries to tell them everything about so when we meet again, they will be reassured that I kept living my life to the fullest...and I did for them. For right now there will be “only laughter and smiles” because “there will always be a tomorrow.”

With great respect,  
Taylor Gramman

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Jaden Hanna – West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

**Letter to Mary Lewis Wang, Author of *The Lion and the Mouse***

Dear Mary Lewis Wang,

The first time I ever heard your book was in first grade. I had thought it was the best story every! I begged my teacher, Miss Moore, to get me it because I just had to have it. Once she had gotten it for me I had my mom read it to me every day. She had read it so many times I could memorize it. “A little mouse is big, too you know” this was one of my favorite sayings in your book. I’m not sure why I liked it but I think it had something to do with my brothers. They would always tell me how small I was and I couldn’t be any help, but once I read this book I thought differently.

When I was “little mouse” I was diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis. I was told I wouldn’t be able to play any sports or hang out with friends. I was even told I would probably spend most of my life in the hospital. I thought they were right, how they said I would live was how I thought. Until I read this book. Then, I felt like I couldn’t do anything I wanted to. After I had read this book, I decided I wanted to play basketball. All the doctors told me it would be too hard, but I knew I could do it. I believed in myself.

Once I started to play, it was hard---I wasn’t use to all the running. I would cough all the time because of it. It was hard, but I never gave up. And I’m glad I didn’t because basketball has helped me stay healthier. Eventually, my lungs had gotten used to all the running, and now I don’t cough as much. Along with basketball, I play softball and volleyball. Then I started to go to friend’s house for a little bit but never stayed the night. I was scared that they would laugh and make fun of me when I did my treatment. It wasn’t until sixth grade that I had spent the night as someone’s house. It was my friend Maddie. She laughed, but it wasn’t at me it was with me.

From this book I have learned that even small people can big too! I’ve also learned that I can still do anything that anyone else can do. So thank you Mary Lewis Wang without your book I wouldn’t have learned these lessons!

Sincerely,  
Jaden Lynn Hanna

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Nadav Keisari – Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

**Letter to Veronica Roth, Author of *Divergent***

Dear Veronica Roth,

Your book *Divergent* has changed my life by teaching me about risks, choices and their consequences. Tris has to deal with risk to survive and make hard choices to protect her friends and family. She also has to take risks to stop people from finding out about her being Divergent. Those risks very important to the story and Tris's life. There are many choices that Tris has to make, such as which factions to join, or who to trust. In my life, I never had to make choices like that, but just thinking about it makes me want to think more about my choices.

Especially the important ones, I think that Tris's decisions were hard to make and I would never be able to make them if I was her. I assume that she was able to handle it because she was brave, smart and courageous. If others had to make those decisions, at least 45% would die earlier than she did, especially me. Risky actions are a big part of *Divergent*. Tris has to take a lot of risky actions to protect herself, her family and her friends. Sometimes those actions in *Divergent* are adventurous but adventure was not always good in my life. When I was 7, there were grill matches under my parents bed and for a thrill, when I was by myself, I would light one.

One day, I was curious and wanted to see if the metal bed frame was meltable, so I struck a match and held it under the frame and waited for an outcome. Suddenly, the mattress caught fire, so I ran to the restroom and tried to fill up a water bottle and splash it on the fire, but it barely did anything. I did it again and in the middle of that, the smoke alarm went off and I told my parents what was going on, so we grabbed the important stuff like pictures and we ran. We called the fire department and it took them a while to get there. Once they arrived, they started working while I was sent to a neighbor's house. Afterwards, my parents went to the house and the whole top floor was gone. Then we moved to an apartment and now we are in our third one. If that adventure had ended differently, I wouldn't be here writing this letter.

Since I made those choices and took that risk my life changed drastically. I am now closer to my Jewish roots. I have learned to adjust to new places more quickly and I have met new people and learned new lessons. This might make it sound like my life got better after the fire, but it also got worse in some ways, too. My house was robbed, so now my mom is scared of the dark and some of the kids at my school still laugh about it behind my back. I now know that what I did was wrong, but at the time I thought it was fun and people gave us things to help us out and at the time I thought they were just gifts.

In the book *Divergent*, Tris teaches us about loyalty, risk taking and choices. My life may not be as exciting as Tris's but we both know what is the right thing to do. Just like Tris I need to take the bull by the horns and lead my life the way I want it to go.

Sincerely,  
Nadav Keisari

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Evan Kenyon – Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

**Letter to Jean Ure, Author of *Plague***

Dear Jean Ure,

Your book *Plague* made me optimistic. At the beginning of the book I related to Fran because she took her wonderful life for granted. She never thought about how great her life really was until she found out about the plague. I then realized that my life was great. We complain about the littlest things. While people elsewhere in the world are dealing with Ebola or starvation, I am complaining about getting a new cell phone.

I never knew how much my friends and I take for granted. Everyone is complaining about how old their phones are or how their tablets cannot download this or that, but no one ever thinks that this would be the least of their problems if they were born somewhere else in the world. In Africa, people are starving and fear the deadly disease Ebola, whereas people in America don't even realize their lives are so much better. After thinking about all of this, I want to donate to charity and help out in the world. I started to look on the bright side of things instead of always looking for the things that were wrong or bad.

After reading *Plague* I realized how people can be hypocrites. Right now everyone is talking about how bad Ebola is in Africa and how they wish they could help stop it. They do not realize they can by donating money, and when they are offered the chance they decline. Whenever I go to the store with my mother, they ask her to donate and she always declines. Like my mother, most people do not realize how they can make a difference if they only donated to what they believe in. If people read this book maybe they would realize that they could and should make a difference in the world. I now realize that I can make a difference in helping people if I donate and try.

Before reading *Plague*, I did not realize that contributing to a cause would make a real difference. I now think about how other people would love to have things that I do not have much use for. I never thought about helping out for a cause I believed in because I thought that there was no way I could help. Climate change is a problem that people are not facing because they do not think it will help if they try. They do not realize that if they have the motivation they can motivate others and eventually the problem will be solved. I now realize how wrong I was and how I can help fight problems in the world and now I will start doing so. I will start changing the world. This book gave me the push needed.

*Plague*, told me how great my life is. I never thought about the good things I have in life like the computer I am typing this on or bed I sleep on. I did not



appreciate all of the extra things I have before reading this book. I never thought about what would happen if a plague infected my town. I now appreciate everything I have. I wish that other people would read this book so they could understand how great their lives are and how they could and should change the world. *Plague* has changed my life forever and I will always be grateful.

Sincerely,  
Evan Kenyon

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Rachel Kiefer – Salem Middle School, Salem

**Letter to Mike Ritland, Author of *Navy Seal Dogs: My Tale of Training Canines for Combat***

Dear Mike Ritland,

I read *Navy Seal Dogs: My Tale of Training Canines for Combat*. After reading *Navy Seal Dogs* your book has changed me and some of my views. With your quote, “I became fascinated-obsessed might be a better word-with the idea of becoming a U.S. Navy Seal team member after reading an article about them in Popular Mechanics magazine. The movie *Navy Seals* inspired me as well.” I related very well. When I was 12 year old my mother and father had a divorce, so I asked for a video game, and a war based one. After a few days we went to the mall where I purchased *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* so that is where my next level of obsession with the military grew (first starting with my great grandfather being in the Army in WWII). After first beginning to play those games I always considered joining the military as a back-up option in case my future plans in life didn’t work out.

After that I slowly began to look at things with a more tactical point of view and did a lot of research on the military and surely, more video games that were war-based came out, causing me to purchase them. Your book was what sent me over the edge, Mr. Ritland, it made me really think about the choices I wanted to make and it caused me to be firm with one choice. I really want to join the military, as an MWD handler.

Some of my views that changed mostly involved respect. I had already respected military personnel but after your book, I respect them even more. I have in fact, been sent to an acute behavioral facility twice, and while there, I treated the techs and nurses with the utmost respect, calling them “Miss” and “Mister” and always using “sir” or “ma’am”. Because of my respect and my polite manner, I quickly flew through the recovery stage and was often asked to help do things, whether it was the tables or the whiteboards. I loved every minute of it since I knew I was helping out the staff and making their job easier. I also treat the teachers at my school with new respect, saying “sir” and “ma’am” when I get the chance. Currently I am working on treating all of the adults in my life with respect, including my parents.

Before, I loved dogs, now, I love and respect them. Reading about the MWDs that you wrote about in your book has caused me to view working dogs differently, whether they are rescue dogs or MWDs. I realized just how dangerous the working conditions for these dogs are, and how they bravely answer the call. I believe it would be great honor to work with military working dogs and if I work

hard enough, I can get the chance to. Thank you for the book, Mr. Ritland, it has inspired me greatly and I want to save lives like those dogs have. One day, maybe, I can get the chance.

Sincerely,  
Rachel Kiefer

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Eliyahu Klein – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

**Letter to Roland Smith, Author of *Peak***

Dear Roland Smith,

*Peak* really taught me how to deal with changes throughout my life it also showed me how change could be good or bad depending on how you deal with it. Everything changes eventually people, places, things, even fictional characters. All the main characters in your book had to go through change. Peak had to get used to living in mountains and living with divorced parents and a new father, Peak's father had to get used to being a father instead of an explorer, even the news reporter changed throughout the book she originally was used to being the center of attention but by the end of the book she could depend on herself. Change not only affects fictional characters, it also affects people in real life.

I personally had to get used to change when my parents divorced I had to get used to living in two different houses. I had to get used to a bigger change when my mom moved to another state and I moved with her I rarely saw my dad unless he came to meet us or we went to meet him which wasn't very often. Luckily my dad moved closer to where my mom lives so I get to go to his house a lot more. I was lucky that I didn't fight against the change and hate my parents for splitting up. Some people aren't as lucky.

Depending on how you deal with change really affects your life. Change can affect you in the littlest ways like if you always wake up 7:00 but at your new school/job you have to wake up at 6:00 if you don't change your sleep patterns you'll be late to school/work every day. Change can affect you in big ways too like if you parents get divorced like mine and Peak's you can either not except the change and have a horrible life where you hate your parents or you accept the change and love your parents.

It's really not how well you deal with change because all change is good even if it seems bad. An example of a "bad change" is if you move to another school and loose all your friends you'll meet new people and have even more friends. Change is in every one the people who use it are the entrepreneurs they have an idea that no else believes in. They tell the world their idea and it gets rejected so they try again and again to change the world and eventually they do. Change is extremely hard to accept for anyone but when change is accepted.

Sincerely,  
Eliyahu Klein

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Mitchell Kluemper – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

**Letter to Lois Duncan, Author of *Killing Mr. Griffin***

Dear Lois Duncan,

My name is Mitchell Kluemper. I was a bad child. I am saying bad. I was a liar, a cheater and a whiner. One time I was playing baseball in the house, and I broke my mom anniversary present. I blamed my brother and of course he denied it. My parents did some investigation and realized that it was my favorite ball that broke the item. My parents had no other proof but that, but I still got punished. Your book, *Killing Mr. Griffin*, has taught me that crime doesn't pay.

If I am bad there's no point in lying about it. I am going to get caught either way. Whenever I start to on something that is going to get me in trouble I refrain from doing it just because I think of your book. When I do happen to do something bad I fess up right away. I am going to get caught so I might as well get it off my chest before the punishment gets too severe.

Like the time I brought my older brother's DS to school. I had a Reduce Reuse Recycle club meeting after school that day. I forgot to bring my backpack home that day and I left in the art room. My backpack does not have my name on it, but my brothers DS has his name on it. When I came back the next day I got my backpack out of the lost and found. When I looked for the DS I did not find it.

The next day when my parents questioned me. Calmly I shook my head. The most dreadful part of the story is that we never got the DS back. For over a month, I sat in my room thinking about the pounding I am going to get from my brother if he ever found out that I took the DS to school and lost it. I have done worse, but I would not be able to fit it all on this letter. For the record I was a lot younger and I had not read your book.

Throughout your book the best part was the ending. It shows that you can't run from something you did. There are going to be consequences to actions no matter the size. Thank you very much for writing your book. Without it I would not be the person I am today. A lot of mistakes were dodged because of me reading your book. I learned that consequences should be faced head on. I also learned that if you do something wrong you should fess up before it is too late.

Your fan,  
Mitchell Kluemper

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Riley Kruger – West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

**Letter to Ellen Hopkins, Author of *Crank***

Dear Ellen Hopkins,

The wonder that fills your pages is stunning. Every single word leaves a vigorous impact on me. The beauty that overflows that simple stack of paper is truly and completely sensational. When I read this book I could not have been more pleased. This book has opened my eyes. Like most people I've been told not to do drugs but until I read this book I did not realize how serious the situation is. The exquisite details in the book showed me how real and dangerous drugs can be. Even in my own community drugs are a problem.

In Noble County, there is an abundant population of meth users as well as other drugs. After reading this book, it has made me view drug users substantially different. Before I read this book, I had a strong opinion on how I felt about drug users. After I read this book, I realized that I was not completely right to assume that people who do drugs are completely horrible people. This book has not only opened my eyes it has changed my whole thought process on everything. The way I think of people, family, life, and many more things will never be the same for me.

This book has transformed me. I can feel each word come off the page and wrap around me creating the strongest of feelings. I can see each word enter my head and build a vivid image of the story. I can taste the energy of each character in every moment and every second. This book has transformed me in a way in which words cannot explain.

Sincerely,  
Riley Kruger

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Jacob LaRavia – Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis

**Letter to Mike Lupica, Author of *Travel Team***

Dear Mike Lupica,

I have always been the youngest in my class and it has always made me try harder, but at one point I just wanted to give up. Your book *Travel Team* made me not want to give up. I put myself in Danny's shoes and I felt just like him. Not age wise, but he was short and played basketball like me. Being short didn't make him give up; it made him strive for the best he could give.

Everyday Danny would ask, "When will I get taller?" Just like I say, "Will I get held back?" Danny worked hard every day and put all effort into him whereas I just thought these kids are older than me so they should be ahead of me and I slacked off. In AAU I didn't play as hard as I could, knowing I wasn't the best out there.

But that was before reading *Travel Team*. I read it in about sixth grade when I was really struggling to ball. That book made me practice every day for an hour at least. I practiced over the weekend for at least three hours. Just like Danny, I had my dad help me with dribbling and shooting. I went to a basketball camp at Taylor University. Now I'm one of the two best players on my eighth grade basketball team and I'm being scouted.

Your book *Travel Team* impacted my life more than you could imagine. It made me strive for the best not only on the court but off the court as well. I have good grades and I'm on honor roll. You have impacted me and the way I look at society. I don't make fun of anyone because of their height or their age. I push them to strive harder in sports and in school. Mike Lupica, thank you so much for writing *Travel Team*.

Your friend,  
Jacob LaRavia

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Paloma Loudermilk Bhatia – West Lafayette Jr. Sr. High School, West Lafayette

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

Dear John Green,

Now I know you have obtained so many letters telling you how inspiring *The Fault in Our Stars* is, that you have left the letters, unopened, just like Peter Van Houghten in your book, but I just need to tell you how this book has changed me, not just praise its delightfulness. Books have this way of telling stories, unlike movies or even by mouth, that keeps you flipping the crisp pages of the book, wanting more and more of the story. Like everyone else, I stayed up late to finish your instant classic, later joining the thousands of fandoms on Instagram and Twitter, your message is now buried deeply into me, for as long as my infinity lasts (as you so greatly explained in the book). Personally, I'm more of an adventure reader, with violence and all that junk, but your book captivated me.

Unlike Hazel or Augustus, my life has pretty much been what you would call normal. No cancer. No hours at the hospital. No drugs that make you lose your hair. Then why am I writing a letter to you about my problems that were similar to your story? It centers on humanness. We look for the meaningful moments in life within our very limited life. Like Hazel, I haven't had some of the best days and will also have some bad ones to come. Yet I've managed to have great periods of time in life when it's just seemed perfect and happy. Those days only lasted for a short period of time, just like Hazel's and Augustus's little happy spell. After that, my life falls back into its usually dark place of school and stress. I've always gotten good grades and made it into honors, but stress brings me down quickly.

Like Hazel, I feel like one day I'm going to just break down and fall apart, not physically but emotionally. I feel like Hazel never had a stable life with friends. I have friends, but I've gone to many schools and never really belonged anywhere. Even if I'm at a normal place, I feel like I just don't belong. My dad is a doctor, who works everywhere, but comes home on weekends. He started this moving everywhere when I was nine but it's really hard and your life isn't exactly what you call abiding. The doctor parts reminded me of my life because my brother had this foot issue where it hurt him to walk. I spent hours in foot stores and doctors offices because of it. It was sad. I would see many kids with diseases, like cancer, and they were dying so young.

When I read *The Fault in Our Stars*, I returned there and it was so real, like I was Hazel, not only suffering from it, but watching someone I love die from it. Plus, cancer has taken many people in my family. I remember years ago, when I was much younger, we were on vacation and the pet sitter took our old dog,



Montana, to the doctor. It turned out she had bladder cancer. We spent lots of money trying to save her, but it was too late. *The Fault in Our Stars* help remind me that once cancer grabs your arm, it is hard to pull away alive. This book helped me understand and realize how short and important things in our lives really are. With a new perspective on life, I give TFIOS a thumb up.

Sincerely,  
Paloma Loudermilk Bhatia

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Henry Madden – Heritage Christian School, Indianapolis

**Letter to Erin Hunter, Author of *Warriors of the Wild***

Dear Erin Hunter,

My name is Henry. I started reading your books when I was about 7. My favorite series you have written is *Warriors of the Wild*. I spent many hours reading the books within the series. My favorite book of all was the first book *Into the Wild*. This book changed the way I grew up. I first started reading these books because of my mother. She wanted us to spend time as a family at night and she picked out this book to read before we went to bed. Each night we read a few chapters.

As we read more and more we grew to love Rusty and we couldn't stop reading the books. We quickly read the first set of books and moved on to the next. Every time we finished a set of books we bought more. Finally, when I was about 10, I got the last set of *Warrior* books, read them myself, and finished the series. Even after reading all of the books, I never forgot the original Rusty and the times my family read together.

Around this time, I considered transferring schools. I was very nervous and didn't really want to change schools because it was the first time that switching schools had been a real option. But, I kept thinking about Rusty. He was just a house cat, scared of the wild. When he finally left the comfort of home, he discovered a world he never knew existed. He made many friends and had many adventures. Because of him, I decided to go through with transferring schools. I was scared what people would think of me the first day. Fortunately, I quickly made some great friends.

Then I met their friends and we became buddies. Soon, I had a large friend group. Rusty was still on my mind though, because some of my friends wanted me to play football. I didn't really want to, but Rusty did many things he didn't want to and ended up making more friends while having fun. So, I decided to give it a shoot. I ended up starting linebacker and had lots of fun.

I believe that if I hadn't read those books, I never would have switched school and made so many new friends. I am grateful to you, Erin Hunter, for writing these books which I have thoroughly enjoyed. They have changed my life in more ways than I could have ever imagined.

Sincerely,  
Henry Madden

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Kenzie Moore –West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

**Letter to William Shakespeare, Author of *Fear No More***

Dear William Shakespeare,

While some people reflect on their childhood as a montage of sports, sleepovers, and chocolate chip cookies, I will always remember growing as tall as the stack of books next to my bed. To my adolescent self, books seemed to be a cool glass of lemonade in the mid summer. I loved devouring the stories and plots hidden inside of those books. Then, the time came that I picked up on the teenage habit of over-usage on the internet; pulled away from the fun-filled knowledge of books for what seemed to be forever.

Then, seventh grade came shambling up on me.

At first, I felt like the deputy of the purlieu. One more year of the dreaded prisonlike deathtrap that is school. I felt more powerful than ever before because I was even more connected to the internet than my classmates. The word ‘read’ or anything related to it seemed to bore me. It wasn’t as exciting as it was when I was young; in fact, I believed that reading was “lame” or “a nerd’s only friend.” But it got worse at home. You see, my sister is three years older than me. While I was a puny seventh grader, she was the all-mighty sophomore, and in her theatre class, she was helping to perform a work of yours. As a jealous child, I silently wondered what a “Shakespeare” was, so, I looked to my only option that wouldn’t make me seem like an “ignorant, cultureless child.” After looking online, I learned that you were an author between the era of 1564 and 1616. I was curious as to how *Twelfth Night* (the play my sister was acting in) was set up, and so you had tricked me into reading more and more. After hours and hours of reading several works of yours; I just happened to find “Fear No More.”

Remember that stack of books that I mentioned? Yeah, that was later brought back. Those poems and those works and plays of yours just re-opened my world of reading. After “Fear No More,” I wondered if other authors were as dedicated to their works as you were, and I wanted to see if anyone else could help me to love to read as you had done for me.

As I read “Fear No More” over and over again, I began to wonder why this poem meant so much to me. Then, I read this stanza,

“Fear no more the lightning-flash,  
Nor the all-dread thunder-stone;  
Fear not slander, censure rash;  
Thou hast finished joy and moan;

All lovers young, all lovers must  
Consign to thee, and come to dust.”

And then it hit me. As a young child, I used to be afraid of thunderstorms, lightning the most, and as I would cower under my bed, or in the basement, my mother would dulcify me, she would tell me to not “fear the lightning” or “fear the thunder” and the more I listened to her smooth voice, the more I realized that there was nothing to be afraid of, and the stanza reminded me of the times my mother seemed to be the only one who was there for me.

After reading your poem “Fear No More,” I felt as if I had changed, and I wished I could go back in time and hold my terror-stricken self during those storms and rehearse your poem; let my vernal self be calmed, until the fear was completely gone. Did anyone ever tell you that you have a way with words? It’s almost as if you will always know what to say, whether it is a reference to one of your poems, or just words of wisdom. No matter what you say, even if it is a quote from another lionized person, you will always find a way to make it seem more inspirational than the original.

I am not as skilled as you in writing and may never be for all I know, but, I do hope that I will satisfy millions of people as you have with poems, plays, and other things that flow through your mind so effortlessly. I will forever be grateful to you because of the great help you have been to me and to realize that when it rains, or when I think I am alone, I will always have the sweet melodic sounds of your words.

Thank you,  
Kenzie Moore

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Elyse Moser – Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis

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

Dear John Green,

September 22, 1998 was the day my dad was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Multiple Sclerosis is a disease which affects your nerves-the biggest of them usually being your brain. Since then my dad has to use a cane. He has to get pricked and poked with needles, while the doctors are trying to find a cure. The biggest part of this disease is his mental state. He had become a completely different person in the last 10 years. He has times where he can't remember the neighbor's name, whom which he has lived next to for the past 20 years. I have had to grow up a lot to make sure I can take care of my dad. You're probably wondering, "Why is this girl telling me about her disable father?" I wanted to thank you for writing *The Fault in Our Stars*. It really helped me feel less alone.

First how Augustus was sick reminded me of my father. It felt so quick that Hazel's world was turned upside down when he turned out to be sick again. That is how I felt how I saw my dad's condition get worse and worse. Augustus was this big strong basketball player as was my dad, being 6 foot 7. When Hazel found him at the gas station with his IV infected it brought memories of my dad when he fell down the stairs and was bleeding. I wasn't strong enough to pull him up and we were home alone. I felt helpless and call 911, just as Hazel had done. I sat next to him trying to clean up his oozing blood with my shirt. It was in these moments both Hazel and I saw the men we love in their most vulnerable moments.

It's really the worst to see the most important person in your life and watch them become someone you don't even recognize. I just wanted to thank you, Mr. Green, for creating someone I can relate to. Without your book I would feel so alone with no one to relate to. I know I'm not the only one who was helped/influenced by your words and for that I thank you.

Sincerely,  
Elyse Moser

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Simone O'Mara – Greensburg Community Jr. Sr. High School, Greensburg  
**Letter to Maya Angelou, Author of *Phenomenal Woman***

Dear Maya Angelou,

First and foremost, I want to tell you that your poem “Phenomenal Woman” has changed my perspective on others and myself greatly. When I was growing up, I had all of these unreachable expectations thrown upon me. Even as 4 or 5 years old, barely even a child, I would see commercials on TV telling me what I needed to be. If I ever wanted to succeed, or get a boyfriend, I was required to have long legs, gorgeous eyes, a ten inch waist, tanned skin, and countless other physical attributes. Never did they say tell me that a man would want a woman with passion, with intelligence, with confidence in herself. Nobody would care about what truly makes up you. Throughout my life, I've seen women be belittled just because of their sex. Since they're a girl, they're automatically though less of.

I never really notice how much it really changes the way I acted. I know I'm only 14 now, but that hasn't stopped the prejudice of my gender. Women all around me have been downgraded for being themselves. I've even succumbed to the judgment of others. Girls put down other girls for trying to be an individual, for being themselves. Girl on girl bullying is rampant. I had found myself judging other girls for trying to be who they really are. But after finding and reading “Phenomenal Women,” my whole perspective on how I look at others and how I should carry myself changed entirely.

From personal experience, I know how it feels to be insecure in yourself, and not like who you are. Through elementary school, I was ashamed that I was tall. It seemed like my height was all people saw I hated it. I despised my hair. It was so straight and dull compared to the other girls. Nothing about me was what I wanted to be. Every little thing about me, I wanted to change or replace. Why? I was only 9 years old. Little girls aren't supposed to care about how they look. They should still be playing with Barbies, and having make believe fun. Why would, why SHOULD, a little girl be self-conscious?

“Phenomenal Women” showed me that I should be proud I'm a girl, and I should carry myself with pride. Have confidence in who I am, be happy I am the person I am today. When you exude confidence, people will be attracted to you, men and women. Because in reality, people aren't attracted to those who have the physical features that are “desirable”, they are drawn to those who love themselves. In the end, loving oneself is the most attractive attribute of all.

The lessons I've learned from your poem have helped me be a more exuberant and happy person, mind and body. My self-esteem has skyrocketed since I've

made the realization that I should be myself, and be proud of that. I just wish every girl or women could read this poem. I feel like it would make everybody positive and self-assured. If every woman were more proud of who they were, women wouldn't be paid less. Women would be equal. Women wouldn't be discriminated by their gender. Women would be able to be women. Phenomenal Women.

From,  
Simone O'Mara

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Gabe Obermiller – Klondike Middle School, West Lafayette

**Letter to James Dashner, Author of *The Maze Runner***

Dear James Dashner,

Your book, *The Maze Runner* was very inspiring to me, and touched my life very much. I loved how Thomas was afraid in this new place, filled with horrors beyond your wildest dreams, and still had that sense of curiosity. Obviously, everyone was curious, but Thomas had a level of curiosity beyond what others had. He dared to explore for the greater good of the people in the maze, and that was a great message I took away from the book.

Thomas had a high level of bravery as well. It took courage to run into maze to help Minho and Alby. They were the only Gladers to survive the night, and that is because Thomas was determined. He knew what to do, and he acted fast. Thomas showed that anyone who is determined can get out of difficult and make a difference in people's lives.

Your book showed that if you are afraid to explore, you get nowhere. All of the boys before Thomas explored the Maze, but didn't have the level of curiosity that Thomas did. Not one of them had the curiosity to further examine the hole that ended up getting them out. Without Thomas, the young boys trapped in the maze might not have ever gotten out. This sends a message to me, as a reader, that to make an impact, you must explore and go out of your comfort zone. If humans didn't explore, people would die, because there would be no cure for illnesses. There would be not treatment for disease like cancer, and children would lose mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters. Exploring makes the world go round.

I have had two aunts on both sides of my family that have had cancer. If not for Thomas' exploration, all of the Gladers may have died, and if not for the wonderful scientists that research cancer and come up with better ways to treat it, I may have lost two aunts, both of whom have children that love them. I, myself, love to explore. Two summers ago, I climbed a mountain in California called Black Butte. I went on the climb with my dad, brother, uncle, and cousins.

This past summer, I climbed about half way up another mountain in California with my dad, brother, and cousins. I was very curious about the mountain, and wanted to explore, and so did everyone else. I was curious, just like Thomas, and the minute we started that hike, I was not turning back. There were narrow trails, and aching people, but determination was key. Thomas was determined to get out of the maze, and my cousins and I were determined to get to the top of the mountain. My 6 year old cousin was a great example of determination that day, because he was motivated. He mentioned turning back several times, but he



never did. He kept going, which, I thought was very mature of him. I believe that determination plays an important role in succeeding. It is the people who are determined to do great things that make huge impacts in the lives of others.

I learned many things from *the Maze Runner* and highly recommend it to several friends. From this book, I learned about the power of determination and willpower and the greatness of exploration. Thomas helped those in the Glade, and someday, I want to help people in an important way too.

Sincerely,  
Gabe Obermiller

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Elsa Perez – West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

**Letter to Benjamin Alire Saenz, Author of *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe***

Dear Benjamin Alire Saenz,

Mr. Saenz you wrote in your book: Why do we smile? Why do we laugh? Why do we feel alone? Why are we sad and confused? Why do we cry when we see a painting? Why is there a riot in the heart when we love? Why do we feel shame? What is the thing in the pit of your stomach called desire? So I have question: WHY DO WE? I also have an answer: Because humans are ungrateful.

Your book, *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, changed my life. This book has beautiful way of showing the love Aristotle and Dante had even though they don't realize that they are in love till the end but you see it throughout the book. It's a beautiful thing that their differences make them love each other. It would be beautiful if I was writing to tell you that your book is just like my love story but that just not the case.

The real thing is how my differences pull me away from the people I love and make me feel like an outsider in my own family. I've always felt different in my family maybe because I was the youngest or because I wasn't like them or because only one of them has the same mom as me. But when I was reading your book, I came to a part where the words were jumping off the page and felt like I finally knew why I felt so out of place, so in the great worlds of Aristotle: Because I was the youngest. Because I was a surprise. Because I was born too late.

When I started reading I felt like the words were coming off the page and telling me YOU ARE NOT ALONE!!! At first I couldn't see that he was describing me when he said he was miserable. He was saying "Elsa, you're miserable, you're alone and bored just like me." While reading on I felt as though he was sitting next me sharing his life in hope that I would do the same, but I didn't. And I really wish I had.

I've had this feeling inside me for a while now that never goes away. This feeling that I know is pain and loneliness. But I'm not alone. I have people, just like Ari, but, I can't tell them anything because I don't know why I feel this way. I know the reason I feel this way can be the fact that people don't pay attention to me. I feel like I'm screaming and no one turns to ask if I'm okay. My teachers don't realize that I'm drowning but I'm not even swimming. That I'm drowning in the evil of this world. I'm drowning because I'm a wallflower. BECAUSE PEOPLE DON'T CARE. Because I walk down the halls and no one smiles at me. Because boys don't look at me that way they look at other girls. Because my parents don't

listen. Because everyone's happy but me. This feeling inside me I know it will never go away, but, I feel like if I cry it will go away. But it doesn't. It never goes away. I know that if I discover the secrets of the universe, I will be free.

Ari said: The world was so silent. There was a barrier between me and the world, and I thought for a moment that the world had never wanted me and now it was taking the opportunity to get rid of me. That made me think if the sporty, popular, pretty girl sitting in front of me was to die the world would stop and mourn her death. Everyone would get up and say how much they loved her. And I know if I died people would ask who I was no one would have stories to tell about and the world would resume as though I never existed. Would it help if I was gone? Should I be gone?

Everyone expected something from me. Something I couldn't give. When Ari said those words I felt as though I knew that everyone was feeling like a disgrace. Like maybe everyone is sad about their lives. Even that pretty and smart and popular and rich girl, that all the boys want and she gets whatever she wants. She shouldn't feel like a disgrace but does she? That makes me think that I shouldn't feel like a disgrace.

Mr. Saenz, thank you for writing this book. Thank you for not given up on Ari. Thank you for not giving up on me. Thank you for your knowledge. Thank you for letting me know where I stand and who I am. Thank you for letting me discover the secrets of the universe with Ari and Dante.

Thank you,  
Elsa Perez

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Udi Rose – Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

**Letter to Steve Wozniak, Author of *iWoz***

Dear Steve Wozniak,

Before reading your book, *iWoz*, I did not see the world the way I do now. I never realized how passionate you had to be to be great at something. After reading your book, I see how anything is possible with a lot of hard work and passion. You worked so hard for your dream to come true, and that inspired me to do the same thing. I have started to work with electrical engineering, the way you did when you were a kid.

In your book, *iWoz*, I was fascinated by how you were willing to give away your designs and projects for free. That shows real passion. It would be hard for me to give away my work and not get paid. Passion is everything. If you are not passionate about something, then you cannot succeed. I would rather take a low paying job and be passionate about what I am doing, then take a high paying job and not be passionate about it, just like you did. You worked at HP, not getting much pay, but enjoying what you were doing.

It is my dream to create a company, and you did that. You built the first true personal computer. I want to make something so innovative that it changes the lives of people, just like you did. Without reading your book, I would have never seen that. You gave me a dream.

After reading your book, you made me want to go make something. I bought an Arduion, which is a little microprocessor for hobbyist. I have been playing around with circuits and plan to study computer science and electrical engineering in the future. I have also made a raspberry pi to play retro games, and I am working on a design to make it into a portable device. I was inspired by how you had to draw out all of your designs on paper and improved them, before you even made the device. It was hard to get your hands on the components to build them. Now a days, all you have to do is order it on Amazon, and then it ships to your house.

When I read the part of your book where you made *Pong* run on Apple 2 and also made *Breakout*, I was fascinated. I have made a few mobile games that are on the App Store. I wanted to make a device that could play those retro games, I have a Raspberry Pi that actually has an Apple 2 emulator on it, but I do not know any of the commands for it. It also has most old retro game consoles. I have managed to get a few games on it. I plan on improving it in the future, with

a screen onboard, and actually make it portable. Without you, the world would not be the same today. We would not have personal computer. With your passion you change the world.

Sincerely,  
Udi Rose

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Eunice Sabagia – West Lafayette Jr. Sr. High School, West Lafayette

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

Dear Sharon Draper,

When I first pick up the book *Out of My Mind*, I was clueless. I didn't really know what it means. What does the fish on the cover mean? Is it a sign for good luck? I didn't want to read it at first, but my friend encouraged me to read your book, so I did. I have so many thoughts going through my mind and I was afraid that I would misunderstand it. But, with courage I started to read the book.

As I read a couple of pages, I was touched. Your book shows me the world that I've never noticed before. In order to explain, I'm going to tell a little bit of myself. I'm 13 years old, and I was born in Java, Indonesia. When I first came to America, I was a very shy girl, I didn't know how to speak or even write English. I was afraid that I wouldn't have any friends, but as I start going to school they're starting to teach me English. I feel so happy like a sunshine in a summer day. At home I practiced and practiced every day, but sometimes I just gave up, because I felt like I didn't fit in here. On the other hand, my parents keep pushing me, and finally I was able to speak and write English normally. Now I'm able to communicate with people around me, and make friends.

While reading this book I realized that in life I should never give up, and always be happy. Like the character in the story, Melody a girl who was born with cerebral palsy, always goes through some hard times. People said so many hurtful things to her. For example, they said that she's not smart and she shouldn't be here. But that doesn't stop Melody from doing anything; she will keep trying and trying. Sometimes Melody thoughts became my own. Melody can't talk or expressed her feelings, but on the inside of her she's sad and felt like she shouldn't be here. That's the same feeling I got when I learned the English language. I always questioned myself like, would anyone like me? Would I ever fit in? I have gone through some hard times like Melody. How would you feel if you get teased, because you're fat, wouldn't that hurt your feelings.

Another thing that I learned is to never tease people with disabilities. You have to respect them and treat them just like your friend. I'm sure that they want to fit in like you, too, and make a lot of friends. Before I read this book I read the summary in the back. And, I wondered how people with special needs thought. It is hard to confess, but I thought they were not smart, and less intelligent. Judging a person disability clouded my mind, and I formed misguided conclusions about them. This book has really inspired me to treat people nicely, and stay true to who I am.

Thank you Mrs. Sharon Draper, now I know the meaning of true friendships, and treat people equally. Also, your book help me in some hard times that I go through every day. This work means so much to me, because it really opened my eyes and cleared that world around me. Along the way, Melody really showed me about how a girl with cerebral palsy, is just the same as a girl like me. Again thank you for writing this amazing, wonderful, and inspiring novel. The book will never be forgotten. I don't think anyone who has read this book will ever forget. If they did, they would be "out of their minds."

Sincerely,  
Eunice Sabagia

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Alejandro Sandoval – West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

**Letter to Tim Green, Author of *Unstoppable***

Dear Tim Green,

I read your book *Unstoppable*. I will be honest with you I really never read books. But when it's about a sport I really love then I will read it. The only reason I really only picked up your book was because it was about football. Then I once I started reading the book it felt unstoppable and never stopped. When I first started reading your book, I knew it was gonna be good book and it was. Your book motivated me in many different ways. I almost forgot to introduce myself my name is Alejandro Sandoval I'm 14 years old I'm in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I love playing football. I play defensive end and running back.

Now the way it motivated me was the determination. This book wasn't just a great story it was also a teacher. At the same time I was reading this book, I had dislocated my ankle. I felt like giving up. I said to myself, "why out of everyone it was me? It was me who got hurt it was me who had to suffer." At that time life was going well. I had reached my goal to start as running back. But I learned that never take life for granted. I learned that life is gonna hit you in the mouth. When life hits you in the mouth, you can either give up or keep moving. So when I got hurt, I promised myself something. I promised myself that no matter what I have to go through I will work my butt off so hard until I can be better than I was last year. When I got hurt I was on crutches for 2 to 3 weeks.

When I got off them my parents didn't want me to push myself and try to jog or put pressure on my foot. But when my parents were busy I would go to my garage and I would work on my legs trying to make it stronger so it could heal faster. After two to three months my foot healed. I will be honest when I was in seventh grade I was a nobody on the football team. What I mean by nobody I mean someone on the team who started but really wasn't important, someone who they could put anyone else in or that spot. So after the season ended I pushed myself running a lot over the summer and also lifted a little.

It finally came to that day that meant more to me than anything else. It was the first day of practice and it was conditioning. I pushed myself really hard. Your book helped me realize that no matter how bad my life got I had to keep pushing and working towards my goal. I know in life we are able to accomplish anything. But to accomplish your big goal you have to be able to give up your life to accomplish that goal you are heading towards. Because I know each rep I do in the weight room I'm getting closer to my goal. Now every time I have free time or have a chance to hang with my friends I don't do it. Instead I work on my dream.



I heard a story on the internet. It said there was a guy that wanted to make money so this other guy said he would help him be successful. The guy told him if he wanted to be successful to meet him at a beach in the morning. The guy that wanted to be successful said I don't want to learn how to swim. But he went anyway. So he's at the beach the next day. So the guy tells him to walk into the water. So the other guy does. The guy grabs the guys head and chucked it under the water. The guy under water was struggling. Then the guy pulled him up and asked him what was he trying to do. The guy said he was trying to get some air. So that's when the guy learned in order to accomplish something he was gonna want to want it as bad as he wants to breathe.

So that stuck with me my whole entire life that I got to want to succeed as bad as I want to breathe. So, Tim, I just want to say thank you because your book had a great impact in my life. To this day I'm working on my dream. My dream is to make it to a division one college football team and if I can make it their then I know I can make it to the next level. So I want to say thank you once more.

Sincerely,  
Alejandro Sandoval

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Mandi Shields – Jasper Middle School, Jasper

**Letter to Kevin Henkes, Author of *Wemberly Worried***

Dear Mr. Henkes,

Your book, *Wemberly Worried*, was read to me at a very young age and impacted me greatly. For as long as I could remember I always over thought things, adamantly worried, and diligently tried not to. It became a vicious cycle. Worrying seemed like an impossible habit to break. Over the years, I learned how to cease the thoughts that caused me to be anxious all the time and your book was one of the reasons I could.

I related very much to *Wemberly* because I too worried about natural and improbable disasters that could happen. I assumed I was the only one who thought of these things. This continued to be a detriment because it caused me to believe that I was odd and unlike other people. After reading your book, I realized I might not be the only one who constantly dwells on these seemingly impossible events. I started to feel like maybe I could finally stop worrying.

I can recall staying up at night when I should have been sleeping and worrying about school tomorrow, tornados that could happen, or a tree that could fall on top of our house just like *Wemberly*. Your book reminded me the odds of that are very slim. I started to change my habits and distract myself from thinking of these scenarios.

I remember thinking of *Wemberly* when I moved to a new school and anxiously awaited to start my first day. It was already three months past January when I moved so I didn't know anyone. I took a deep breath, thought of your book, and walked through the doors. It gave me the courage I needed to start the day.

Even now, though I am much older, I sometimes find myself reflecting on your book when I have to take an important test I had worried about for a strenuous period of time. I remember that it's not the end of the world and as soon as I'm done taking it, it won't affect me anymore. I am so thankful that my parents read me your book. Without it I don't know if I could have reached the conclusion that I'm really not that different as soon as I did. I am so grateful for the valuable lessons *Wemberly Worried* taught me.

Most sincerely, a fellow worrier,  
Mandi Shields

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Amelia Shull – West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

**Letter to Cassandra Clare, Author of *City of Glass***

Dear Cassandra Clare,

I have just recently read the first three books in the *The Mortal Instruments* series. I find them very fascinating, full of adventure, and life. Your books are different than the kind of books I usually read. They are written in a way I just cannot describe. When I read them it is like I am actually in the story with Clary, Jace, Alec, and Isabel.

Books; my escape to Utopia. My way of escaping life, thoughts, and all the troubles. Books are what keep me sane, keep me from losing it all. Books are my ways of saying leave me to dream, leave me to my Utopia, and leave me to my escape. Your books are the way I escape my family troubles. They are how I understand love and life. How I understand my life.

I imagine being with Clary, being in same situation with Clary. I feel like I am in her shoes. I feel like I share the same father and daughter situation with Clary. My father is like Clary's ; he is very self-centered. He thinks he knows so much, but in reality he only knows how to make others dislike him. After he has done something wrong he will act like nothing is wrong. Even though Clary did not grow up with her father like I did, I feel like we still share the same situation.

Another thing that I feel like Clary and I have in common is our mothers. My mother keeps so much from me about my dad, similar to what Clary's mother did. I feel that our mothers did it to protect us. From the reality of how life works. And protect us from what we really never wanted to know. When I was reading *City of Glass*, I thought that if only Clary's mother had told her about everything then maybe Clary's relationship with her father would be different. I think that if I knew half the stuff about my dad then maybe I would not be having such a hard time trying to decide if I should text him back.

Maybe it was the way it was supposed to go. Clary was not supposed to meet her dad until later in life. And I was supposed to go through a hard time with my dad. Maybe it was how the universe planned it. Maybe it's the way life is. You go through pain but you move on and get over it. Just like Clary had to. She had to

forgive her mom for what she kept from her and move one for the better. She had to move on with life and forgive. I understand what Clary had to do and I shall do the same. I will move on. I will forgive. I will live my life to the fullest because I cannot have it hold me down anymore.

Sincerely,  
Amelia Shull

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Brianna Stewart – Heritage Christian School, Indianapolis

**Letter to Lois Lowry, Author of *The Giver***

Dear Lois Lowry,

I've always been loud and strong willed. In my head, I am this tough girl who lets nothing break her, which makes sense because I am only fourteen. However, my world and reality are two different things. When I am with my friends, it is almost as if they don't know who I am. I could be depressed and sometimes they will not notice. All my life I have tried to fit into what society tells us is perfect. Society says that being more like someone else will make you a better person. Being unique does not generate success. It tries to make us think that our differences aren't the best things about us. Lois Lowry attempts to use the tone and mood of the book to explain that this thought is wrong.

In *The Giver*, people decided to adopt a plan of sameness. Differences were tossed out including color and emotion. The Giver says, "Our people made that choice, the choice to go to Sameness...we gained control of many things. But we had to let go of others." They wanted to be safe, but instead lost touch with what mattered most: their memories. At that moment, I thought, memories bring love, peace, and happiness. This part really impacted me because it left the question, is being safe worth losing touch of your humanity? You lose the very things that make you who you are. If we listen to society today and completely converge, we will lose precious memories and time.

In your book, the people took away their memories of the past. If you don't have a memory of what love looks like or feels, you cannot love someone else. They lost all forms of love and strong desires. In your book you quoted, "the worst part of holding the memories is not the pain. It's the loneliness of it. Memories need to be shared." I began realizing that when you feel so passionately about something, you want the world to know it. Memories cannot be precious if you have no one to share them with. This quote made me think that when I'm with my friends if I open up, they would actually be able to understand me. To care about something you have to have a connection with it. If all your walls are up, no one gets to experience the real you, so at the end of the day, why would they care if you were happy or sad. Not only do you lose precious memories, but time.

When a person is going through the motions of life, trying to stay behind the crowd of people, and hide their differences, time is lost. Their energy is being devoted to hiding who they are. As a kid, this is difficult because we often think that if people see who we really are they will not like us, but this is a lie.

We do not know when our time will end on this earth. One day we will not wake up and all our lives could be wasted on hiding who we are rather than letting someone love us. The Giver is the only one to truly know Jonas and he loves him. He shares his pain and frustration, the love he has, and his honesty. For the first time Jonas has felt comfortable with who he is because he had someone to share his inmost thoughts with. This is what I struggled with and what I was missing from my life.

If I could no longer feel the rush of loving someone, the joy memories bring, the pain that comes with loss, and the suffering some memories can inflict, what would be the point. Jonas, along with the reader, realizes that even if restoring memories brings pain, getting to love someone or being loved is even greater. Choosing for yourself is part of living, so is the life they have allowed them to truly live. Jonas said, “things could be different. I don’t know how, but there must be some way for things to be different. There could be colors. And grandparents...and everybody would have the memories.” He discovered his life and the lives of others would never be completed if they lived like this, and he strived to change it.

Today, the world is not a utopia, but it does tell us to deny a part of ourselves. We are living in a time where being unique is no longer common, but your book showed me that my singularity makes me who I am. Now I open myself up to others around me. I act respectfully but don’t feel pressured to change my opinions for someone else. I am no longer going through the motions and am proud of who I am. If I want to be heard and seen, then I have to stop hiding behind the shadows, let down my walls, and show the world; because who I am is loved.

Typically I don’t read or enjoy reading when I have to. Your book was much more than an assignment. It was a reminder of who I want to be, and for that I will always be grateful.

With admiration and thanks,  
Brianna Stewart

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Rihanna Taylor – West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

**Letter to W. Bruce Cameron, Author of *A Dog's Journey***

Dear W. Bruce Cameron,

Have you ever lost a love one, person or pet that you thought you would never forget? Have you ever thought that you couldn't move on without them? Have you ever thought that you will never see them again and that you should have been there to protect or prevent them from being killed? Well, I can say this with a "yes" when I lost "Kevin," a family member that I loved dearly.

Before I found and read your book *A Dog's Journey*, I was in sixth grade mourning the loss of Kevin. I didn't pay attention much in school and I cried day and night for him. I even prayed to God to give Kevin back to my family and me but he never came.

Then April of 2013, as an "I'm sorry for your loss" gift, my librarian let me choose a book for free. As I was going through the books, I saw your book *A Dog's Journey* on the third shelf on the right. It was like God was telling me and wanting me to read it because as I went through the other books, the name of your book was bugging me. It just repeating over and over again in my head, so I went over and "bought" your book.

I started reading it as soon as I got it. I started to yell at it when Gloria blamed and yelled at Buddy for trying to "hurt" baby C.J. when he was really trying to save her from drowning. I laughed for the first time in weeks when Molly was trying to get C. J.'s attention. I yelled, I cried and got angry at Shane for trying to kill and hurt C.J. Then in the end, I understood something... I will see Kevin again. I was so happy, I burst into tears. I gave my momma your book to read and she too was crying by the end. Hundreds of tissues later, she told me about her tan and white cocker spaniel, Cody. When he died from testosterone cancer, which traveled to the throat, my momma was not herself.

She would sit in the bathroom all night long and cry. She barely smiled at anyone but my sister because she was a baby and babies don't understand sadness, as she put it. Three days later though, a little tan and white bird visited her and every day afterwards until winter was over. She believed it was Cody saying don't worry about me, I'm okay in heaven. She also told me that she believes that Cody is waiting for her on a dock near heaven so when it is her time, they will go to heaven together. Bruce, your books ending where Toby doesn't I have to reincarnate anymore and goes to heaven and is reunited with his family, I knew I would see Kevin again for sure.

You also gave me something I never thought I would need... HOPE. In conclusion, I thank-you for writing this book because your words give people hope that they will see their loved ones again, no matter if they are person or pet, and truly, I thank-you for that.

Your reader,  
Rihanna Taylor



Level Two/ Semifinalist

Hannah Walker – Salem Middle School, Salem

**Letter to Paige Rawl, Author of *Positive***

Dear Paige Rawl,

I have been bullied about my height due to the fact that I am tall for my age. A girl once told me that everyone hated me because I was too tall and I would never fit in. I was crushed and this caused me to hate the way I looked. That girl was not the only person to make fun of me because of my height. Bullying can destroy victim's lives. It almost ruined mine. My thoughts on bullying have changed but through experiences shared in this book. *Positive* has taught me that I don't have to be a victim. I let people tear me down; I didn't try to build myself back up. When I finally realized that I couldn't let people walk all over me, I was a mess. I was insecure, sad, scared and depressed. I had a lot of work to do and I did it, with help from this book.

The emphasis, to treat others kindly, in this book has inspired me to change the way I treat others. I never know what is going on in other people's lives, something horrible could be happening to them. So now, I try to be a positive influence in people's lives, instead of just another person putting them down. Maybe I can make a small change in their life that others may overlook. I know that I cannot totally eliminate bullying, but I can help the victims. Anyone can help someone, but that person has to want to. I have made being a positive influence my life goal. Unlike the administrators at Clarkstown Middle School.

Going on stage at the talent show and sharing the sad truth about bullying, inspired me to make a change. It showed me that I can make a change if I have the courage to do so. My hope is to eliminate bullying in schools around the world. I believe everyone needs to read *Positive*, maybe then will people realize bullying is horrible crime and should be minimized as much as possible. If schools started clubs for victims of bullying that was a place to have fun, be who they are, and learn about how to handle bullying, we could make a change. I'm ready to work, but is everyone else?

Overall, this book empowered me and gave me hope. The fact the Herron High was so accepting of a girl with HIV makes me feel hopeful. It showed me that not every school was like Clarkstown Middle School. It also showed me that people will accept me despite my appearance. This book made me a better person: I think before I talk. I think about how my words will affect others. This, in my opinion, is the key to life.

Sincerely,  
Hannah Walker

Level Two/ Semifinalist

Trevor Williams – Heritage Christian School, Indianapolis

**Letter to Whitney Kapsalis, Author of *To Chase a Dream***

Dear Whitey Kapsalis,

We were asked at school to write a letter to an author who inspired us. Your book, *To Chase a Dream* did just that. It taught me to persevere through tough times, never underestimate myself, and to not believe others when they say I'm not good enough. Your book inspired me and made me realize I can do anything if I want it bad enough.

*To Chase a Dream* showed me perseverance in tough times. You displayed this throughout your five years at IU: you were red-shirted your freshman year after being picked as the last man on the roster; you broke your foot in your third year, after getting such a good position to play, and then not being able to play at all; you only played sporadically in your fourth year; but then made captain in your senior year. However, you showed such grit and determination through it all and had such an amazing positive attitude. Earlier in my fall season, I got a concussion that put me out for a month, including the final three games of the season. I was frustrated at my slow recovery and worried about how my game would be affected. I wondered if I could ever get back to where I was before the concussion. Then I remembered your injury and continued practicing and playing hard and now I am better than I was before.

Throughout your college career, you were always underestimated. Coaches and players alike thought that you could not make the IU team. I especially liked it when you said, "I would rather fail at IU, then spend the rest of my life wondering whether I could have made it." When you were told countless times that you would not make it and you did anyway in spite of what was told to you, I was encouraged and determined to not let others dictate how I play or live.

Your book taught me to ignore others when they say I'm not good enough. This used to frustrate me and it got in my head affecting my game. In your book, you were told by Coach Yeagley three times that you would never play on his team, yet you overcame this challenge and became captain in your senior year. This taught me that when I try out for the varsity team at Heritage, there will be people that think I am not good enough because of my height, strength, speed, or age. I might start out a JV player, but with a lot of practice, I can work myself into a varsity spot.

*To Chase A Dream* has motivated me from the second I started reading it. It has showed me that I can chase my dreams just like you did, and keep trying even when the odds are against me. Someday I hope to play college soccer like you did, and I will always keep your example in mind as I reach for my goals I want to thank you for your encouragement and motivation. I'm glad to call you a friend.

Sincerely,  
Trevor Williams





**LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE  
LEVEL THREE**



Level Three/ First Place

Cassie Ratliff – West Noble High School, Ligonier

**Letter to Antoine de Saint-Exupery, Author of *The Little Prince***

Dear Antoine de Saint-Exupery,

Through the escapade of an undaunted *Little Prince* with fierce ambitions and an unrelenting desire to go home, you have made me aware of the dangers of becoming an adult. Not that becoming an adult is bad, but it should definitely come with a warning label. Like, WARNING: IN DANGER OF CAUSING UNNECESSARY EXHAUSTION AND STRESS! Or, WARNING: YOU MAY LOSE ABILITY TO SEE THINGS FOR WHAT THEY REALLY ARE AND THINK THAT A PICTURE OF A BOA CONSTRICTOR DIGESTING AN ELEPHANT IS ACUTALLY A HAT. As I grow closer to the beginning of my long awaited college adventure and closer to becoming an adult, I am thankful for the significant impact *The Little Prince* has had on my life after recently reading it.

Through the years I will probably meet kings who brood over not having anyone to rule, people so vain they're incapable of hearing anything but compliments, and businessmen who crunch numbers all day because they believe they own the stars. In these situations I want to react just like the Little Prince and mutter to myself how strange adults are. Even when I am old and am closer to death than I am to life, I want to have the wisdom of the zealous traveler you brought to life before my eyes, who was not more than a mere child, but whose heart was open to everything.

Your book has revolutionized the way I want to look at life. After High School, I plan on pursuing a career as an English teacher and I'm done looking at it as the career everyone warns me to avoid. I want to look at it as the career I am called to pursue. Every night, the Little Prince gazed into the sky and knew that his rose was crying to him from a star far away, and he knew he had to get there. When I peer into the depths of who I am, I know with my whole heart that I'm called to teach and that I have to make that happen in my life. It's what I'm made to do.

It's not like I can just choose another career, because I don't see in other careers what I see in teaching. After all, the fox did say, "One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eyes." Seeing things with your heart is like looking at a tattered teddy bear that you've had for ages. To the eyes, it's threadbare and worthless. But to the heart, it's a source of comfort because with your heart, you see things as they truly are.

To the eyes teaching can seem daunting, but none of what you see with your eyes actually matters—it's not essential. When I look at it with my heart, I'm able to



see everything that makes all the bad worth it. I see students who want to feel needed in life. I see dazzling souls who need a light to guide them through the dark. I see prosperous minds and potential just waiting to be unleashed.

Life in general is so much easier when you look at it with your heart as the Little Prince did. As I get older, I can't wait to apply the youthful innocence of *The Little Prince's* essence to my thoughts. Not just my thoughts on teaching, but on everything. In my heart and in everyone's heart resides a little boy who fought so audaciously for his rose, who was able to see a lamb through a drawing of a box, who believed that adults were extraordinarily strange. People like the Little Prince are the wells that the desert of life hides. They're what make life beautiful; they're the spring water that revives your spirit when the desert of life has drained you of everything good.

You should know that I have not taken your book lightly, but have used the lessons I have learned as standards to live by. Every time I look at the sky, I'll know that somewhere on a star is a Little Prince who has touched my life greatly. Like the pilot, I'll hope with every ounce of myself that he was able to save his rose and live peacefully on his planet with sunsets for enjoyment. If I ever venture to an African desert and stumble upon the spot in which the pilot described, I'll be sure to wait a moment for the boy with the golden hair who can make the stars laugh. Thank you Antoine de Saint-Exupery for sharing your Little Prince with me through the magical pages of your book.

Sincerely,  
Cassie Ratliff

Level Three/ Second Place

Madison Wendelin – Crawfordsville High School, Crawfordsville

**Letter to Nadja Halibegovich, Author of *My Childhood Under Fire***

Dear Nadja Halilbegovich,

My grandfather is an intensely private Vietnam veteran who was shot twice in the head during the war. My grandfather is one of my heroes and I have always looked up to him because of his capability to move on from the brutal images of war. He rarely discusses what he was subjected to during that horrific time, but when he does, I listen carefully, hanging on to his every word, storing them in my brain to reflect upon later. Because of these rare tales of heroism, I have always had an interest in war and survivors. That is why I was so fascinated with your book, *My Childhood Under Fire*. I view you as a hero who has moved on from her past and taken from it lessons to teach others all around the world.

When I was in seventh grade, the entire student body was issued copies of *My Childhood Under Fire*, which we were to read and discuss within our English classes. I read the book within the first week of receiving it, and then read it all the way through a second time. I sat for hours contemplating the tragedies and hardships you endured. I cried when the bomb hit and you were injured, and yet again when you left your family to flee to America. I stayed awake several nights to discuss the cruelty in the world with my parents in order to ease my mind. I was so alarmed by this world of death and destruction you described, feeling the despair of those around you, and yet, in awe of how you managed to escape. You, like my grandfather, managed to move forward and see the future, instead of the upsetting present. You managed to not only keep up your own spirits, but to uphold others with your music, poems, and broadcasts. You became one of my role models because of your optimism, your winning attitude, and, most importantly, your motivation to always see the bright side of every situation.

It took our classes just short of a month to finish reading and discussing *My Childhood Under Fire*. Soon after, the school was buzzing with news: Nadja Halibegovich was coming to our school to give a lecture about her life and war. I was so excited! I was even selected to be one of the students to sit in the front row of the auditorium and ask questions off a notecard. Meeting you was such an honor. It was a relief to see you standing there, explaining how you survived. I listened intently to your stories and was simply amazed by your presence. After you presented, we went back to our classrooms and my mind was spinning with all you had said: your survival, your positive attitude... It felt so nice to talk to you and have everything explained in detail. When my class returned to our room, our teacher was nowhere to be found. We seated ourselves and waited patiently for her. When she came back, you were with her. She had brought you back for some pictures with our class and for one final thank you. I was so

excited to see you and actually talk to you face to face. Your book had made such an impact on my life, and talking to you was like an ultimate ending story.

Your book was so much more than just an assignment to me. It changed my life. Before, when I thought of war, I only thought of hate and destruction. Now, I can see that still, but I weigh it against the light and good in the world. Now, I think of people like you who refuse to give up, to quit fighting. My life has been changed for the better, because now, when I see someone in need, or someone with poor attitude, I think of how you might handle the situation. Nowadays, I try to improve the lives of those around me by volunteering at shelters, donating money to those in need, and even the simple act of complimenting my classmates. I have been inspired by you and your optimism, and the way you uplifted those around you by keeping a positive outlook. Because of *My Childhood Under Fire*, I am able to see the light in the world, and see just how influential it can be.

With great admiration,  
Madison Wendelin

Level Three/ Third Place

Eden Rea-Hedrick – Homeschool , Crawfordsville

**Letter to Ethel Johnston Phelps, Author of *Tatterhood and Other Tales***

Dear Ethel Johnston Phelps,

I wonder if you grew up with Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty. I wonder if you loved them and were inspired by them. I wonder if you often pictured yourself wearing an elegant gown and glass slippers and waltzing till midnight, or dreamed of lying in stately slumber waiting to welcome a handsome suitor. I wonder if you knew each story's happily-ever-after by heart. And I wonder if consciously or unconsciously, you modeled yourself after those sweet, gentle, beautiful princesses.

If all this is so, when did that change? Did you wake up one day and realize suddenly that the idols of your childhood were false? Or did the revelation come to you gradually that these "heroines," though all sweet-natured and generous, in fact do nothing remotely heroic? How long did it take for you to come to the conclusion that sitting and watching wistfully out the tower window for a knight in shining armor to gallop up and carry you off into the sunset hardly makes for a very useful or interesting life? When did you come to understand that girls need something more?

Whatever the circumstances that led to you think as you did, It's clear that by 1978 your conviction must have come alive, for it was then that your first book of true heroine-centric folktales, *Tatterhood and Other Tales*, appeared in print. In fact, your idea must have been in your mind even earlier than that, for you surely spent years searching a vast array of cultures in order to compile the beautiful traditional stories that make up the book. You must have devoted measureless energy to seeking out precisely the stories you wanted, stories that, in your own words, "portray...heroines in the true and original meaning of the word – heroic women distinguished by extraordinary courage and achievements, who hold the center of interest in the tales."

I don't remember when I first became familiar with *Tatterhood* and its companion volume, *The Maid of the North*. I do remember that by the time I was old enough to read them for myself they were already old friends. In fact, those two books have been part of my consciousness for so long that in most cases I don't remember ever hearing the stories without already knowing how they ended. The women who inhabit them: clever farmer Kamala, wise Lady Ragnell, the spunky laird's lass, fun-loving Maru-me, brave Janet, brilliant Scheherazade, and especially Tatterhood herself, were the most frequent leading ladies of my childhood fantasies. I outsmarted my imaginary enemies like Kamala, carried out schemes in disguise like the laird's lass, and fought off invisible trolls with my

wooden spoon like *Tatterhood*. I learned from Janet that tenacity is the mark of real love, from Maru-me that people may be stronger than they look, from Lady Ragnell that choosing one's own destiny is one's greatest privilege, and from *Tatterhood* that a girl doesn't have to be "beautiful" to be worthy of love.

I was always too busy fighting trolls and climbing mountains to ever smudge my face with dirt and sit in the corner like Cinderella or lie asleep on a canopy bed for a hundred years like Sleeping Beauty. I never learned to expect true love's kiss to solve my problems. I never thought that patiently enduring abuse would lead me to a just reward in the form of a high profile marriage. I never wished for a fairy godmother to appear and magic away my troubles. For that, I want to thank you. Because of your thoughtfulness and dedication, I didn't grow up believing I needed a prince to rescue me. I've always known I have the power to rescue myself.

Gratefully,  
Eden Rea-Hedrick

Level Three/ Honorable Mentions

Brianna Havics – Covenant Christian High School, Indianapolis

**Letter to Wendy Mass, Author of *A Mango-Shaped Space***

Dear Ms. Mass,

My world is color-coated, and I have no choice in what colors are used. When I read *A Mango-Shaped Space*, I realized that not everyone's words, letters, and numbers have colors, and most people don't think the number '7' is light green and has the attitude of a bossy know it all. Ms. Mass, you gave me words for a phenomena I experience but never knew the name of: synesthesia. My words are very special to me, not least because they all have their own colors. Words are powerful and they can create literally anything. The words you gave me were even more powerful because they explained my words and my world of color. I believe you saved me from being picked on for something I would have never understood unless I had read *A Mango-Shaped Space*. I am not crazy. Suddenly, I could explain why I had difficulty with basic addition and subtraction (some numbers hate each other and don't like to be added) and why I got certain names like Mark and Tony mixed up (they're both the same shade of blue).

If all you had done was explain what went on inside my head and tell me that I am not alone, that would have been enough. But *A Mango-Shaped Space* led me much deeper than that. *A Mango-shaped Space* was the first book that showed me that I could learn about myself by reading books. English classes often focus on great literature not purely for the sake of great literature, but because reading it teaches us universal truths about ourselves and about others. Your book was my first experience in 'literature' as self-education— revealing something about me to myself. *A Mango-Shaped Space* taught me to read books not just as entertainment, but to explore the world in a different direction that traditional textbooks provide. I realized that novels are a different kind of textbook. They teach about people, not facts. Even though it was not until I was older that I really began to understand how to relate emotions and internal struggles with reading, your book took me by the hand and let me in my first baby steps of truly reading with depth. It opened the door to learning about the character and learning about myself at the same time. This wasn't just an exciting story; this was me.

What I learned about myself was that; I longed to be special. I will never forget that thrill of realizing that I had something people call 'special', 'interesting' and 'dramatic.' I discovered that I am what I always craved; I am special. However, what I also realized is that I don't feel like any of those things. My world in color is just as natural a part of my life as breathing. If you tell me your name, it has its own color when I imagine it. The number '4' is pink, just like the letter 'b', and 'C' is blue, but colors don't jump out at me in a crazy ways. They're subtle. Over the years, people have told me they think it's "so cool that you have synesthesia,"

and after a while, the feeling of ‘special’ fell flat. Synesthesia has nothing to do with me. I didn’t choose to have it; I didn’t create it; and I don’t have any control over it. What made me special wasn’t really me. Am I really special then? *A Mango-Shaped Space* sparked a train of thought that eight years later, I am still struggling with. Am I as special as long to be? And if so, what makes me special? I yearn to be unique, but in that search of my uniqueness, I came to have a strong love and appreciation for the individuality of others.

We can all be special even without some ‘dramatic’ diagnosis. Yet, this makes sense with what I believe; that there is a God who created more mysteries and idiosyncrasies than we will ever be able to imagine. To me, *A Mango-Shaped Space* helped me better understand my Christian faith because at the end of the book, Mia understands that she is not a part of her synesthesia, her synesthesia is a part of her. She would be special whether or not her world was wrapped in colors.

Ms. Mass, you explained to me that I am special, and though I will forever struggle to wrap my head around the idea, it doesn’t mean I’ll ever stop trying to. You opened my world to show me that people are mysterious and fascinating and there are so many hidden things in the world. Even if my blue is not the same as your blue, we can still both enjoy the color blue. I cannot thank you enough for giving me an appreciation of the quirks in other people and giving my adventurous nine-year-old brain the beginning of a path to reading and understanding literature.

Sincerely,  
Brianna Havics

Level Three/ Honorable Mentions

Sarah Humphrey – New Tech Academy at Wayne High School, Fort Wayne  
**Letter to Kate DiCamillo, Author of *The Tale of Despereaux***

Dear Kate DiCamillo,

You are ingenious author and have conveyed your competence in the children's literature field brilliantly. I possess the utmost respect for you and your work and am I tremendous fan of yours! As a child I would spend hours reading your books contemplating their deeper morals. I found your literature to be more enticing and ethical compared to other children's publications. I was always able to connect with the characters on a deeper level, and for that, I thank you. They were an inspiration to me and thousands of other children, especially your fictional story, *The Tale of Despereaux*. While reading this astounding piece of literature, I came to the realization that I am not alone in my endeavors; there are others out there combating similar struggles to my own.

I was a vivacious child and could only be subdued by the pages of a book, just like Despereaux. I always attempted to aspire to the heroic characters' level of tenacity, but unfortunately I never received an opportune moment to do so. I would instead fantasize myself as the heroine in my own fairy tale. The concept of being presented with a grievous challenge and possessing the courage to accomplish it despite obstacles in your path has always been alluring to me. Much like Despereaux I yearned to be the knight and rescue, well, not a princess per say, but someone who was in need, that depended on me. I was able to instantly connect to this character in your book and have idolized him every since.

Despereaux fantasized about being a knight and honoring a princess for a reason. He was an outcast in his own world different from the rest, so he found another world where he could be who he was without anyone judging him. And when the time came that Despereaux had to protect the world he claimed as his own, he did so as valiantly as any other knight, if not more so. Despereaux desired only to honor a princess, which was considered an anomaly at the time, though granted now it is not much different. In the same way I was in anomaly in my world as well. I didn't act like other children in my generation, and I still don't. I am nearly sixteen years old now and the concept of trick or treating, decorating as early as possible for Christmas, and Easter egg hunting still exhilarates me. Many children as they age find themselves too mature for such childish nonsense, but I've never been one to run with the herd, so to speak. If I find something I love or truly believe in, I refuse to let peers or anyone else pressure me into doubting my decisions. Because of this, I never even notice if what I do now is considered strange. Not only that, but often times you hear of teenage drama in High School and/or middle school, but I have found I've never been a part of that. I see no need for it, especially since it causes nothing but heartache. I know no one is perfect and I understand their insecurities. This is why it is so reassuring knowing



that I am not alone in my seclusion from normalities. Despereaux was the underdog, the runt of the litter, but through struggle and perseverance he persisted in the face of danger and eventually became the hero of the book. The morals you convey in *The Tale of Despereaux* are ones that have accompanied me throughout my life.

Another influential aspect of your transcendent book is that it isn't just a tale of the hero, despite its title; it greatly focuses on the villainous character, Roscuro. However, to me he isn't just a run of the mill villain. You so vividly portray his depressive past, his insecurities, and his motivation for his horrendous actions. There are so many layers to this character that a reader must decipher. I for one absolutely loved Roscuro in your book, he is unlike any character I've ever known of. He may seem villainous, but I for one held nothing but empathy for him while reading your book. He had a strenuous life that led to his wrongful doings.

I can relate to Roscuro in so many ways. As a child in elementary school I did love to read, and still do, but I wasn't the best person. At the time I was oblivious to my shameful actions and looking back I can now see how horrid I was. I was an egotistical narcissist incapable of sympathy on any level and who spent her time micromanaging others. I was a loathsome bully who was ignorant of her ways. I may not have been as terrible I believe I was, but whenever I resurface the memories I know I should have been so much kinder and considerate of others, I have a friend who can attest of that. I just felt horrible after realizing how imprudent and impertinent I acted. However, when I made the transition into middle school, I realized this was an opportunity for a new beginning.

I have no clue what brought on my change of heart, perhaps one day I just arbitrarily realized the error of my ways. I suppose that is why I find Roscuro such an influential character he may have started as the villain, but with the aid of *Despereaux* he actually became better, almost good. Not perfect by any means, but it was a start to a happily ever after. I suppose he always gave me hope that there is second change for all of us, that we're not all doomed to suffer the shameful weight of the past on our shoulders for an eternity.

After the realization that I could make a new start for myself, that is exactly what I did, and I've never been happier. I ensure I am always respectful of other, trustworthy, and am considerate of their feelings. I've never been in any drama so

to speak and I always attempt to contemplate the effects of my utterances in case offense could be taken. I am surrounded by the people I love and have received my second chance, just like Roscuro.

Your book aided in my realization that there's always a silver lining. The characters in your book and the morals I obtained from them set my irrefutable doubt at ease. *The Tale of Despereaux* truly is the quintessence of your children's literature. Thank you so much for conveying the story of a mouse, a princess, some soup, and a spool of thread. Your work has influenced who I have become today and for that I am forever grateful.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Humphrey

Level Three/ Honorable Mentions

Caroline Peterson – Homeschool, Granger

**Letter to Hilda van Stockum, Author of *The Winged Watchman***

Dear Hilda van Stockum,

You're known for your gentle stories of children and their families. But your output isn't limited to simple tales of home life. You take on the tough subject of the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands during WWII in your novel *The Winged Watchman*, and in doing so you've taught me tremendous lessons about gratitude. You portray the sufferings of a Dutch family, the Verhagens, with matter-of-fact pathos and compassion. Joris and Dirk Jan, the two sons, are often hungry and afraid. They witness the immense suffering inflicted on the Dutch people after they take in a Jewish child whose family has been deported, risk their lives to rescue a downed aviator, and even come near to starvation themselves.

Despite these miseries your book does not descend into despair. The characters retain their humanity and humor throughout the war, continuing to love one another even in the face of hunger and fear. Paradoxically, as circumstances worsen, they become more compassionate and generous towards their fellow citizens. Your novel contrasts with the contemporary trend in my generation's literature that dwells on the sorrows and disappointments of life. Many authors desire to speak to the needs of abused and maladjusted children, and so their books delve deeply into harsh realities. It's a trend that reflects a larger cultural tendency towards cynicism.

Cynicism is a sure soul-destroyer. A cynic does not believe that his fellow human beings are capable of goodness, and thus he subverts his own power of the good. Furthermore, cynicism renders us incapable of compassion, since sympathizing with another person requires humility and trust, taking seriously the concerns of others. Cynicism has become a chief tenet of our culture, resulting in a callused society that simultaneously ignores and repels suffering. And just as the simple goodness of the Verhagens counteracts the evil of the Nazi regime, gratitude overcomes cynicism. It is a necessary virtue, and perhaps the forgotten one of our time. Like love, it's a simple word to say, but requires a lifetime of patience and hard work to fully internalize. Gratitude appreciates the good things in life, yet it is not just rose-colored glasses. Like the dikes that keep the North Sea from destroying the reclaimed land of the Dutch people, gratitude is like a bulwark that enables us to face the troubles of life with a solid foundation of hope.

While I know that the Verhagen's situation is far removed from my own, the lessons I can learn from it are many. Few families face war, but all families face suffering. "Life is a bad night as a bad inn," St. Teresa of Avila said. While I think this statement can be true at times-sometimes life is just hard-I've also come to

realize that dwelling on the hardships ultimately exhausts and weakens us. We have to live in the moment and recognize the power of good, even if it seems small. Dirk Jan says, “[The Nazis] can do terrible things to you and to all of us...We have nothing.” “Yes, you have,” the aviator they are helping answers. “You have right on your side.”

At the same time, we must recognize the suffering of others. Otherwise we will lose our power of compassion. We cannot reduce pain to clichés and abstract statistics. Your character Mrs. Verhagen gives from what she needs to the starving; so should we all. I must exercise great hope in his own life, yet at the same time I must take seriously the suffering of his fellow human beings. Your novel taught me that perfect gratitude casts out cynicism, and enables compassion. I pray I will always remember those who do not have what I do—who are ill, who struggle in their relationships, who are too poor for a meal. “Hildebrand,” the student hiding with the Verhagens, tells them, “It’s been terrible winter, but somehow I think I will only have happy memories.” May my own gratitude lead me to express the same joy.

Sincerely,  
Caroline Peterson

Level Three/ Honorable Mentions

Sarah Vas – Northwestern High School, Kokomo

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

Dear John Green,

“I’m on a rollercoaster that only goes up, my friend” is a line I find myself quoting from time to time after reading your book, *The Fault in Our Stars*. It reminds me that life is only getting better, and the hardships are preparing me for a greater event. Your book helped me understand a lot about life and taught me to be thankful for what I have been given.

While reading your book, I began to realize that, in a way it applied to my life. When my brother was 16, he was diagnosed with bone cancer in his right arm. He eventually got his radius taken out. During this time, I was only 7 years old, so I was unaware of the situation that was happening. I just expected my brother would become better, and he would be back to normal. But as I read this book, it helped me put what was actually happening into perspective. I now have a better understanding of what my brother felt and my family’s stress of not knowing whether he would make it through. Although, Steve is currently in remission, I worry every day that the cancer will reoccur like it did with Augustus Waters.

*The Fault in Our Stars* also helped me realize how blessed I am with the life I have. I wake up every day without cannulas and an oxygen tank. I am perfectly healthy, but I know not everyone is. Many people live day by day participating in school and activities not thinking about what a privilege they have by not requiring shots every day, going for daily check-ups, or even living in a hospital. I too would take what I have for granted, not thinking about how life as I know it could one day be taken away from me. I would go to restaurants, movies, and school without ever thinking about how people all over the world don’t get opportunities like me. I acted as if I was in a barrier away from the real world, and I could not be hurt, it never occurred to that me I could become diagnosed with some disease or cancer, and my life would change drastically.

Whereas Hazel Grace knew what was happening in her life and faced reality. She even claimed that she was a grenade because she knew she would eventually die. This line in the book was significant to me because Hazel didn’t act like she was invincible, which most people do. She knew she wouldn’t walk the Earth forever and I think that’s hard for many to understand. No one wants to face the fact that they fear the future and that in a couple of years everything in their life can be completely different.

In the end, your book taught me to have more empathy toward others and to open my eyes so I can see the blessings in my life like family, friends, and shelter.

I'm always trying not to take my life for granted by spending as much time with my family and friends as possible because I know everything can change within a day. I often go to my grandparents to keep them company and help them around the house so I can be with them more. I also thank God daily for all of the opportunities given to me such as the ability to play basketball and volleyball. I am blessed for the life I have been given and I thank your book for teaching me that.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Vas

Level Three/Semifinalist

Moe Moe Aung – New Tech Academy at Wayne High School, Fort Wayne  
**Letter to Patricia Polacco, Author of *Pink and Say***

Dear Patricia Polacco,

We are humans therefore we are guaranteed to make mistakes. No matter the determination, we will never understand every aspect in life. The one thing that has influenced me that most from reading your book is that we take things in life for granted, but nothing is truly appreciated until the day it is gone. That is the day that our eyes are truly open. The day where our mind seeks out what is no longer present. I shamefully confess that I am one of those people who have taken things for granted. While reading your book *Pink and Say*, I have to come to a startling and harsh conclusion that my mother and father are not immortals. I have never given much thought to the fact that they will not be on this Earth forever. As harsh as it seems, I cannot deny the fact that they are aging day by day although I am not witnessing it physically. I dread that day where I will wake up and no longer be able to sit down with my lifelong mentors and eat a simple breakfast. Reading about Moe Moe Bay and the way she cherished and showed such warmth towards her son Pinkus brought to mind my own parents. You Ms. Polacco have truly changed the way I value my parents. If I lose them, I will lose part of myself.

Disagreements and arguments are a natural part of life. These are the aspects that mold us into the people we are today. We pay no mind to the heated trade of words or feelings of hatred, yet we ponder on these words more than we like to admit. What I have come to realize is that behind every argument, every word spoken with heat, there is an undertone of love. Every word spoken is spoken with reason. Every argument I have with my parents stays with me for days beyond days until I lose count. It can be a simple argument about who spilled the glass of water or what my career will be when I grow older. Every word that comes out of my father or mother's mouth is done with love. I know that everything they say, either with anger or irritation, is done because of the affection they have towards me. They are trying to shape me into a better person. To become a person who will succeed in life. To become a person they could never become.

I will never forget the day my mother told me she would die for her children. In the back of my mind, I have always known that my parents would perish for my brothers and me if we were ever involved in a situation that brought up the factors of life and death. To physically see and hear her speak those words absolutely tore my heart apart, yet those same words gave me a sense of security. After my mother had spoken those words I was reminded of when Moe Moe Bay

sacrificed her life to protect Pink and Say from the Marauders. Just for me alone, my parents have sacrificed so much. Sacrifices I will never in my life be able to repay. These sacrifices are the kind that are priceless, the kind that are worth more than anything in this world. These are the people who have immigrated to America from Burma just to give me a better life. So I won't have to suffer under the cruel tyrant government of Burma and have to endure the hardships that they have endured. These are the people who left their family behind in another country just so my life will be fruitful and I can prosper. My mother and father have laid everything out for me so I will never suffer or experience struggles in my life. I never paid that much attention to this and without my gratefulness, everything they have done for me is being wasted day by day.

Personally, I have always despised those types of children who can be labeled as spoiled and take their belongings for granted. After maturing in the past years and becoming more open minded about the world, I have realized that in reality, I myself have become one of those 'spoiled brats.' Everything my parents have ever given me has been a result of their hard work and labor. My parents have repeatedly bought me items and knick knacks just to see a smile on my face. These are the small things that I have never taken notice of in the past. To me, small knick knacks and items are the most important things that could be given to me. For my parents to buy me something just to see me smile warms my heart. To know that their child's happiness is the source of their happiness is something that money cannot buy. No I am not proud to say that I am an ungrateful child. It makes me ponder on all the wrong I have done towards my parents, all the words spoken with heat towards them, all the negativity. Looking back at my life, every little bit of emotion ever directed towards my parents was a mixture from bitterness to pride. Throughout my years every time I thought of my parents it was to make their wishes come true. To do what they wanted me to do. I know they mean no harm when they command me to get good grades or to continuously ask about college opportunities, yet it had influenced my mind so much that it has gotten to the point that I barely value my parent anymore. I barely even thought about what it meant to value one's parents.

After reading your book *Pink and Say* it made me realize that our parents deserve more respect and cherishment than anything else. They will not be here forever to help us fight through the struggles of life, to kiss away our pain, to share a laugh with us. To value my parents mean too much to me now. I want to be



more grateful, more loving, and more importantly, a better daughter. You have opened my eyes and helped me see the wrong in my ways and the way I have been valuing my parents. I have always said that I love my parents, but my words never took action until the day I read your book.

Sincerely,  
Moe Moe Aung

Level Three/Semifinalist

Maxime Courroux – International School of Indianapolis, Indianapolis

**Letter to Dominique Sagne, Author of *Passe, Present, Futr***

Dear Dominique Sagne,

Your poem “Passe, present, futr” had a big impact on me. In a way, it changed the way I see life. It helped me to move through in a difficult part of my life. I first read your poem when I was around 13 years old; I was hanging out on the Internet when I found your poem. I first really liked it; this is certainly not extremely complicated literature but the 13 years old child that I was enjoyed reading it. It made me think a lot but nothing more. Two years later, my father announced to me that we had to move to the United States. I lived in France my whole life; I didn’t want to leave. It was like giving up all my past, leaving my family, my friends and my memories. And at this moment, as if by mystery, I found a link on a friend’s Facebook page sending me back to your poem. I read it again but I was seeing it totally differently than how I saw it two years ago. I was now trying to use the words you wrote for myself. My favorite quotes from your poem are:

You shouldn’t regret anything  
And continue living without looking back  
Past stay what it is  
There is nothing more to create

...

Future doesn’t exist  
It is you who creates it with every new step

...

Exist only the present  
That is what caused your past  
And outline your future

Those parts of the poem are the ones that helped me the most. I was repeating those in my head and trying to get their meaning. It made me realize that I shouldn’t stay like that; I needed to change, to evaluate. Always thinking about the past and that I was missing my friends wasn’t the thing that was going to make me progress in life. My past made me be who I am right now but it is not the thing that is going to decide what I will be later. It helped me a lot to move on. After I moved, it took me a long time to realize what the word really meant, but I now think I understand it. Even if I keep thinking a lot about the past, I

now think more about my present. It is what I am doing right now in my everyday life that will make me enjoy my past later. And if I want good memories for later, I need to enjoy my present and live everyday like it was the last one. And I wanted to thank you for making me realize all of that. Without you or this poem, I would be in a kind of depression, sitting in the corner of my room. I am joking but my life would be different, I don't think I would be who I am now; I wouldn't have made that big step in my life. I wouldn't have made the effort to make new friends, to hang out with them and to create a "new" life in this new place. I realized that my older friends, if they were real friends, would not forget about me and the good moments that we passed together and when I would go back there, it would still be the same. And last summer when I finally went back to France I realized that every single part of that was true. I had exactly the same relations with them, even though I lost some friends, the more important ones for me were still there and we spent amazing moments together and I felt as if I have never left.

Sincerely,  
Maxime Courroux

Level Three/Semifinalist

Kim Le – International School of Indianapolis, Indianapolis

**Letter to Justin Richard, Author of *Time Runner: Freeze-Framed***

Dear Mr. Justin Richard,

There are so many time I've been distrusted by other people, I just wanted to be by myself, with no one caring whether I am here or not. I believe that lots of people have the same trouble as I do at some points of their life. I've thought a lot about this: what if I was here in some form, but I did not even exist as a normal, mortal person? My family would not know who I am, and why I am in their house. I could be yelling at them, "It's me, I am Kim!" They might realize who I am but a few seconds later they may ask, "Who are you?" Also, becoming immortal is always a subject that is so attractive to me. You can do everything you had wanted to do in your life but you couldn't; now if you were the time runner, no one would care about what you do no matter how silly it is. No one would worry about you because that time does not affect you. It gives me the feeling of being totally free. Since death is so scary, and it is a part of human life, I just want to get away from it. Reading your book *Time Runner: Freeze-Framed* changed my mind about being immortal and free that way.

During the time I read your book, I started to question at what point in my life would I want to fall through a time break-when would I want to become immortal? If I fell through the time break at 12 years old like the main character Jamie Grant in your book, I would never finish my study in school, never have a chance to see my family, or my friends any more, and there would be so many experiences for a human growing up normally that I would skip. Because nobody would notice my existence even if I stayed in front of them, yelling in their face, they would pass me like I was just a shadow. Or If I can choose to fall through the time break at 25 years old as I always dream, I would never have a chance to love someone and have some children. The vision of being immortal and nobody disturbing me would turn out to be a nightmare. The whole world would keep going ahead with the time, but only you stay there, alone. It makes me feel so lonely, especially when I see somebody pass me with a happy smile, because they have someone who cares about them, someone waiting for them at home, a place where they could return.

If there were one day that I turned into a *Time Runner*, I would ask myself what would I do? Where should I go? If I look at a picture, which used to have my face, now only a black page, I would think "Doesn't it seem scary?" I realize that there are many things I am supposed to do for my responsibility and things that I could do even if they are silly and need someone to stop me because it is my life. No matter at what age I fall through the time break, I would lose a part of the complete life that I should live. This is even worse than death

After finishing your book, I think that maybe death seems not as scary as being immortal as a *Time Runner*. Death is just a part of life, there are lots of things we could do to enjoy our life before death comes. I think living a normal life is much better than living a *Time Runner* life.

Sincerely,  
Kim Le

Level Three/Semifinalist

Junyi Liao – International School of Indianapolis, Indianapolis

**Letter to Antoine de Saint-Exupery, Author of *The Little Prince***

Dear Antoine de Saint-Exupery,

I have to be honest that the first time I ever read *The Little Prince*, I was confused about the deeper meanings of the novel. Not until a couple of years later when I reread it casually, I finally understood the novel better and that is when I gained a new definition of life.

As a student, I always aimed to score higher in tests and do better at schoolwork in order to become successful, and I tried to devote my time to study. Whenever I was distracted by other things or felt tired and lost focus while I was studying, I would feel guilty and warn myself that there was not time to dally. I felt that although people always say the role of students is to study, sometimes it is just too tiring. Why would people want to give all they have and their free time to become society's ideal person-successful, wealthy and renowned? When the Little Prince, a lonely little boy who lives by himself with this unique innocent and ways of understanding and approaching the world, met the King and the conceited man, he wondered why they were so vainglorious and always wanted other people to worship them. The businessman would also spend all his time on counting his property, the stars in the sky, because he thought he was rich. Their characteristics represent that vanity and avarice of human nature.

I started to question myself about what I had lost as I grew up. Just like the thorns on the rose, I am positive I have developed some dark side of human nature in order to fit into the model that everyone else expects, but on the way, I lost my individuality. Why can the *Little Prince* spend his whole day watching the sun rise and set, and talking to his rose, but the king and the businessman have to be busy all the time to become successful? I evaluated my life, and I figured out I had given up my talent and my interest to squeeze out more time to study and join all kinds of clubs to enrich and build my resume when I apply to universities. Of course I will harvest happiness and success from all of this, but I decided to live for myself instead of living for other people.

I do not have to give up what I truly want and enjoy to get what the world considers is good. Now I know how to balance my studying time and relaxing time, and enjoy life while studying. I would spend time working out every day to refresh myself instead of drinking coffee to just keep me awake; I would listen to music and take a nap while I am on my way to school instead of studying; I would watch my favorite TV shows and movies when I feel like I need a break and I would sleep an extra hour in the morning instead of practicing for the SAT test. What's more, I picked up my interest in playing the guitar, learned how to

play the electric guitar and joined the school rock band! How interesting is that! My friends told me that I have become more outgoing, and the more I communicate with my friends, the more wonderful traits of my friends that I discover, all because of the changing of my attitudes about life. I feel that my life is more fulfilling with different kinds of activities that I enjoy doing, and I gain and benefit a lot from them.

The *Little Prince* teaches me there are many ways that I do not have to sacrifice my interest and happiness to achieve the success from others' perspective. The novel has changed my values on adapting to the world with a different approach! It is well worth spending time on reading books like *The Little Prince* that can let me think deeply into my life, and now I know better what true happiness and success should be like!

Sincerely,  
Junyi Liao

Level Three/Semifinalist

Sarah Manhart – Homeschool, Clinton

**Letter to Lois Lowry, Author of *The Giver***

Dear Lois Lowry,

People follow trends. That is a fact of life that not many people can avoid. Whether it is buying the newest shoes because your friend got them or listening to music because it's popular, similarity and the dull sameness that is society continue to intertwine. At a younger age, I would often follow these trends. I listened to pop and hip hop because all of my friends did. I began slacking on homework because my friends did. I refused to wear my glasses for three years because none of my friends had them. Everywhere I look now, there is a fine line between originality and original trends.

One thing I never gave up was reading, even when hardly anyone I knew enjoyed it. When I was in fifth grade, the teacher I had that year was retiring. As the school year was winding to a close and she was getting ready to move on to bigger and better thing than being a fifth grade honors teacher, she started cleaning out her classroom. With only a month or so left in the school year, my classmates were ecstatic and my teacher excited, yet looking as though she would miss the annual end-of-school hype. All of the posters with multiplication tables and sentence structure guideline were removed from the cold, white brick walls. Windows were freed of their clings. My teacher often had the class help her pack books and papers and undecorated the bulletin boards. As she was going through a bookshelf, she picked up a book and walked to the front of the class. She asked who enjoyed reading and my arm immediately shot up as my eyes surveyed the room, watching for other arms. Only a few rose, and my teacher began reading for the back cover of the little black book. When she was done, she asked for any of us who were still interested, and I kept my arm raised. The next day, I was given the book with a small note inside. I have since lost my first copy of *The Giver*, and cannot remember my teacher's exact words, however the message the book gave me has remained with me for 6 years and will for many more.

Reading *The Giver* over the summer between elementary and middle school made me reflect on myself as a person. Jonas was a determined young man in a society where everyone was equal. A utopia, if you will. While the community around him was given a set of rules and everyone obeyed them with no questions, he was exempt from them. I find myself relating to Jonas in a few ways. When I was younger, I was observant of everything and everyone there was to observe.

I learned reading *The Giver* that it is okay to break the standards and be different from the rest of the crowd. It made me understand that there will be differences between everyone, no matter how minuscule, that other will never understand or



overcome. I realized that that is how society works and probably always will, and that people may not understand the way that I am or why I am that way. *The Giver* taught me that it is perfectly fine.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Manhart

Level Three/Semifinalist

Anna Mariacher – Wisdom Builders, Indianapolis

**Letter to James Dean and Eric Litwin, Author and Illustrator of  
*Pete and the Cat and His Four Groovy Buttons***

Dear James Dean and Eric Litwin,

My life is not as extraordinary as some nor as heartbreaking others. I have not experienced a dreadfully mind-blowing event that will alter my life forever, and I hope I never will. Although I am a homeschooler, I would say my life is rather typical. If one thing would classify me as an uncommon individual it would be gymnastics.

Gymnastics is a huge part of my life and I would never want to quit, but four hours a day, six days a week occasionally gets tiring. Many times I do not want to practice, I would much rather stay home and hang out with friends. Other times, I ungratefully look at the things, such as how everybody else gets to do fun activities while I am at the gym, or when people ask me to do things with them my response is always “Sorry, I’ve got practice.” None of my friends (except for the ones who are gymnasts) understand my life (Maybe I’m not as normal as I thought).

The first time I read your book *Pete the Cat and His Four Groovy Buttons* it instantly became my favorite children’s book. Introduced to me by my grandmother, Pete has inspired me to keep on singing. Why look at the horrible things in life when you can rejoice about the great things? Why sit on the couch sulking about what you don’t have instead of gleefully singing about what you do have? Instead of thinking “Why can’t I skip practice and go to the movies?” try to think “Wow, I am so thankful that I am able to have opportunity to do gymnastics everyday! So many people would love to be gymnasts, why am I complaining?”

Not only can I train myself to consider the great things in life instead of the unpleasant ones, but I can also help others to realize that too. When people become angry and/or upset, the fruit of the problem is usually unthankfulness. I guess the sorrowful thing is that we are unthankful at times. But seriously, who can drive on a road full of mansions and not be a little bit unthankful about your tiny house on the hill? I can’t do it, that’s for sure. Every time I see that huge house I immediately think, “Oooh, I wish I could live in that house.” But I have to stop and think again, this time with thankfulness. “That house would be really awesome to live in, but I am thankful that I have a place to call home I don’t have to live outside in the winter”. (That is much better!)

This brings me to the next lesson the super groovy cat taught me. You just have to keep on walking. Life will come and life will go. If you get caught thinking

about what is unpleasant in our lives, or what unkind things people have done to us it will only get worse. Your body will be so full of resentment it will be impossible to be happy and continue a joyful life. If you forgive and let go of your bitterness happiness will follow along.

Life comes quick and someday it will end faster than you think. Why sulk when you can sing? Why be unhappy when you can be overflowing with joy? Why be unappreciative about what you don't have when you can celebrate what you do have? I have gotten so much more observant about the level of my unthankfulness and the level of others. It has been easier for me to forgive and let things roll off my shoulder since I read your book. Thank you for sharing the story of Pete the Cat and I am looking forward to reading your other books.

Your groovy friend,  
Anna

Level Three/Semifinalist

Winter McCreedy – Switzerland County High School, Vevay

**Letter to Arthur C. Clark, Author of *2001: A Space Odyssey***

Dear Arthur C. Clark,

In your book *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Dr. Floyd, the main character goes to the moon to research and solve an epidemic. I found this relatable because in my life I also try to find resolve problems before they become too large to maintain. Although I have never had to travel all the way to the moon to solve a problem like Dr. Floyd, issues I deal with in my life sometimes seem just as important as an epidemic.

I am the type of person who hates confrontation. I would rather a problem fix itself rather than having to get involved. If I have a problem with friends or family, I always let the situation cool down before I get involved in order to avoid an explosion. I think that this is important because when a situation is new emotions are high and people could say and do things they do not mean. In experience I have found that it is better to let both parties of an argument collect their thoughts and think about what they have also done wrong. However, Dr. Floyd did not have time to let the situation cool down or fix itself. He ran straight to the problem, searching for a solution. Another thing I found very admirable: he did not discuss the problem with anyone until he fully understood it and how to fix it. This is so important because if he had told people there would have been chaos. So many people talk about things they do not understand. This leads to rumors and arguments. People that do this are best described as ignorant and attention seekers. They thrive on drama and stress in others lives. I personally deal with this constantly. As a high school student I hear rumors and lies on an everyday basis, and it is so frustrating.

Before I began reading this book I did not have very high expectations. I expected it to be slow and boring. This is nothing personal, I am very critical of books assigned in school. However, after reading the first couple pages my opinion had completely changed. *2001: A Space Odyssey* was nothing like I expected. The beginning was so different and gave a back-story. As the man-apes were being possessed by the piece of translucent unknown material, it foreshadowed the extraterrestrial forces at work throughout the story. As the book progressed I enjoyed the dialogue between the characters. As I read this book I could sense the tension or history between them. I could picture the conversations like I was sitting right next to them. Another thing that made the book more interesting was the intense detail to every situation. The descriptions of everything helped me to picture everything happening, which made it more enjoyable to read. As Dr. Floyd was sitting in the spaceship, I could imagine what

he was feeling. I could picture him reacting to the absence of gravity. I could picture him attempting to gain his balance as he stumbled to the restroom.

I enjoyed this book so much and would love to read another by you. I will be looking for other works by you. I am very interested in watching the movie based on *2001: A Space Odyssey*, although I am certain that it is nothing compared to your novel.

Sincerely,  
Winter McCready

Level Three/Semifinalist

Ireland Mitchell – Homeschool, Indianapolis

**Letter to Elie Wiesel, Author of *Night***

Dear Elie Wiesel,

My name is Ireland Mitchell, and I am the vulnerable age of sixteen years old. An age, you might say, in which the world is seen through different eyes with new passions, new dreams-just as you saw. Your fifteen year old self was brought to a whole new level of understanding (or utter confusion), of passion, of brokenness-when described in your book, *Night*.

*Night* left me breathless, crushed, torn, confused, angry, sad-I search for the right descriptions of my emotions, but I just cannot. No words can fully communicate the depth of sadness I fell for yourself and others who were dragged away from your lives and thrown into the utter blackness of Auschwitz during World War II.

For two days, I could not pull myself away from your memoir. I was completely enthralled! There was something so infectiously passionate about your words-so haunting and clear. It gave me a window into the Holocaust that I had never looked out of before. Throughout the course of reading, I sat stunned. Too stunned to cry or have any emotion, really. My mind swirled with questions, with things I wanted to verbalize in person if only I could. I wanted to reassure you, to give up hope-hope that seemed to be forever lost from your grasp; but even my heart wasn't sure how to reassure someone who lived through such a nightmare. I could only try to scratch the surface of imaging.

What struck me most in the book was, curiously, your preface. While your accounts of what happened within the Holocaust and the concentration camps were formed in the book itself, the preface comprehensively described what became of yourself and your emotions after the fact. You displayed your struggle of knowing what is was you wanted to say, but having no idea how to say it when you wrote, "...I would pause at every sentence and start over again. I would conjure up other verbs, other silent cries. It was still not right. But what exactly was 'it?'" Which is, in fact, the same feeling I have while writing you this letter. I know what I want to say to you, but the task seems so beyond me that I cannot think of how to word nearly anything to the degree of emotion that has been brought to the surface by your words.

A passionate reoccurrence I sensed from your writing was that of your own urging to get people, ordinary people like me who never lived through the Holocaust, to at least try and understand the emotional trauma in the events that took place. Your strongest desire, it seemed, was to share the memories and understanding you had with other generations, so that never again would think to

do something so terrifying. You proposed this question: “Could men and women who consider it normal to assist the weak, to heal the sick, to protect small children, and to respect the wisdom of their elders understand what happened there? Would they be able to comprehend how, within the cursed universe the masters tortured the weak and massacred the children, the sick, the old?”

My response is this: I do not believe I could. As someone who cares for the young and old and respects people and finds it natural to protect and serve, I cannot in my right mind imagine the evil man possesses to do the extreme opposite and torture the helpless in an unspeakable way.

And that’s just it—the way is unspeakable. So nobody speaks. And your greatest fear is that no one will have the courage to speak. You fear that your own people will go down with little attention paid to the horror that is our history because people did not share what they experienced. The rest of your life you were indebted to being a voice to your people, and to humanity as a whole. You chose not to keep silent in your agony so that history does not repeat itself, and in doing so you remind us that, “those who keep silent today will remain silent tomorrow.”

So where do we begin? How do we change the trajectory humanity has been taking towards evil? Those of us who want to do good often hit a wall and struggle to continue, so we shrink back to the emptiness of the room and continue living. I crave to do so much more than hit a wall and return to the empty. The only way I can do that is through love.

Love is often so overused that we forget what it truly is. We say over and over again to “love one another,” but what does that even mean? You saw the complete and utter void of love that humans can have for each other. You faced death, the ultimate void of love, and held a staring contest with it. You saw more hatred than any one person could imagine in a lifetime. But then again—how often do we experience true love in our daily lives? You used to believe that there was a God who loved you. You sang songs to Him, you prayed to Him, you spent your days and nights learning about who He is. But once you saw the fiery consummation of human flesh, once you were face to face with the blackness of death, once you saw with burning eyes the unfathomable hatred of man, you were convinced that there was no God: “Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever... Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams into ashes.” The hatred you saw was far greater than the love that you felt at the time. And thus you were convinced that there was no God.

It is hard, at first reading, to truly understand—as a devout Christian, someone who loves the Lord and follows Christ with all I am—why such horrendous activity took place. The Holocaust seemed to rip people of their ability to ever

feel and receive love again, but I believe that even in the midst of evil, there is love. There is God, the Ultimate Love. He does not hide His love from us; it is only we who choose to hide from His love. He is almighty and ever-present, and He fills us, if we allow Him, with a love that breaks the chains of evil and allow us to walk away from death into everlasting life. I believe we still have a capacity to love, by His grace, that transcends far beyond any evil man can accomplish. Humanity simply chooses not to display love over hate, but love is still there. It's always there.

In the summer of 2015, I will be heading to the country of Latvia in Eastern Europe. Just as your Eastern European home was consumed by the fires of Holocaust, so was Latvia. As a result, the county as a whole slipped into immense spiritual poverty and disbelief in God. Since reading your book, I have been filled with even more passion to break through the silence that tends to cloud us when faced with memories of the Holocaust, and in turn reach out to the Latvian people who are still suffering from their painful history. I want to be able to comprehend the sorrows of these people so that I can better understand and communicate the love and grace of God.

I will never truly understand the horrors you faced, that your family faced, that the entire world faced during World War II. I will never be able to wrap my mind around the fact that babies were sent into flames, families were forever torn apart, hundreds of people were killed in less than a minute by firing squads, and that all the while there was absolutely nothing able to be done about it. I will never understand.

But I am also challenged to grow deeper and seek answers, to hold tight to the faith that I know to be true and to love passionately and purposefully all people for all time. Your book has haunted me, challenged me, and impassioned me to be a voice of love in the world of evil. I do not want to remain silent; I do not want to walk into walls.

Thank you for so vulnerably, passionately, vividly and artistically weaving your sorrows and desires together in a way that crystallizes, for those of us who were not there, an understanding of what took place during the Holocaust, and what the world needs to know from this moment forward.

With sincere admiration,  
Ireland Mitchell



Level Three/Semifinalist

Gracie Munroe – Crawfordsville High School, Crawfordsville

**Letter to J.K. Rowling, Author of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone***

Dear J.K. Rowling,

Throughout my childhood and leading up to my teenage years, my family raised me in a strict and obedient household. Sometimes perfection was assumed upon me, but I often found myself struggling with attaining perfect daughter status. From there on, I felt an immense pressure to make my family proud. My loving parents made education a priority. I was reading by age three, and have been in advanced student classes since the first grade. I dove head first into my schoolwork, and strived to leave a legacy for my parents and myself. Through my journey, I have taken refuge in books. They serve me not only as entertainment, but also as a distraction, and sometimes just a safe place.

My road with books has been long and endearing. What started out with *Green Eggs and Ham* and *Cat in the Hat* have now become novels such as *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Les Miserables*. As I got older and entered my middle school years, emphasis on reading became intense. We began reading more challenging novels, and the reading level increased. Books had become my new best friends. For just a few hours they took the pressure off my shoulders. When reading a book, I did not have to worry about grades, or family issues, or homework. I could escape to the dystopian worlds of *The Giver* or *The Hunger Games*. It was not until my seventh grade year that my world was forever changed. Nearing the end of the year, we were assigned a new project circulating around the importance of books and poems. We called it the author's convention, and each student was required to read two books, give a presentation, and dress as their selected author. I was assigned J.K. Rowling. Growing up in a Christian home, I was uneasy about my given author. Preconceived notions of witchcraft and wizardry had infiltrated my judgment from an early age. Warily I began to read, but soon those misconceptions flew out the window. Once I dove into those books, there was no stopping me. In a matter of weeks I had already finished four out of the seven novels. Harry Potter had me hooked. It was there that I could be magical, and it was there I could feel free.

In the world of Harry Potter, grades aren't important, friends are always loyal, and everyone has a place in the world. In my life, I often feel skipped over. I struggle with confidence, and most of the times my insecurities get the best of me. I fear of not making a difference in the world and not making my parents proud, but Harry Potter inspired me. I admire his sacrificial actions towards his friends and family, his tenacity to stand up for what he believes in and to challenge authority, and his enduring strength when times are tough. He represents everything I want out of life. As a child reading this novel, I never

imagined the effect it would have on my life today. Because of Harry, I now voice my opinions, even when the odds are not in my favor. Because of Harry, I realize that perfection is unattainable, and failure is learning experience. Because Harry, I never give up.

Harry Potter is more than a book. These stories have comforted me through some of my darkest days. When I feel alone or when the pressure to succeed becomes overbearing, I quietly sneak to my room and grab *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. I retreat to my closet, close the doors, and begin to read through the dim light. For these few hours before I am disturbed, I am the happiest. Those books are where I belong. Those books feel like home.

With love and gratitude,  
Grace Munroe

Level Three/Semifinalist

Tin Oo – New Tech Academy at Wayne High School, Fort Wayne

**Letter to Kate DiCamillo, Author of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane***

Dear Kate DiCamillo,

I have always thought that life was bittersweet and a lost cause. I never really cared for what others have done for me. Whether it's being loved for who you are, or looking out for each other, I did not care of these such things. But after reading *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, my perspective on my own selfishness and on the world changed. I never really gave much thought that I could become hurt by someone else's actions, I truly thought life was something we should take for granted. Although this may sound a little silly, I believed that life was not anything meaningful.

Much like Edward Tulane's perspective of the world before his endless owners, he had no empathy of the people who cared for him. Edward's uncaring personality reminded me of myself in the beginning of the story. He had no interest in what people had to say. Much like my younger self, I did not quite care very much about people's opinions and what they did to affect me. But of course, Edward did not know a thing about love and how to simply receive it and love them back. On top of that, I didn't feel the necessity to love and care for the people in my life that have done so much for me. Is this what people call unrequited love? Both Edward and I had not realized how precious people can be in our lives.

After reading the book *Edward Tulane*, I started to realize that I've been living the realities of life. While Edward was facing a dark time in his life, they helped shaped him to become a better person from those dark moments. But because of the characters that found Edward Tulane during his journey of being found and lost again, they taught him the values of life. One of the values was that a person has at least one precious moment that they want to cherish and treasure in their life. Those kind of people are the ones that have stars in their eyes when they first meet someone. And they don't even notice anything else other than that person.

Once you realize that this someone could be the person for you, you feel like this person is your everything. After learning the realities that Edward faced and the values that were portrayed in the story, Edward did not realize he was living the realities of the world. When Edward was thrown out into the sea, he was hindered by the world as nothing but the sea surrounding him. He went unnoticed for 297 days only to be picked up once again by a new owner. Similar to that moment, I also hid from the world not wanting to withstand the harsh realities of life only choosing to ignore them.

Edward's heart grew a little bigger and became more opened after being approached by the people who cared for and loved him. He was finally able to learn how to love them back after opening his heart to others. Because we learn to treasure the precious moments in our lives, we have strength to overcome the challenging obstacles. While reading this story, I was wishing to take Edward's place so that he would not have to suffer. Instead, this piece of literature became meaningful as I realized it is important for a person to go through the good and bad times to learn a valuable lesson.

Sincerely from your admirer,  
Tin Oo

Level Three/Semifinalist

Sarah Salahuddin – Bloomington North High School, Bloomington

**Letter to Sylvia Plath, Author of *The Bell Jar***

Dear Sylvia Plath,

Life can be unkind, to say the least. At times I have felt the ticking of the clock as an endless reminder of how it never seems to end. I first came thoroughly in touch with this feeling when I moved to a single-bedroom apartment with my mother, my father, and my younger brother, during a time of economic hardship. Although this situation was unpleasant for all of us, it seemed to affect me the most for whatever reason.

I lost myself in ways I can now hardly remember, for they are memories I wish to erase. I would listen to music, draw, and run away from the unpleasantness, hoping for it to go away. I would try to stay outdoors as much as possible in order to not have the four walls of the apartment crushing me from every side. Regardless of what I did, I could not find a way to bear with the pain I had felt at leaving behind my former house.

Somehow my prayers had been answered in the most peculiar of ways, when I had found your book, *The Bell Jar*. I had not much of an idea of it; I only knew of it as being a much spoken of, almost notorious novel because of the dire content it holds. I finished the book in no longer than two days. After I was finished, a curious emotion overcame me, as if I knew the girl in the novel all along.

The way she suffers is much more than I can even imagine. Having a life of constant disappointment after disappointment takes her through the attempt of putting an end to everything. Whenever Esther feels the warm spark of happiness, it is subtly taken away by cold, shattering news. Regardless of which position she is put in, the unbearable sadness wins over her every single time. However, there is no end to her story.

After finishing this book, I decided that I would change the outcome of the story. I will not allow this depression to come near me, let alone win against me. I want the end of Esther's story to be a positive one. I want it to be one of hope and triumph, not one of despair and failure. It made me very sad to read such a book, yet it gave me hope to do the opposite of what she did. I am sure that you would agree that she deserves a better ending.

*The Bell Jar* gave me the comfort that I was longing for in my life at the time I spent in that one-bedroom apartment. I learned the beauty of words and how to use them to my advantage; now, whenever I feel down, I write away my thoughts and focus on the positivity. Thanks to you, I have seen the errors of my ways and realized that living as if I were dead is not how I should be living. I admire your

authenticity in describing the pain Esther feels throughout the novel because I allowed me to feel it also, and find a way to be rid of it.

I hold my life dear to me. Esther said, “I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead; I lift my eyes and all is born again.” I vow to never shut my eyes as she had shut hers, and I will keep them open to have my imagination flourish as long as I live, which I hope will be a very long time.

Thank you,  
Sarah Salahuddin

Level Three/Semifinalist

Julia Tharp – Northwestern High School, Kokomo

**Letter to Heather Vogel Fredrick, Author of *The Mother-Daughter Book Club Series***

Dear Heather Vogel Fredrick,

We all dream. We sometimes dream of the past, but mostly we dream of the future. We dream of where we want to go, what we want to do, what we wish we could do. Most people can't live those dreams. They're stuck at home, wondering if they'll ever get a chance to even try. For me, it's writing and traveling. I want to travel the world and watch as my books change it, but how can a fifteen-year-old do that?

Adults can. Before I read *The Mother-Daughter Book Club Series*, I believed that there were so many things adults could do which children and teenagers could not. Start businesses, travel the world, publish books. Only adults had the ability and resources to do all of these, but I was wrong. My mom always told me that I can do whatever I put my mind to, and your series cemented that fact in my brain. Emma, Jess, Megan, Cassidy, and Becca are all ordinary teenagers from semi-ordinary families, and yet they can do so much! They've put on a fashion show, created a business, published an original work, started up a hockey team, and even crated a baby clothes line!

During these experiences, they acted confidently and surely, as if they knew they'd be successful. Sure they were nervous, but that didn't stop them. They continued on and pushed back any doubt they had until they succeeded. That's what I needed to hear. Whenever I want to do something, I'm usually timid and afraid of what others will think. Will adults just look at me as a little girl? Will they not take me seriously? Will other authors laugh at my works? There are so many different possibilities of what could happen. But there were so many things that could occur in the book club's endeavors as well. There could've been no one at the fashion show. The executive could've laughed at Megan's ideas. Pies and Prejudice could've had no customers, but they didn't acknowledge these possibilities. They went straight for what they wanted and succeeded. They did what they put their minds to. And from now on, that's what I'm planning to do as well.

As you'll remember from *Pies and Prejudice*, "Never say 'I can't.' 'I can't' is a limit, and life is about breaking through limits. Say 'I will' instead." That quote has become a life motto for me. There are so many undertakings I have said I am

incapable of doing. Now I realize there are so many things I can do and will do. I will write a book, and I will travel the world. It's time for me to break through the limits. Thank you for giving me the confidence I need to make that happen.

Your reader,  
Julia, Tharp



Level Three/Semifinalist

Tessa Weidner – Northwestern High School, Kokomo

**Letter to Rick Riordan, Author of *The Blood of Olympus***

Dear Rick Riordan,

There are times in a person's life when they have the choice to stand up and take charge of a situation, or to stand by and let the opportunity just slip out of his life. If he just lets those certain situations slip by, however, then he might spend the rest of his life wondering what he could have done to change the outcome for the better. This is what I've learned from your newest book, *The Blood of Olympus*. I've realized that your character Piper Mclean makes me think of myself in many ways.

In the Temple of Fear, Piper and Annabeth face off against the giant Mimas. Annabeth's knowledge and plans aren't able to help them escape, so Piper has to take charge to get Annabeth and herself out of the temple. She has to follow her instinct trust her emotions, even though she's terrified. I've had to do a similar thing in this year's marching band season.

I played an alto saxophone in my high school's marching band as an eighth grade marcher last year. It was extremely hard because the rest of the band would learn new drill and go out to practice marching the show during their band class period. I couldn't do that with them because the high school band is the first period of the day, while eighth grade band is second period. I would go to practice and someone would tell us to go find a set, and I wouldn't have any clue as to where it was located because they had marked that set in first period class. This year I was determined to not let the alto eighth graders have to go through that.

My section this year has two eighth graders, five freshman, two sophomores, and one senior. Half the people in my section are new people. Since my section leader isn't at practice most of the time, I decided that this year I would step up and help the new people.

It took until our first Saturday practice for me to finally step up. The heat index that day was about a hundred degrees, my section leader was at soccer practice, and almost all of the altos were getting sick or feeling really bad. Neither of the sophomores was taking charge, mainly because one of them was one of the altos who were sick and the other had yet to step up. So I impulsively took charge and basically became a complete momma bear to the whole section. I went to all of the altos and made sure they were feeling ok, and if they weren't I kept nagging them until they sat down.

There are times in the book when Annabeth and Jason came to Piper for help and advice, and Piper has trouble believing that two of the strongest and wisest of the seven are asking her for help and advice. I've had moments like that this season, where both my section's new people and more experience people have come to me asking for help on drill or music. It's hard for me to believe that they're coming to me for help, especially when some of them have been in marching band for way longer than I have.

I've decided that I'm not going to let the fear of what's going to happen if I stand up and take charge prevent me from doing what needs to be done. I don't want to end up wondering what I could have done to change a situation because I didn't have the courage to be a leader. I feel like I've grown with Piper throughout the book. As she grows into a stronger person and a better leader, I feel like I'm doing the same.

Sincerely,  
Tessa Weidner







