

Letters About Literature

Letters About Literature

2017 Winning Letters by Indiana students



Letters About Literature

2017 Winning Letters by Indiana students

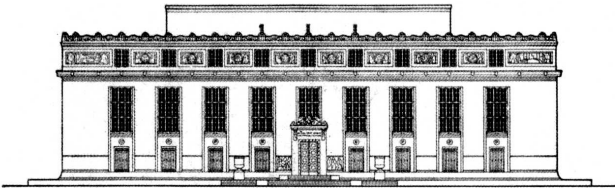
Indiana Center for the Book Director
Suzanne Walker

Indiana State Librarian
Jacob Speer

the James & Madeleine *McMullan* FAMILY FOUNDATION
LettersAboutLiterature



Published 2017



Indiana State Library
140 N. Senate Avenue
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Letters About Literature

Letters About Literature is a national reading-writing contest for readers in grades 4 through 12 sponsored by the *Center for the Book in the Library of Congress*, the *Indiana Center for the Book* in the Indiana State Library and *The James & Madeleine McMullan Family Foundation*. We hope you will participate in the 2017–2018 contest!

What is a Center for the Book?

Are there any books in the *Indiana Center for the Book*? Not really...Starting in 1984, the *Center for the Book in the Library of Congress* began to establish affiliate centers in the 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These Center for the Book affiliates carry out the National Center's mission in their local areas. Programs like this one highlight their area's literary heritage and call attention to the importance of books, reading, literacy, and libraries. The State Centers gather annually at the Library of Congress for an Idea Exchange Day.



Congratulations from the Indiana Center for the Book

We are excited to honor your work in our 2017 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 29, 2017 at the Indiana State Library. Our *Youth Literary Day* was a great event that included writing workshops, author signings, and readings of several of the award winning letters.

We also offer a special thanks to the *Indiana State Library Foundation*, whose support we are constantly thankful for.

Every year we do our best 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 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 in this collection are heartfelt interpretations from young writers that touch on a variety of difficult themes including gender equality, growing up, losing a loved one, adjusting to a move, cancer and health, being adopted, racism, body image, war, and other serious topics that our Indiana youth struggle with daily.

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

Contents

Level I Finalists

2

1 st Place:	Nithya Murthy – <i>Riverside Intermediate School, Fishers</i>
2 nd Place:	Olivia Hasenkamp – <i>Sugar Creek Elementary, New Palestine</i>
3 rd Place:	Elise Crecelius – <i>Castle North Middle School, Newburgh</i>

Level I Honorable Mentions

8

Alexander Boeckmann – <i>Park Tudor School, Indianapolis</i>
Elizabeth Pavey – <i>Blair Pointe Elementary, Peru</i>
Morgan Schaffer – <i>Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis</i>
Kyla Stalbaum – <i>Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville</i>
Glen Taylor – <i>Riverside Intermediate School, Fishers</i>
Mia Wilhite – <i>Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville</i>

Level I Semifinalists

20

Emma Ahern – <i>Zionsville Middle School</i>	Paige Leman – <i>Zionsville Middle School</i>
Samantha Arendt – <i>Castle North Middle School</i>	Ethan Lindeman – <i>Zionsville Middle School</i>
Rory Barnard – <i>Sugar Creek Elementary School</i>	Zach McEwen – <i>Riverside Intermediate School</i>
Will Bowen – <i>Zionsville Middle School</i>	Michelle McLaughlin – <i>Zionsville Middle School</i>
Emma Chamberlain – <i>Zionsville, IN</i>	Ben Olsen – <i>Southern Indiana</i>
Bella Colon – <i>Zionsville Middle School</i>	Lara Rahman – <i>Park Tudor School</i>
Ian Davis – <i>Northview Elementary</i>	Lillie Recker – <i>Benjamin Franklin Middle School</i>
Yael Ehrlich – <i>Hasten Hebrew Academy</i>	Jacob Rose – <i>Salem Middle School</i>
Brayden Emery – <i>Greensburg Elementary</i>	Nate Sapp – <i>Riverside Intermediate School</i>
Megan Gilmour – <i>Castle North Middle School</i>	William Schell – <i>Zionsville Middle School</i>
Ellie Hahn – <i>Zionsville Middle School</i>	Jack Schlueter – <i>Zionsville Middle School</i>
Mallory Heerd – <i>Zionsville Middle School</i>	Emma Schwartz – <i>Northview Elementary</i>
Eli Hocking – <i>Castle North Middle School</i>	Lainee Sellers – <i>Northview Elementary</i>
Shelby Hunn – <i>Zionsville Middle School</i>	Carolyn Williams – <i>Union Elementary</i>
McCullough Jordan – <i>Park Tudor School</i>	Maya Yaari – <i>Hasten Hebrew Academy</i>
Cookie Kaur – <i>Zionsville Middle School</i>	Cora Zink – <i>Fall Creek Intermediate</i>
Alayna Lautner – <i>Castle North Middle School</i>	

Level II Finalists

74

- 1st Place: Yael Cohen – *Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis*
 2nd Place: Shay Orentlicher – *Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis*
 3rd Place: Arianna Sia – *Greensburg Jr. High, Greensburg*

Level II Honorable Mentions

80

- Barakah Abdo-Baari – *West Lafayette Jr./Sr. HS, West Lafayette*
 Samarrah Denney – *Central Middle School, Columbus*
 Tal Friedman – *Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis*
 Brooklyn Halsey – *West Noble Middle School, Ligonier*
 Anastazja Krostenko – *Stanley Clark School, South Bend*
 Madelyn Long – *Clark Pleasant Middle School, Greenwood*
 Katie McLean – *Greensburg Jr. High, Greensburg*
 Grayson Russ – *Jasper Middle School, Jasper*

Level II Semifinalists

96

- | | |
|--|---|
| Amelia Ahner – <i>Jasper Middle School</i> | Sophie Mariacher – <i>Wisdom Builders</i> |
| Hannah Allen – <i>Jasper Middle School</i> | Caroline McCance – <i>Jasper Middle School</i> |
| Kinsey Bruder – <i>Lebanon Middle School</i> | Jackson McPherron – <i>Southridge Middle School</i> |
| Peyton Bryant – <i>Central Middle School</i> | Madison Morgan – <i>West Noble Middle School</i> |
| Adrian Buczkowski – <i>Klondike Middle School</i> | Herschel Nathan – <i>Hasten Hebrew Academy</i> |
| Rivkah Bunes – <i>Hasten Hebrew Academy</i> | Desiree Null – <i>West Noble Middle School</i> |
| Lyrrika Burman – <i>Salem Middle School</i> | Ty Ofer – <i>Jasper Middle School</i> |
| Macy Clark – <i>Southridge Middle School</i> | Addison Reed – <i>Salem Middle School</i> |
| Taylor Cooney – <i>Greensburg Jr. High</i> | Truly Reffeitt – <i>Wisdom Builders</i> |
| Rachel Curry – <i>Belzer Middle School</i> | Ethan Solomon – <i>Hasten Hebrew Academy</i> |
| Emmy Gottsman – <i>Brownsburg East Middle School</i> | Samrawit Solomon – <i>Hasten Hebrew Academy</i> |
| Jordyn Hagerman – <i>West Noble Middle School</i> | Emilie Sondhelm – <i>Hasten Hebrew Academy</i> |
| Gabbie Haviland – <i>Greensburg Jr. High</i> | Madison Songer – <i>Southridge Middle School</i> |
| Vianai Herrera – <i>West Noble Middle School</i> | Sarah Springmeyer – <i>Greensburg Jr. High</i> |
| Kendalyn Hurm – <i>Jasper Middle School</i> | Mya Stiles – <i>Jasper Middle School</i> |
| Tanner Kane – <i>Southridge Middle School</i> | Tatton Strassheim – <i>Wisdom Builders</i> |
| | Konner Thyen – <i>Southridge Middle School</i> |
| | Millie Tredway – <i>Southridge Middle School</i> |

Level III Finalists

168

-
- 1st Place: Bronwynn Woodsworth – *University High School, Indianapolis*
2nd Place: Luke Schirmer – *Four Seasons Academy, Lizton*
3rd Place: Sarah Smith – *Northwestern High School, Kokomo*

Level III Honorable Mentions

179

-
- Shelby Giffen – *Centerville High School, Centerville*
Mikayla Miller – *Centerville High School, Centerville*
Sheena Tan – *West Lafayette Jr./Sr. High School, West Lafayette*

Level III Semifinalists

187

-
- Emilie Deibel – *Centerville High School*
Emily Krieger – *Taylor High School*
Brooke Minch – *Switzerland County High School*
Marlon Robertson – *Centerville High School*
Jolie Rusznak – *Centerville High School*
Alex Shukri – *Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School*
Abby Stewart – *Centerville High School*

Level I

Level I
1st Place

Nithya Murthy

Riverside Intermediate School, Fishers

Letter to Gloria Whelan

Author of *Listening for Lions*

Dear Gloria Whelan,

There are sometimes in life where everything seems to be going perfectly, and then suddenly, everything changes. This happened to Rachel Sheridan when both of her parents died of influenza. A similar thing also happened to me when my grandmother died of a heart attack. In one beat she was alive, and in the beat that failed to come, she was gone. After reading the book, I realized that every moment is precious, and we have to cherish everyone we love, for they could be gone in an instant.

Your book, *Listening for Lions*, has touched my heart in ways no book ever has. The life of Rachel is truly a magnificent one, full of adventure, sorrow, joy, realization, and courage. Learning about the life of Rachel, I wished that I could have a life as exciting as hers. Living in Africa, helping out in her parents hospital, it makes my daily routine look as fun as watching paint dry. Eventually, I got to the part where her parents died, and I realized that I should be thankful to be living the life I'm living, with both of my parents alive and well.

As I read *Listening for Lions*, I didn't just follow the life of Rachel, I *experienced* it. I felt what she felt: her grief when her parents perished, her homesickness for Africa, and the relief that flooded through her when she revealed the inheritance plot to Grandfather. All the emotions she felt I felt as I turned each page, my excitement growing with every word printed in the book.

As a girl growing up during a time of female segregation, Rachel came to England on account of an inheritance plot, and found out about the complicated land beyond her beloved Africa. Even though women now have equal rights as men, sometimes I have felt that I couldn't do something because I was a girl. I have also faced setbacks

because of my gender, but Rachel taught me that anything we put our mind to is possible. She remained strong and unwavering when facing Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard, who wanted her to be their daughter Valerie, and she went against society who said that a woman could never be a doctor. Even though she faced challenges, Rachel succeeded and became a doctor at the hospital that her parents started in Kenya.

Reading about her act of courageousness, showed me that any person, put in any circumstance, good, bad, or horrible, could still build their way to success if they try hard enough. Even now, a year after I read the book, I still use her as an example to keep me going when times get hard, and to persevere, for if I try hard enough, I can achieve great things.

Reading this book I learned many lessons, but I think the main lesson was to never give up, and to stand strong, no matter what challenges we are faced with. And I know this may sound cheesy, but from time to time, I find myself in a hard situation, silently asking myself: “What would Rachel do if she were here?” And hearing these words I would somehow find a solution, and eliminate each challenge that life throws at me, just as Rachel did. Another important lesson I learned is a bit more personal. Rachel’s loss taught me to cherish the people I love and to spend time with them while I still can. I made that mistake with my grandmother, but I promise, that I will never let that happen with me again. So I thank you, Mrs. Whelan, for writing this book and teaching me about the most important thing there is in our lives. Family.

Sincerely,
Nithya Murthy

Level I
2nd Place

Olivia Hasenkamp

Sugar Creek Elementary, New Palestine

Letter to Tilar J. Mazzeo

Author of *Irena's Children*

Dear Mr. Tilar J. Mazzeo,

I have recently read one of your novels, *Irena's Children*. It is amazing to read about a real, typically unknown hero in a dire situation; World War II. I hadn't even heard of her incredible bravery until I decided to read your novel. This book inspired me very much.

Your book made me believe I shouldn't doubt myself and to have self confidence. Irena could have stopped helping Jewish people because she simply thought she couldn't do it, but she didn't. Because of this she saved over 2,000 children in her lifetime. It showed me that if you have courage to do the right thing, you can accomplish many incredible tasks and overcome any obstacle.

Irena risked her life to save others, even though she didn't need to. Her acts of rebellion in World War II could have resulted in death by the Nazis. People depended on her to rescue their children and family. Irena's own Jewish friends were in peril. She helped everyone she could escape the constant gunshots and beating of the Nazi soldiers.

I now strive to be like Irena. I may not have the same situation of Irena and her committee to help children escape from an inevitable death, but I try to help anyone who needs it. Just as Irena, I want to show people that they can always trust me.

Sometimes my friends or peers are mean or look down on someone just for who they are. Even I do this at times. This isn't fair. Irena knew this. She took a stand. After three years of rushing children through the sewers to the Aryan side, hiding people under dead bodies in caskets, giving all the people she rescued fake kennkartes (identification cards) and many more acts of heroism, Irena was caught in her bedroom by the Nazis. They tortured and almost killed her in the Pawiak Prison. However, she needed to protect her

children, so her and her coworkers in Zegota were determined to find Irena a way out. Zegota managed to bribe a guard who was taking her to her absolute death in the prison to release her. Instead of going in hiding after the long trek home on broken bones and injuries, she continued her illegal work.

I want to make those who are singled out because of their differences feel like someone cares about them, that they are not alone. It may not be in a loud and public way, but I feel the need to comfort those who covet it, those who are going through difficult times. Irena did this for an immense amount of children. She brought wooden dolls to the children made by Dr. Wickwiti in the ghetto. Irena couldn't promise them a way out of their hardships, but she tried to offer them comfort. I strive to do the same.

Irena was very brave. I wonder if my friends or innocent people were in danger in my community if I would help them. I wonder if I could have the bravery that Irena Sendler had. I want to be a person that anyone could ask for help from and know that they would receive it, even if it would put me or something important to me at risk. Willingness is something I feel I need to have when I am asked for assistance. I try to be brave like Irena.

Horrible things are going on in society right now. Our world needs more people to be like Irena Sendler and her friends in Zegota. This story had inspired me to be one of those people. To have courage, bravery, and be passionate about what I believe in. Thank you Tilar J. Mazzeo, for introducing me to my new role model.

Sincerely,
Olivia Hasenkamp

Level I
3rd Place

Elise Crecelius

Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Patricia Hermes

Author of *You Shouldn't Have to Say Goodbye*

Dear Patricia Hermes,

Mothers can teach us valuable lessons if we are willing to listen. *You Shouldn't Have to Say Goodbye* taught me that and more. Sarah's mom gave her a list of books she had wanted to read with her if time had allowed. My mother has recommended a few books for me that have been wonderful. While reading your book together, my mom and I made memories, laughed, cried, and reminisced. Your book changed me, taught me many things, made me ponder life, and brought me closer to my mom.

Like Sarah, I did gymnastics and love reading, but your book connected with me more than just with hobby similarities. I never really thought about death affecting me anytime soon. I was really just staying alive. Then, I read your book. Now, I see every new day as a blessing and try to live life to the fullest. You changed my outlook on life. I realize that death can happen without warning so now I talk more with family, spend time with friends, etc. This revelation you gave me has just recently put itself back into my mind.

My sister is in the Castle High School marching band. This year they made it for the first time to Grand National finals of the Bands of America competition. This wonderful feeling of excitement, pride, and victory ended abruptly. While driving home after the competition, the extremely talented vocal soloist, Sophie, her dad, grandmother, and older sister hit a deer. Her dad pulled over to the side of the road, and in the blink of an eye, an intoxicated 19-year-old boy rear ended them. Three lives were lost all within an hour—Sophie, her dad, and her grandma. Her sister was hospitalized but has now recovered. The whole band family, including me, lost someone very close. Your book taught me how to cope during this time.

The first action Sarah took to recover from her mother's death was to accept this truth and begin to move forward. Taking your first steps can be the hardest, but once you start the rest becomes easier. By telling me the first steps to take, you helped me to cope with my loss.

Although I can't relate to my mom having cancer or having no siblings, your book still affected my mom and me because we were able to put ourselves in Sarah's shoes. I remember clearly my mother coming home to see your book on the table. She almost started sobbing right there while recalling when she read your book. ***You Shouldn't Have to Say Goodbye*** has taken me on a rollercoaster full of memories, laughter, bawling, and thinking. My mother and I have also started to spend more time together.

My perfect book is one that is thought-provoking, makes me laugh, cry, and I finish thinking, "Wow! That was great." ***You Shouldn't Have to Say Goodbye*** was my perfect book.

Thank you!

Yours truly,
Elise Crecelius

Level I Honorable Mentions

Alexander Boeckmann

Park Tudor, Indianapolis

Letter to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Author of *The Little Prince*

Dear Antoine de Saint-Exupéry,

The day I found *The Little Prince* on my bookshelf, I thought it was a small children's storybook. I never expected it would touch me so deeply. It helped me realize why each one of us, including *you* and *me*, matters in this world. It also taught me *why* we matter. Even though there are millions of people, each one of us matters because of who they care about and who cares about them.

I think that this book affected me because I have moved to four different schools in four years because of my father's job. This past year, I even lived in a different country. So, I have thought about my place in the world, and also had to make friendships quickly.

When the Little Prince comes to Earth, he sees thousands of roses. They all look like his rose. He discovers that his rose is not unique! After talking to a fox, he comes to understand that his rose is special because he cares for her, and she cares for him. I am one of many kids in my grade and one of millions in the world. Millions more people will be born after me. Why do I matter? But when I think of the rose, I realize my friends are not just like other people. I know them better than almost anybody, and they know me.

To care about someone means you have to get past what someone looks like, and make an effort to get to know them and find out what makes them unique. It is not what you see that is important, like the clothes that you wear. In the book, the man who crashes his airplane describes how silly it is for people not to believe a man dressed in Turkish clothes, but later believe the same man when he was dressed in English clothes. It is the same for kids. Boys think they can not wear pink. Girls think they have to wear makeup to be pretty. They

don't. Everyone should just be themselves and not worry about being the same.

The Little Prince meets a Conceited Man who is worried about how handsome he is. He made me think about how silly it is to care if people appreciate your looks. It is better not to focus on yourself. Everywhere I have moved, there are kids who group together if they share the same clothes or style. If your relationships are not based on something deeper than looks, then you do not care about them and they do not care about you. Then, do you really matter?

There are many other adults the Little Prince meets. The Business Man was counting stars, which is similar to real life and just counting money or how much stuff you have. Owning more things does not mean anything, and it may tell you that the person is greedy. It does not make anyone a better person if they own more. The geographer reminds me that we can not just sit around and rely on others to tell us what to do. We have to go out in the world and explore by ourselves. The miserable tippler taught me to not feel sorry for myself, and to think about how my actions affect others. Do not think "Will I get in trouble or not." Instead, think, "Is this going to help others or myself? Will anyone benefit from this?"

Of all the adults the Little Prince met, the King made me think the most. In every school, there seems to be a kid who bullies others. But just because a kid seems strong and seems to have power over kids does not mean that they do. If you make other real friends and talk about this, you could have allies and not give someone else the power that they want. This is something I have been thinking about lately.

I hope that you see how much your work made me think and how the way I look at the world changed. I wish I could meet you and find out how this story came into your mind—and how it changed your life!

Sincerely,
Alexander Boeckmann

Elizabeth Pavey

Blair Pointe Upper Elementary, Peru

Letter to J.K. Rowling

Author of *Harry Potter*

Dear J .K. Rowling,

I can't thank you enough for your series *Harry Potter*. Books and knowledge are very important to me. A bit like your character Hermione Granger. Yet I may not have discovered this trait if I did not read your book *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. For that I thank my parents.

I didn't think I'd ever be thankful for being grounded. You see, it wasn't but several months ago when I got myself into some trouble at home. My punishment was no phone. No big deal. Except I forgot that I was me. If that makes sense. I was a total social butterfly. I just couldn't get enough of my friends so I was texting, or emailing, them all the time. Not having my phone completely changed my day. Even my sleeping schedule! Most nights I would be up past 10:00 at night which doesn't sound bad to you, but then my bedtime was 8:00!

Soon after my grounding was settled I began reading at night instead of texting. At first it was a burden, a sort of school assignment. Until later when I read your book *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. My thoughts and feelings towards books were totally changed. This made me do things I don't think I've ever done before. For example, *joy read*.

One or two months later, I remember I was in the middle of the 5th book *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* and my mom called me downstairs. She gave me my phone back. She laughed and told me she had forgotten she had it. The old me would have been angry, but I merely shrugged and took it upstairs to charge. I eventually read the whole series. I became a total fangirl. Just this Halloween I was Hermione. I learned so much from your books, but one quote by Albus Dumbledore has stuck with me to this day, "Happiness can always be found in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light."

Thank you J .K. Rowling for writing ***Harry Potter*** and turning on my light.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Pavey

Morgan Schaffer

Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to Jen White

Author of *Survival Strategies of the Almost Brave*

Dear Jen White,

I remember briefly the day my sisters were born and I became a big sister. When I read your book *Survival Strategies of the Almost Brave*, I embraced my love for my sisters. After reading your book I understood the importance of big sister leadership. Your book has made me see the world in a different way. It made me see myself as a leader, a big sister, and a role model. Being a role model was the biggest part of me. This instinct was a part of me since my mom was sick. I tried to be the best I could from then on.

When my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2013, the thing she said before her big surgery was “Remember to be a leader, even when I am not there.” That had touched my heart in every way. Everyday after that all I could think of was my mom and what she said. The next day at school, I used every opportunity I had to be a role model. As in your book, *Survival Strategies of the Almost Brave*, Liberty was a huge role model. She made sure that nothing happened to her little sister. She was a role model to Bobby.

I was heart broken when I found out that she was going to be sick when I was at camp. It was intimidating to think that she could perish when I was at camp. I always kept my mind on what she had said to me before, it kept me smiling. I held my sadness in and focused on what my mom had told me, be a role model. Like in your book *Survival Strategies of the Almost Brave* Liberty showed leadership in the good times and the bad. I knew that my sisters were going to be at the day camp though, so I showed them that I could do it. This experience taught me that you have to be a role model, in the good times and bad.

When I came home, I was so happy to see my mom’s smiling face again. I was happy to see my sisters’ smiling faces again. This was the perfect moment to show how I was a role model over the summer. I told her everything. She was happy to know I took her advice.

To this day, seeing the little 1st graders walking down the hall or my 5th grade teacher in the copy room. This role model instinct has gotten the best of me. It always feels good for her to compliment us for walking nicely down the hallway showing her that we have grown so much.

Being a big sister, you will need to be a role model. You need to set the example. You will need to be your own role model. In your book, *Survival Strategies of the Almost Brave* Liberty set the example, she showed that she was a leader. Now it is time for me to be the leader. Thank You Jen White for showing me what it means to be a big sister role model.

Thank you for showing what it means to be a big sister,
Morgan Schaffer

Kyla Stalbaum

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Malala Yousafzai

Author of *I Am Malala*

Dear Malala Yousafzai,

When I first opened up the book, *I Am Malala*, I was filled with melancholy and anger because of the incommensurate difference between the way girls and boys were treated. After reading about half of the book I was filled with new feelings, determination and inspiration. I realized that the reason you wrote the book was because you wanted to inspire different girls around the world, and that just reading the book was not going to make a difference. You taught me valuable lessons I will need to know throughout life.

I remember one part in the book when you were visiting your dad's school and how enjoyable it was for you. I was devastated when the schools were being blown up and you were not supposed to attend. School was your favorite place and it ripped my heart in half when it was taken from you. I think school is something we take for granted. Yes, you have to get up early and it takes time out of your day, but if we couldn't go to school how would we survive in the real world and have a happy life? I can not imagine what it would be like if one day I was not allowed to go to school. I have a dream to be a marine biologist someday. If I couldn't go to school it would be very hard to get that career. You stood up for what you thought was right. You taught me to follow my dreams. This is the way in which you inspired me.

Another memory in the book is when you and your best friends are at the school and it is the last day before break. They know that they might not be able to come back ever again and might have to spend the rest of their lives cooking and cleaning. At first they are devastated, but then they decide to go around the school and play all the games they played when they were little. They became happy. This taught me to make the best out of bad things. This is a life skill I lacked. I applied this lesson when I was at camp with my friend, Ava. We were disappointed because it was our first year and we were missing the blob because of a storm. The blob is a huge pillow-shaped floating

balloon. One person sits on the edge and the other person jumps on the back and sends them flying through the air and makes them land in the lake. We were sent to this room with all the other campers and had to watch Veggie Tales. Everyone was super downhearted. Then I had an idea. I started a hand game with our cabin. More and more people joined until we had a huge game going. It became really fun. I thought back to that memory in your book and realized how much I needed to know how to be optimistic. You had taught me another important life skill.

Before I read the book, *I Am Malala*, I had no idea about the unfair conditions in Pakistan. It was just another country on the other side of the world to me, but once I learned that women were not allowed to go to school and could be treated as slaves, I wanted to change it. I think the best way to help the people in Pakistan is to get other people to read your book. I told friends about the book and recommended it. I also did projects and book reports on it. I am planning to do as much as I can to help the people in Pakistan. After you were shot, you had to move to Birmingham, United Kingdom. I want you to be able to live in your old house and continue your happy life where you will be able to go to school and maybe someday teach. Your book inspired me to help the women in Pakistan have rights that are equal to the men's.

The ways in which you inspired me and the lessons you taught me are very important in life. All the different memories in the book touched my heart. I now see the world in a different way and I want to help the people in Pakistan. Thank you for that.

Sincerely,
Kyla Stalbaum

Glen Taylor

Riverside Intermediate School, Fishers

Letter to Ransom Riggs

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

Dear Ransom Riggs,

Your book, *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*, gave me an entirely new way to look at society. After reading the journeys of the peculiar children, I realized that everyone has some peculiar inside them.

The peculiars were rejected because they were different, because they weren't normal. But then again, what is normal? Everyone is different, we're not exactly the same, because then who's life would we be living?

Your book inspired me to be myself, to be peculiar. At school, people are shocked about what I do, like how I finished over 40 books in 7 weeks. When I reread it, I imagined my self as Hugh, loving and caring for the bees living in his stomach, and Enoch, pessimistic yet intelligent. I thought of Jacob, torn between two worlds: the one he knew and the one that foretold unpredictable things. But *life* is unpredictable. But if you be yourself, if you be your own kind of normal (or peculiar), you will overcome life's challenges.

Jacob taught me a lesson about choices. All the choices you make, like how Jacob decided to stay in 1940, all impact your life. No matter how big or how small, all your choices have a say in how you live your life. Emma, Jacob, Hugh, Olive, Miss Peregrine, and the others, even the wights and hollowgast, taught me to be myself and be mindful of what I choose. Thank you for your captivating story.

Sincerely,
Glen Taylor

Mia Wilhite

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Malala Yousafzai

Author of *I Am Malala*

Dear Malala Yousafzai,

I have always known that I am a lucky girl. I live in a beautiful home, attend a wonderful school, and there is always food on the table. I have been on many vacations, and had the pleasure to travel outside the country multiple times. When I read your book, *I Am Malala*, I realized I am even more fortunate than I thought. I am always safe.

I live in a very secure town in a safe neighborhood, attend a well built school, and my rights are guaranteed. I knew that people were less fortunate than I, without a home and other items, but your book showed me that they lack safety. You lacked safety. I have never had to move because my family felt threatened. I have never had to fight to be able to go to school. I have never been hurt for sticking up for myself and my beliefs.

So what can *I* do about it? How could *I* help? Last Christmas I thought about all of the people in the small town that I live in with disabilities. I realized that they could not go out to see Santa, or do fun events I do every year. I heard about a party being thrown for them called the “V.I.P. Christmas Party,” and decided to volunteer. I helped people getting to Santa, helped apply tattoos, donated toys to give to them as presents. At the end of the party, a little girl came up and gave me a giant hug, saying “Thank You,” with a big smile and left. After that night, my heart felt full. *I* had made a difference. Just remember, even if your difference may seem small, it still makes an impact in the community. I also joined girl scouts, and have had many rewarding projects. We held a book drive called books for Boo-boos. We collected books and gave them to doctors’ offices and hospitals so that kids and adults who are there can have something to distract themselves from pain or boredom. We also decided to do a concert at a nursing home to help cheer up the residents there as well.

Your book changed my perspective of my life, community and world. If I had not read your book, I would not be who I am today.

Level I: Honorable Mentions

I would think of myself as just a lucky girl, one of many people with the ability to help, but don't. Your book helped shape me to be compassionate to all in need, and give a helping hand. It showed me to make my impact on the world, even if it seems invisible on the map. Thank you, for changing my life for the better, and teaching me to be the person I have always wanted to be.

Sincerely,
Mia Wilhite

Level I Semifinalists

Emma Ahern

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to R. J. Palacio

Author of *Wonder*

Dear R. J. Palacio,

The ball reached its highest peak and I exploded off my sore back leg with little confidence only to find out I was too late and the ball would not make it over... again. It felt like the hundredth time I slammed the volleyball down but it just bounced into the net that was staring holes through me. It was tryouts for one of the best clubs, and I wanted to cry. All the other girls never missed a hit and it felt like they got everything right. My parents told me to be proud of myself and to be appreciative that I can play volleyball. When we got the e-mail that I had made the B team I put on a happy face for my parents, but inside I was kind of disappointed in myself for not playing better. Later that night my friend texted me and said that she had made the A team. I groaned, this just made me jealous and frankly a little embarrassed, until I saw your book *Wonder* on my shelf.

As soon as I picked up the book it hit me how blessed I am. "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," when I started reading I realized that his problem turned his world upside-down and mine was a little bump in the road. I know that I am so blessed but I always take that for granted. Even though Auggie is fictional, there are people like Auggie out in the world. He showed me to be thankful for the things I have.

When Summer sits down with Auggie it is so kind when she knows she could be made fun of or laughed at. This part taught me the importance of being kind. If she was not so nice and kind Auggie would have maybe never made friends and have a good end of the year. If it was not for the kindness of Summer and Jack, Auggie would have never survived in middle school. I know how hard it is to

actually go over and sit with someone who other people may not like. Kindness is the key to a good friendship and *Wonder* showed me that.

In fourth grade, me and my two other friends would sit with the special needs kids at lunch. It felt good to do it but I would have just liked to sit with other kids like me. (Well that's what I thought two years ago) One day one of the popular girls asked me to sit with them so I did. Not only my friends were disappointed in me but I was because I let embarrassment get in the way of being a good friend. Kindness is a good thing and I learned never to be mean even if it is the unpopular thing to do.

Your book has had a huge impact on my life and helped me see what I have and what I take for granted. If it wasn't for your book I might have always complained and I could have let that ruin my season. Your book has taught me many things about being kind, thankful, and a better person. I will always try to be a good kind person, and for that I thank you, R. J. Palacio.

Sincerely,
Emma Ahern

Samantha Arendt

Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Patricia Hermes

Author of *You Shouldn't Have to Say Goodbye*

Dear Patricia Hermes,

Your book, *You Shouldn't Have to Say Goodbye*, changed my life and made me realize something important. It made me realize that every moment in your life, the lives of family members, and friends matter. It is sad, but true, that at any moment something could happen to endanger or possibly even kill you! With that I come back to your book. As you know, Sarah's mom died because of cancer. Both of my grandmas both had cancer but, luckily survived. Since we had the same problem in our lives, I shed tears with Sarah.

When I read your book I was in elementary school, like Sarah. I was always eager to go home and read it. Why you ask? Your book had me hooked and connected from the start. I wanted to find out what happened to Sarah's mom that was so dear to her and see if she had the same luck as my grandmothers. When my grandmothers had cancer, I was young and believed that they would survive. I didn't have a lot of emotion at the time, but now I realize how many kids go through the same thing and how many cancer patients die.

Sarah and I shared so many problems, emotions, and fears. When I found out Sarah's mom had cancer, I was sad and hopeful that she would survive her battle. Before Sarah's mom showed up to her gymnastics meet, I was worried about her. I was confused when she arrived in a wheelchair, but I knew it had to do with the cancer weakening her. When her mom died, I just sat in my room and tried not to cry, but a cascade of tears flowed down my face. Why did she die? Why can't everyone live for eternity? I wish this never had to happen; I wish cancer would not exist!

Every time someone I know is diagnosed with cancer or dies, I think of your book and how I should spend as much time with them as I can. Sometimes I'm eager to help families who had to go through the same thing as me. So, with my Grandma Phyllis, I go to Chemo

Level I: Semifinalists

Buddies and Gilda's Club to help out as much as we can. I also pray every night that God watches over people that are ill and their families. I will try to be a hero to those that I can.

I hope that one day your book becomes known to all people battling cancer so that everyone appreciates what they have, and that they try to be a hero and help others win the fight against cancer. Thank you for creating a book I could relate to and knowing that other people feel the way I feel. Your book has impacted people, like me, and made me want to help others. I will always remember ***You Shouldn't Have to Say Goodbye*** and how it impacted me and my life.

Sincerely,
Samantha Arendt

Rory Barnard

Sugar Creek Elementary School, New Palestine

Letter to Nora Raleigh Baskin,

Author of *Nine, Ten: A September 11 Story*

Dear Nora Raleigh Baskin,

Thank you for helping me change my perspective of the world. I used to judge people by how they look or their religion, sometimes just because they're different. Although I didn't really know who they were, I also didn't know that they wanted the same privileges that all Americans want. It also showed me how to not forget, but to forgive the ones we love who have passed away. This book has taught me things that I was truly astonished to learn about.

One character that has helped me understand something (that is still currently a big problem in the United States) is Naheed. One of the many things that she has helped me gain out of this book is that Arabs and Muslims are two totally different groups. I always thought that they were all the same religion and people, but I was very mistaken. Also, I never knew why they wore those things (what I used to call them) around their necks, but I found out that the objects are called hijabs and they wear them because they care about the beauty on the inside not the outside.

Another character that has helped me see a different view of the world is Will. I will always be upset about a family member of mine or a friend's loved one that I cared about very much, but Will has taught me not to dwell in the past as much. Now, everyone did say the same thing as Will did, but he showed me in a different way. No one could relate to how bad I missed my grandmother, they all said nice things, but I don't think that they meant it as much as I hoped they did.

Will taught me to still care about the ones that have passed away, but to also enjoy life while I have it. He was with his friends and his crush, Claire, near the strip mine where Flight 93 crashed on 9/11. He was playing around with his friends just like old times before his dad died. In Will's story he forgave his father, but I also forgave my

grandmother too. Now, I still think of how life would've been if she was still here with me, but I still play with my friends and enjoy life as it is. Whether it is a bad day or a good day.

Thank you again for helping me change my perspective of the world. Now, whenever I see an Arab or a Muslim, I smile at them because I know that they are actually really nice people. I have also been enjoying life as much as I would if my grandmother was still here with me today. You have shown me so many things that I should've known about a long time ago, thank you.

Sincerely,
Rory Barnard

Will Bowen

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Mike Lupica

Author of *Heat*

Dear Mike Lupica,

Zoom! Have you ever heard that sound? Well I had been hearing it a lot. I had been striking out left and right at my baseball games. I was by far the worst offensive player on the team and I wasn't much better at defense either. I had lots of trouble catching the ball. I was starting to get discouraged and I was thinking about quitting baseball.

After reading *Heat* I realized that I am lucky and that being bad at baseball is not a big deal. I also learned that a lot of other people have a lot more serious problems.

Also after reading this book I was encouraged to try to get better at baseball. I was encouraged because I read about all the struggles that Michael had to go through in baseball and that made me realize that I wasn't a lost cause. I could get better at baseball if I really practiced.

So that's what I did, I kept practicing and eventually my practice payed off. I got invited to a showcase baseball team. I ended up playing showcase for two years and in those two years I kept practicing hard and then I got invited to a travel baseball team.

In conclusion I learned that if you want to get better at baseball you just have to work for it. I also learned that this applies to the real world because if you want something in life you will have to work for it.

Sincerely,
Will Bowen

Emma Chamberlain

Zionsville

Letter to Sharon Draper

Author of ***Out of My Mind***

Dear Mrs. Draper,

I love your book ***Out of My Mind***. Not only is it a great book, I can relate to it as well. For example, when people are ignoring Melody I feel like I have been that person before. Just pretending like someone's not there because they are different. I knew that it was wrong but I didn't want to be known as that girl who hangs out with the "weird" kids. While I was reading your book it was like I was on a rollercoaster of emotion. At times I was mad at myself while other times I felt sympathy for Melody and everyone I had disregarded.

When your book came to an end I had finally realized that what I had been doing was unacceptable and I needed to fix it. At first I was a little uneasy, just saying hi to the "special needs" kids in the hallway. Giving the occasional hugs. Though this was a big step up for me, I still felt like it wasn't enough. After thinking for awhile I decided to join best buddies. It was just what I was looking for. After talking to the disability kids, I realized they were actually a lot more like me than I thought. Some of us even liked the same music and would dance around together. It felt so good to me and even better to them.

As of today I am in 2 different programs helping "special needs" kids and I am looking for more ways to help out. It is so much fun and it feels really great to be comfortable with the kids. I just wanted to let you know how much your book has impacted my life. I am now spreading the word to many people that the "special" kids aren't really that different and we shouldn't just ignore them.

Thank you so much,
Emma Chamberlain

Bella Colon

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Clair Belton

Author of *I Am Pusheen the Cat*

Dear Claire Belton,

In the hallways, people are people. I am also one of those people. Just one little smear of paint in a huge mural. On the outside I'm just an average middle schooler. Go to classes, do homework, eat lunch. That's what normal kids do. But on the inside, I'm a completely different person. On the inside, I'm a wackadoodle ding dong. I've always wanted to embrace my weirdness, but I was afraid that others would think I'm an outsider.

Then, I found the book *I Am Pusheen the Cat*. Pusheen was a totally weird (in a good way) cat. Other cats probably think she's a loser, but Pusheen doesn't care. She just keeps on shedding on a chair. After I read this book, I learned to just be myself and if others don't like it, then they can just go find a cat wizard. So when I walk, it turns into a skip. When I talk, it turns into a song.

In the hallways, people are people. Go to classes, do homework, eat lunch. That's what normal kids do. I learned I'm not just a little smear of paint, but that I'm a painting in a huge art gallery. Because everyone has something different about them, just like paintings. Your book inspired me to set the wackadoodle ding dong out of me and embrace it. I've always been afraid of being an outsider. Now, I see it's not being an outsider, it's just being unique. Thank you for inspiring me to be myself.

Sincerely,
Bella Colon

Level I: Semifinalists

Ian Davis

Northview Elementary, Gas City

Letter to R. J. Palacio

Author of *Wonder*

Dear R. J. Palacio,

“Kind words do not cost much. Yet they accomplish much.” That precept echoed in my head as I quickly read through your amazing page-turner, *Wonder*. I admit it. I am not always the nicest person in the world. I’m not like a kid who is always a jerk or anything, but I’m not only good and no bad. I make mistakes.

Everyone does. But after I read your book, I decided I would make less of those mistakes. In the scene of the book where Jack was talking about Auggie behind Auggie’s back (and saying mean stuff), I silently told myself that right there, right then, on my bed in my room, I was going to make some changes. I resolved that I wouldn’t say anything about someone that I wouldn’t say to their face unless it was about one of my best friends and it was a joke that they would understand and not care if I say. I now think I am more of friends with people now that your book flipped my life around, in a good way.

Another way that your book changed me is that when I learned Auggie just looked a little different but was the same as other kids on the inside. And I thought I had it bad! A lot of kids say they want to be normal, but really, what is normal? I mean you can say you do “normal” things, like play sports or something like that, but if everyone is different and likes different things, then how can two different people both be normal? And what makes one person normal, and another person weird or different if they like more of the same things, but another “normal” person doesn’t like the same things as the other person. I just don’t get it. That’s how you made me look at things differently thanks to your first novel.

A connection I had with your book is with soccer. It is linked to the championship of soccer, which was played on the only field we had. Our team was undefeated and so going into the game and we knew this was the most important match of all. We played the match and won, and I was super excited that we had won the championship.

I was practically flipping cartwheels on the field, which makes me think of what Auggie must have felt like when he won the Henry Ward Beecher award. I'm not going to go into depth about that part because you already probably know it by heart but when I was reading it I basically broke into cheers and was joining the rest of the crowd shouting, "Auggie, Auggie!" These are all the ways your incredible book changed me. I would be a completely different person without your "wonder" of a book. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Ian Davis

Yael Ehrlich

Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to M.E. Kerr

Author of *The Green Killer*

Dear M.E. Kerr,

Misconception, jealousy, and insecurity are feelings that sometimes I have felt with friends and even within my family. In your story *The Green Killer*, I strongly identified with Alan. Like Alan who thought his cousin Blaze was handsome, smart, and rich, I have had a similar experience in middle school. Things aren't always the way they seem at first. My insecurity led me to think that the grass was always greener on the other side. Instead of being happy with who I was, I was dreaming of being everything I was not.

Being a middle schooler isn't always easy especially when your class is the youngest one in the school. That is the case with me. In my school, I am right at the bottom of the food chain. I'm just one small sardine swimming in a large ocean filled with predators. This is the perfect recipe for feelings of insecurity. How will I ever make it to the top of the food chain without getting gobbled up by these ferocious sea monsters?!

All these problems started on the first day of school. All of a sudden my best friend was being taken away by all of the cool kids and I slowly drifted off to the side like an invisible piece of plankton. That was my first awakening to life as a middle schooler. Was I boring? Ugly? Annoying? Maybe not, but at the time all I knew for sure was that I was suddenly alone. So, I started hanging out with really nice and welcoming classmates, people who I never played with before. I was still friends with my best friend but we just didn't hang out with the same crowds. It wasn't all smooth sailing. For starters I didn't know who to play with at recess. Frightened of the cool kids, I stayed with my goofy classmates. Although they let me in their games, many times I felt out of place.

One day, during lunch, I was sitting with my adversary. My friend tried to bring up something to our adversary but nobody listened. We kept on trying to speak to them but they just wouldn't listen. We just

started saying random things and it was hilarious. That whole lunch period we couldn't stop laughing. I was so happy. In that moment, I was finally able to be myself and not care if people ignored me. My friends and I may appear weird to other people but we have our own sense of humor and are a very tight-knit group of friends. As the weeks passed by, I started to feel more and more comfortable acting as who I really am.

The Green Killer came into my life at the right time. Alan had misconceptions about his cousin whom he thought was handsome and just had positive traits and Blaze was not sure of himself at all. He was actually glad to lie and cheat to keep his image. Your story helped me realize that it's ok to be who I am even if it is just a tiny fish in the ocean. I'm happy with who I am, including all of my imperfections. Things aren't always as they seem and maybe the grass is really greener just where I am.

Your grateful fan,
Yael

Brayden Emery

Greensburg Elementary, Greensburg

Letter to James Patterson

Author of *I Funny: A Middle School Story*

Dear James Patterson,

Thank you for making the book *I Funny: A Middle School Story*, because it made me realize that I should be nicer to people that may not have that many friends. It also made me realize that if someone that you see is getting bullied you should try to help them even if you don't like them. Another effect that it gave on my life is that you could try to make people laugh if they are hurt or if they are sad and upset. That always seems to make them happier. I'm really glad that I read your book so that I could truly realize all of those things to make people feel better when they are blue. An example that is from the book that really changed my mind was how Jamie was on a stage and no one was laughing until he told that one funny joke.

Now that I know all of that stuff I am going to help people with the information that you and Jamie gave me. So if I see someone that is feeling down I will try to make them happy again. When I do that I'll thank you. The people that I cheer up will probably ask me how I knew that what I said would make them happy. I would say that I learned about being nicer to other people because I read a book and it taught me that. When I was reading the book it made me laugh so much. I laughed so hard that when I read the book in my bedroom, people in my living room could most likely hear me laughing. You are one of the best writers in the world in my opinion. I love your books so much because they make me feel happy.

I really like the covers that you make on the front of your books. They don't just say the words of the title. It kind of shows what Jamie Grimme does to make people happy. He has a weird and funny pair of glasses on. Weird and funny things makes people happy. That is kind of how I figured out what Jamie does. If you think really hard and use common sense you can figure that out before you even read the pages where it explains what Jamie does. All it takes is a lot of thinking, not a little but a lot!

Jamie gets bullied a lot because he tries to make people happy but sometimes they don't turn out to be happy. Another reason he gets bullied is because he has lost the use of his legs. It is sad that they bully him for that. If all those people that are being mean to Jamie lost the use of their legs they wouldn't want anyone to bully them. I just wish that some people would think about that when they are being mean to other kids. That is why Jamie tries to make people happy. If I was Jamie I would definitely try to do the exact same thing that he does. But Jamie is way funnier than I am. If we had a contest about who the funniest kid in the world is and we were the contestants I would forfeit. That kind of reminds me about a part in the book how there was a part where Jamie was in a competition like that. I would never be able to reach that far in fame. Even if I became rich I wouldn't ever be able to be that famous. I might be exaggerating a little bit. But all I'm really trying to say is thank you!

Sincerely,
Brayden Emery

Megan Gilmour

Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Robert Munsch

Author of *Love You Forever*

Dear Robert Munsch,

The first time I read your book I was three. My mom would read it to me as my bedtime story. Every time she read *Love You Forever*, it created a spark inside me. I went to your website and read about the story description. I was so sorry about your two stillborn babies. From then on, I always thought of how lucky I was to be in this world.

I know that this might seem weird, but from about the first time I read the book to now I always liked my parents to tuck me in at night. It made me feel safe if they were there to check in on me. Your book made me realize how you have to hold the ones you love close before you lose them. Last year, my best friend moved away and I thought it would be the end of the world. She always did everything with me. When she moved, it made me feel like I lost her forever. I know that you losing your children was a lot worse than me having a close friend move fourteen hours away, but I felt your pain. Now, almost every night before I go to sleep, I sing a little song in my head. *I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, as long as we're living, best friends we'll be.* I hope you don't mind that it is a little like yours.

Love You Forever changed me deep down in my heart, I try to appreciate every moment I have with my parents. I know that one day I will “grow and grow and grow” to be my own grown up and then when my baby is asleep I will pick him or her up and rock them “back and forth back and forth” then, I will sing your song.

Sincerely,
Megan Gilmour

Ellie Hahn

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Sharon Draper

Author of *Out of My Mind*

Dear Sharon M. Draper,

One day I was walking in Lions Park with my friend. We were both very young and lively kids. We decided to go swing on the swings and a few minutes later a girl who looked about 10 years old came to the swings in a wheelchair. At that moment my friend and I ran to the other side of the playground and stayed on the opposite side of the girl the whole time. It was not a very amusing playground trip. After she left we played for a little while longer and then left. About a year or two later I picked up your book and was so intrigued. After I was done reading your book I thought about the trip to the park I took. I sat in my room for a while and just visualized that whole trip in my mind then, I made a promise to myself that I would never forget.

I promised myself that day that I would never run away or judge anyone like that ever again. I also told myself to go up to someone just like that person at the park and talk to them. When I see someone in a wheelchair who is different than me, I always think of Melody. She dealt with all of the people around her in a great way. She would ignore the people who were staring at her, and be herself. I think that is something that is hard to do, and is very strong of her. When people gaze at people like Melody in the park or at my school I just think about how hard it would be to have so many people staring at you.

If I could do that whole situation over again I would definitely go say “hi” and invite her to play with us. If I was that little girl, I would probably be broken. Therefore, your book made me regret that park trip and my heart goes out to all of those kids less fortunate than I am. I am so sorry about what my friend and I did to that little girl and I hope I can see her again sometime to tell her how really sorry I am.

Thank you for writing your book to show me how rude and selfish I was to people. I am very glad that I know how people like Melody

Level I: Semifinalists

feel when people stare and murmur about her. It makes me always think to myself what it would be like if I was always stared at and whispered about. Thank you for making a profound impact on my life and the way that I treat people.

Sincerely,
Ellie Hahn

Mallory Heerd

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Lynda Mullaly Hunt

Author of *One for the Murphy's*

Dear Lynda Mullaly Hunt,

On my driveway in the hot humid air dribbling a basketball, looking at my bare feet. Trying out the new moves I had learned. Between the legs. Behind the back. Spin move plowing into my 6'1" brother for a layup. He knocked me to the ground. I get back up. When he dribbles all I can think of is how I want to be like him. I eventually got the ball back when I tried another layup but he blocked my shot. My 8th grade brother said to me "try shooting a jump shot." I yell at him "try being 2 years younger and a girl!" I storm of into the house frustrated at him because he is so much better than me.

The only thing that calmed me down was reading your book. Now I have basketball, a mom, a dad, a brother who wants to help me, and even two step parents. I know that I am lucky and loved very much and other kids don't have both of those things. Sometimes I wonder if I am selfish for taking advantage of it.

Your book *One for the Murphy's* calmed me down because my problems are so much smaller than hers. Carley got taken away from her mom, my parents just got divorced when I was five. Carley has to live with three foster brothers, I only live with one. Carley can't play basketball every day, I can. Even though my problems are difficult hers made me realize that I am not alone.

When I am nice to my brother he is nice to me. So sometimes we go outside and he teaches me how to do post moves or where I should shoot my best jump shot. Carly doesn't have family like that, I mean sure she has three foster brothers but they don't have that bond that me and my brother do. Now I am a lot nicer to my brother. Because of your book, we have grown a lot stronger as siblings.

I know now that I am lucky, fortunate and I should be grateful for what I have. Your book will forever be remembered because it has made me feel things that I have never felt before. While reading your

Level I: Semifinalists

book emotions of sadness and gratefulness poured out of me. Thank you for helping me understand my life in a different perspective.

Sincerely,
Mallory Heerd

Eli Hocking

Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Grace Lin

Author of *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*

Dear Grace Lin,

Some people stay the same after reading a book, but your novel helped me realize that I should be grateful for what I have, not want more and help others. The heart you put into writing *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* gives me the heart and courage to help the poor and the ill. That's why I joined *generationOn*, which is an organization at our school that helps people find ways to help the community. One example is when we held a fundraiser to give little kids stuffed bears. Activities like this help me to understand a lot more about society, giving me a sense of triumph.

I have always been very shy. Ever since preschool, I haven't had many close friends. My personality was more the introverted nerd of the class who didn't really care about anything but school. Minli went on a journey to find the Old Man of the Moon to ask him how her family can change their fortune. Starting in 2014, I became involved in changing others' wealth and help the disadvantaged have a normal life. From that deed, I made friends to support me when I am down. To this day, I deliver food and clothes to the poor when there are fundraisers. I sometimes try to find ways to donate to organizations that cure diseases such as donating money or helping run fundraisers. You showed me the difference between alive and living.

As I continue down the roads of my life, I know I will not always remember the importance of helping others because I'll become preoccupied. However, I do know that when I face especially difficult or wonderful choices, I will remember that the decisions Minli made gave her the confidence not to let anyone but her determine her future; I will try to do the same. You taught me that whether I'm a veterinarian, a police officer, a firefighter, or even president, there are many ways to help others.

Yours truly,
Eli Hocking

Shelby Hunn

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Jeanne DuPrau

Author of *The City of Ember*

Dear Jeanne DuPrau,

One crisp spring morning I hopped out of the car energized and ready to run. I put on my shoes and started my run around the trees and through the dewy grass. As I passed my friend she asked me how I run so fast. I told her there is no special way it is just a part of you. Then she asked if I could run with her. Little did I know that by running with her would crush one of my dreams but make a better one.

I ran with her two times a week after that. We ran one hour before school started because we were in running club. In running club you set a goal. Every season my goal was a marathon and I always made it. This year was my last year that I could be in running club so I knew I should push myself harder than ever. I decided I could run more than a marathon this year so I set my goal for the superman (supermarathon) which was 50 miles. I wanted to grow up and be the fastest woman in the world. Recently I had picked up your book *The City of Ember*. After running for a while with her I realized I wasn't going to make my goal unless I ran without her. I knew I couldn't do that and I thought about Doon and Lina. They didn't give up each other no matter what. I didn't want to run without my friend so I lowered my goal to marathon. After the last week we had our running club breakfast where they give out awards after you eat a delicious breakfast. Seeing everyone happy of what they accomplished made me happy to. Then my coach announced three special awards. When she didn't announce my name for the first two awards I was sure that I wouldn't get an award. And finally the time came for my coach to announce the last award. She announced my name! I was very cheerful.

Then standing on the stage with my award in my hand, smiling, I realized that maybe being the fastest woman runner in the world wasn't my dream. I learned that the best dreams are the ones that surprise you. Standing on that stage smiling at people and my friend

was greater than running 50 miles, 100 miles, even 1,000 miles because these moments are the best ones. Your book has taught me you can be different. It also taught me that when something pulls you down grab it and climb back up. “Run when you can, walk if you have to, crawl if you must; just never give up.”

Sincerely,
Shelby Hunn

McCullough Jordan

Park Tudor School, Indianapolis

Letter to Cynthia Lord

Author of *Rules*

Dear Ms. Cynthia Lord,

When I read your book *Rules* it taught me to accept others even if they are different from me, and also to treat them in a kind and thoughtful way. Some kids at my summer camp are a little different. They remind me of David because they play by themselves, act strangely, and get weird looks from other kids. Some other kids thought that the children who are different are weird. These kids didn't want to work with the children who are different.

Before I read your book, sometimes I was uncomfortable talking to kids that are different than me. But now I go up and introduce myself. Instead of ignoring kids that are different, I try to talk to them, become friends, and learn more about them. I believe kids with disabilities aren't kids that are "really weird" and "gross" but are just kids with different talents that my other friends and I aren't able to do. Some people are scared of disabled kids but now I am not.

People come in all shapes and sizes. This refers to all kinds of people like David or like his sister or like me. It doesn't matter what you look like or how you talk, but it does matter what's inside. Your parents tell you that you can change the world. I believe that's true for me and it shouldn't be different for disabled kids. They can change the world just as well as I can.

I just want to thank you for writing this book because it has changed my life and hopefully many other young readers.

Sincerely,
McCullough Jordan

Cookie Kaur

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Daniel Keyes

Author of *Flowers for Algernon*

Dear Mr. Keyes,

Anyone can say that they've read a good book, but I think that what makes a good book is how it changes you. *Flowers for Algernon* was one of those books. This book helped change my take on different people, as well as start a new family tradition.

Flowers for Algernon helped me understand how important it was, or still is, to treat people equally. I agree with you when you wrote "How strange it is that people of honest feelings and sensibility, who would not take advantage of a man born without arms or legs or eyes—how such people think nothing of abusing a man with low intelligence."

I realized that many people may sympathize with physically disabled people, but we often overlook those who suffer from mental disabilities. I wanted to change this, but wasn't sure how. I ended up looking up if there were really schools like the one Charlie went to, and found thousands of results, as well as a link to a charity website.

I don't celebrate Christmas, since I don't practice a religion (and the only holiday I celebrate is Halloween, because free candy), but when I told my parents about the charity website in December 2014, my parents told me that it would be nice if we started helping out people in need.

Now, every Christmas, my family cleans out our piggy banks, and donates around \$200 to the charity every year. I also set up a hot chocolate stand every winter break, when I go to visit my relatives in Chicago. Another way to gain extra cash to donate.

I think that *Flowers for Algernon* was a big help in pushing my family to make this change, and I hope that it will continue to do so for others around the world.

Thanks for listening,
Cookie Kaur

Level I: Semifinalists

Alayna Lautner

Castle North Middle School, Newburgh

Letter to Marcus Sedgwick

Author of *The Ghost of Heaven*

Dear Marcus Sedgwick,

Most ballerinas I know started ballet at a young age. By young, I mean between three and six. I started ballet at nine which put me in a class with girls at the least three years younger than me. Luckily, I am naturally talented at ballet and was able to make friends. About a month ago, after only two years in dance, the ballet director made me an offer. I am in Level Three but was offered to go to ballet five days a week including a Level Four class. To be asked to go into a higher level before everyone else was a great honor. Ambitious and eager, I jumped on the chance. I had no idea how hard it was going to be.

In the Level Four class, on Mondays, I was oblivious half of the time. I had no idea what to do, and it burdened me like nothing had before. I continued to do my best, but frustration flooded me when I compared my skill to the others. I was impressed by the skill of the other Level Four dancers who were younger than me. They could do things that only people with years of practice could do. I started judging myself unfairly, and I was obsessed about my skill compared to them.

When I read your book, *The Ghost of Heaven*, it woke me up. I admit, when I first read your book, it confused me and, for that reason, I didn't regard it as one of my favorite books. It only made an impression when I realized what it meant. It happened recently when I realized more about spirals. I was talking to my mom about the concepts of your book and I told her that spirals were what made up the world. She told me I was right; that spirals make up time. I recalled Dexter walking that spiral staircase, making it against all odds.

My spiral staircase is ballet. I know my fear was never getting as good as the other girls in ballet. I was scared that I would never be as good as the dancers around me and wanted to take the easier route of quitting. I made myself look at the negative things of me instead of my talents. I would only subconsciously focus on the mistakes.

Your book showed me to embrace my skill level in another way—to concentrate on the good.

Now, as I'm spinning in turns I can now do, I know from above I look like a spiral. I think of the spiral shell, I think of the spinning top, I think of Dexter. I hope my never-ending ballet spiral is one that will truly never end.

Your reader,
Alayna Lautner

Paige Leman

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to J.K. Rowling

Author of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

Dear J.K. Rowling,

Your book series, especially the *Deathly Hallows*, has really impacted me. It has impacted me because I became a better reader, better writer, and a better person. I learned I love reading which has changed me forever.

Before I read your series, I was reading little chapter books but none really grabbed my attention. A close friend recommended Harry Potter so I decided to try it out. Every day I got more in depth like I was really with the main characters and that made me love the book so much more. My imagination was sparked like a match being lit on fire. By the time I got to the *Deathly Hallows* book, I was blown away by how good books could be, and how they can take you to a new world.

In addition, your books are so well written that I saw how to use my imagination and play with my own writing. I started to become a better writer when describing fear, love, hate, and more. Now, writing seems easier, and my mind seems more creative. I use descriptive instead of bland words and more action-packed story lines. I have learned how to express myself better than before reading your books.

Lastly, your final book, *Deathly Hallows*, made me a better person because of how Harry, Hermione, and Ron's friendship was tested. It inspired me so much about how loyal and trustworthy they were to each other even when it was like the whole world was fighting against them. They cared more about friendship and each other than money or fame. Yes, they did hit some rough spots, but they were always there for each other. This book provides a good message about friendship and loyalty. It has made me care even more for my friends and family and realize that every minute is a blessing with each other.

The *Deathly Hallows* has really changed me to be a better reader, writer, and friend. I took away these skills, and I can't thank you enough for inspiring and teaching me. I learned that no one can take away your love of reading but most importantly is your love of family.

Thanks,
Paige Leman

Ethan Lindeman

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Tim Tebow

Author of *Shaken* and *Through My Eyes*

Dear Tim Tebow,

I have recently finished reading your book *Shaken*. I really enjoyed it, but I have to say that *Through My Eyes* is my favorite because I enjoyed learning about you and your family. The chapter in the book, “Preparing a Foundation,” where you explained your education and learning disability, was the part I could relate to the most. I actually read *Through My Eyes* while being homeschooled, and during that year I too found out I had dyslexia. I am now back in a public school trying to keep up.

Each day I am continuing to struggle through how I learn best and having the confidence in myself. My mom encourages me as your mom encouraged you: “dyslexia wasn’t a disability, just a difference.” Your words encourage me too. When you explained how your mom affirmed that we are all “wonderful creations of God, with our God-given intelligence and abilities,” this gives me confidence that God made me and He has a plan for me.

As I think about God’s plan and my future, I have always thought I wanted to go into the medical field and be a nurse or doctor. Since I read your book *Shaken*, I now have more confidence to pursue my dream of being in the U.S. Marines. I thought that being in medicine was what the world saw as successful, but I wasn’t sure that was my purpose. When you found out that you were cut from the football team, you said that “maybe this was God’s plan for me.” Your books electrify me to pursue my dreams, never give up hope, and seek what God is calling me to do.

Sincerely,
Ethan M. Lindeman

Zach McEwen

Riverside Intermediate School, Fishers

Letter to Saint Paul

Author of the *Letter to the Ephesians*

Dear Saint Paul,

While reading the *New Testament*, I came across your letter to the Ephesians. In the last chapter, chapter 6, verses 10–20, it is labeled, “The Armor of God.” This has really helped me get through tough times, including a death in my family, unhappiness, and despair. When I came across this passage, “... Against the power of this dark world and Satan ... put in the full armor of God ... buckle the Belt of Truth around your waist ... the Breastplate of Righteousness ... ready your feet with the Gospel of Peace ... take up the Shield of Faith ... the Helmet of Salvation ... and the Sword of the Spirit”

As I was reading your letter, the words of the letter stopped the gnawing thought of my parents’ divorce. Even though this letter was to the people of Ephesus to encourage them to stay faithful to the Lord, anyone can use those words and it can turn their life around. Whenever temptation has gripped me to do something wrong or non-Christian, I have called upon these words. My faith’s shelter was crumbling and the metal beams of support coming from the Armor, it was covered.

Those words helped me deal with my great grandmother dying. Most people would resent God for taking a loved one, but your Gospel preaches about trust in the Lord. Instead of resenting Him, I’m thanking Him for taking away her pain and weariness of this world and that she is now going to a much better place than this dark world. Ephesians states that the Armor will protect me from despair and evil as long as we have faith.

All in all, the Armor of God as you state it to be, is stronger than any armor available that is made by humans. It protects us from evil and gives us hope, hope for a better tomorrow. Thank you, Paul, for the uplifting words written in the book of Ephesians. Thank you.

Thank you,
Zachary McEwen

Michelle McLaughlin

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Sharon Draper

Author of *Out of My Mind*

Dear Sharon Draper,

Out of My Mind has taught me to never underestimate kids with disabilities. I do not have cerebral palsy, but my family knows someone who does. When I was little and my family lived in Delaware, we hung out a lot with a family that had a daughter with cerebral palsy. Grace was in a wheelchair every time we saw her. Unlike Melody, Grace could speak. However, her words did not come out very clearly, so sometimes, it was hard to understand what she said. I remember that her parents had to feed her, and Grace could only drink with a straw. As Grace got older, her parents had to move her bedroom to the first floor because she was too heavy to carry up the steps. Taking care of Grace must have been a burden for them. She was eighteen when we moved away, but in many ways, Grace seemed childlike because she spoke so few words and was dependent on her parents for everything. Still, she always seemed happy, but I was sure she struggled in school and probably wasn't very smart.

After reading *Out of My Mind*, I realized that my opinion of Grace could not have been more wrong. Even though some kids with disabilities may not be able to talk or move on their own, they can still understand things and they could be very smart. Melody's story is a great example of why we should never judge a book by its cover. The way you wrote the novel helped me to understand how Melody felt through her quiz team adventure. When she couldn't compete at the competition in Washington D.C., I was mad at her teammates. When she got on the quiz team, I was really happy for her. Even though most people at school thought that Melody wasn't capable of making the team, her neighbor, Mrs. V, coached her as she prepared for the test, because she believed in Melody. Mrs. V looked past Melody's physical limitations and treated her like a regular person.

It has been nearly five years since we've seen Grace. If we ever have the chance to visit her again, I am sure I will see a Grace that I've

never seen before. I will look beyond her wheelchair and see a unique individual who, just like anyone else, has her own interests and aspirations and who has brought much love and happiness to all of those around her.

Sincerely,
Michelle McLaughlin

Ben Olsen

Southern Indiana

Letter to Cressida Cowell

Author of *How to Train Your Dragon*

Dear Cressida Cowell,

Your book, *How to Train Your Dragon*, caught my attention immediately because I enjoy reading stories about dragons. I normally just read for entertainment; however, after I finished reading the book, I discovered that I had a connection with the book. This connection came to me like the sunrise—it was gradual, I had to think about it before it came to me. I felt a connection with the conflict that occurs between Snotlout and Hiccup.

The other day, I was in a headlock with my brother. At that moment I realized he was similar to Snotlout. I am constantly at the mercy of my older and much larger, athletic brother. Even though my brother is mean to me by putting me in headlocks, I am learning to deal with this hardship like Hiccup dealt with Snotlout. First, I realized that I will not achieve a victory in every battle. Second, I am learning that even the best laid plan may not be effective. As a result, I must remain calm and persevere by thinking through the difficulty.

A common perception among bullies is that the rules do not apply to them. When Snotlout was picking his dragon, he picked a monstrous nightmare even though only chiefs and their children were allowed to have these dragons. This fact makes Snotlout seem like my brother because they both disregard the rules. On numerous occasions, my brother has eaten food in my room and left garbage on the floor. The result is me cleaning up his mess, and then I am reprimanded for breaking the food rule.

Many times it seems like only the rich, famous, athletic people win in life. Your entertaining and light-hearted book restored my faith; the underdogs or social outcasts can be victorious. A prime example of this is how Hiccup defeated the Green Death while the warriors, who fight off enemies and keep people safe, could not. *How to Train Your Dragon* has also given me confidence that I can out think my brother because Hiccup was able to use his intelligence to overcome obstacles.

Hiccup defeated the Green Death by stabbing it from inside; he had to think on his feet. Anyone can be a winner when they are willing to fight and work for what they believe in.

Sincerely,
Ben Olsen

Lara Rahman

Park Tudor School, Indianapolis

Letter to Sharon Draper

Author of *Out of My Mind*

Dear Mrs. Draper,

Out of My Mind is a book I will never forget. It's about a girl named Melody who is around my age. She is very similar to me except she has many disabilities. This book allowed me to get into the mind of a girl who is trapped in her own body. She is in a wheelchair and cannot talk, but has a lot of feelings and thoughts. Like many girls, she is concerned about her image, how she dresses and how she fits in at school. I learned about how many people ignored her because they thought she did not have the same feelings we all do. This girl was an inspiration for me because despite her disability of not being able to speak or walk, she worked very hard to do well in school.

Coincidentally, after I read the book, I met a girl named Rida who had similar disabilities. I felt like we really connected. Even though she had to stay in a wheelchair and couldn't walk around like my friends and I, she seemed happy. My friends and I got to go to her room and read her a book.

I now understand that even if someone looks like they don't know what's going on or screams wildly when you don't expect it, it doesn't mean they don't have feelings. It means they are trying to express themselves. Even people with disabilities have thoughts, feelings and opinions too.

Sincerely,
Lara Rahman

Lillie Recker

Benjamin Franklin Middle School, Valparaiso

Letter to Betty G. Birney

Author of *Summer According to Humphrey*

Dear Ms. Birney,

Your writing has truly changed me as a person. But let me start from the beginning. I am a sixth grade honors student. I have always found reading to be easy. You would think someone that can read well would love to read, right? Well I really don't. I mean I really didn't until I read your books about Humphrey!

I started reading your books in second grade. I fell in love with Humphrey from the start. It was awesome how a cute fluffy hamster could be so intelligent and loving. It was a really special time for my mom and I to read your books every night before bed. Not only was my mom delighted that I had found a book series that I loved, she loved the books too.

I loved how Humphrey had nicknames for all of the classmates. I also enjoyed reading about the adventures he had at their houses over the weekend while they took care of him. Golden Miranda was my favorite character in the book. She was so sweet and kind to Humphrey. One of my favorite adventures was when Humphrey searched for his missing buddy, Og at summer camp.

My favorite book of yours was *Summer According to Humphrey*. I loved that there was a new concept instead of in the classroom. Humphrey had so many adventures. A few of his favorite classmates and even Humphrey's best pal Aldo spent the summer at Camp Happy Hollow with him.

So setting aside how great your books were how did they change me? Well like I said I used to hate reading. I am the pickiest reader you will ever find. Books just weren't interesting for me. That was until I discovered Humphrey. I loved everything about him. It was such a cool concept to have a pet hamster help so many people without them realizing it. I can't thank you enough for showing me how to love reading.

Level I: Semifinalists

I loved your books so much that I told everyone about them! I told all my friends and even my second grade teacher! She started reading them to our class and it was so fun! No Humphrey books would be left in our school library because all the second graders had checked them out. We even begged every day to our teacher that we wanted a pet hamster. Unfortunately we didn't get one, so instead we read about Humphrey every day.

So thank you! Thank you for creating an amazing character that I will love forever. Thank you for showing me how to love and get excited about reading. Thank you for not only creating a book that's great, but interesting and funny. Thank you!

Love,
Lillie Recker

Jacob Rose

Salem Middle School, Salem

Letter to Dr. Seuss

Author of *The Dr. Seuss Collection*

Dear Dr. Seuss,

As a young child you sparked my imagination, your books inspired me to be creative and to enjoy being a child. My favorite book is by far *The Cat in the Hat*. *The Cat in the Hat* taught me you might be bored, but as long as you can pretend and have imagination you'll never be as bored as Sally and Conrad. Your books also helped me learn to enunciate and most importantly, you taught me how to read. Without your books, I would not be in honors language arts, or as smart as I am today.

You also taught me that creativity has no limits. Your books inspired me to draw, and drawing got me to do crafts. Even though I'm a boy a lot of people don't realize art is not a boy or girl thing. Your books also taught me EVERYTHING is possible if you just believe. Ever since I read your books and started drawing I have won five art contests and that was all because of you.

Your books also inspired me to try new things. Your book *Green Eggs and Ham* not only got me to try out the piano it also got me to show and take care of many different species of animals. Your books really have inspired me to do a lot in life because of your books I've played the piano since I was four, and have won many trophies and ribbons, and that was all because of your books that sparked my imagination at an early age. I could never thank you enough.

Sincerely,
Jacob Rose

Nate Sapp

Riverside Intermediate School, Fishers

Letter to Shel Silverstein

Author of *The Giving Tree*

Dear Shel Silverstein,

I've never really thought about how helping people can benefit me as well as others. I do a favor for them, and I get a "thanks," then I say "you're welcome," and I move on. After reading your book, *The Giving Tree*, I realized that there is something more to helping people.

The tree in *The Giving Tree* gave the boy all of her apples, her branches, and her trunk. He gave her nothing in return, yet she was still happy. She was only a stump, but she was gleeful for solely the reason that she helped him.

Before I read *The Giving Tree*, I thought that it was rude for people not to give anything to someone that lent a helping hand to them. Your book has helped me realize that you don't actually need a reward. The reward that you get is the joyfulness that comes from helping someone. In fact, my favorite quote in *The Giving Tree* is this: "The tree was happy." This part, and the fact that it was said many times, helps me understand that you can be content even when you don't get anything in return when helping people.

After I read *The Giving Tree*, I started helping people as much as I could. I still do. One time, I helped a foster kid by donating about half of my clothes to him through my church. I never got any reward, but it still brought me happiness. I mean, I just helped a kid in need. That's enough reward. I think about the lesson that you taught me whenever I help someone, and I'm happy even if they don't give me anything in return. Thank you for teaching me this lesson.

Sincerely,
Nate Sapp

William Schell

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to James Dashner

Author of *The Maze Runner*

Dear James Dashner,

A few weeks ago, I was watching my father run a half marathon when I saw a man on the side of the road. At first, I didn't realize that he was homeless. My mother has always told me not to get near strangers. But later that day I remembered reading your book, and I wished that I could go back and help him.

Your book, *The Maze Runner*, changed me when I read it. It helped me understand how to use my time and not to give up on challenges that seem impossible to solve. It changed the way I thought about things around me and made me realize that people around will need help even if we are not trapped inside a maze.

Like Thomas, I had to move to a new place and make new friends. About a year ago, I moved to Indiana from Maryland. Friends like Chuck, Newt, Minho, and Alby all helped me get used to living here. I did not get my memories wiped, but everything felt new to me. After reading your book I understood that I could adjust to my new life just like Thomas adjusted to his new life.

When I face challenges and puzzles in school and out of school, your book reminds me not to give up. For example, in math class, I will run across a problem that will be hard, but I will not give up on it. Or in English or writing, I will be looking and looking, not being able to find an answer or textual evidence for an essay or question, but I will not give up on the question until I figure it out.

Also, this book made me use my time while I'm alive wisely. About five years ago, my grandfather died. When I read this book, it made me feel better knowing that my Papa died knowing he used up all his time wisely. I too, would like to know that when I die. Like in *The Maze Runner*, I could die at any time. So, I decided to sign up for things after school and spend more time with my family instead

Level I: Semifinalists

of sitting around all day. I now spend over 60 hours a week at school and have developed a passion for music and spending time with my family.

Overall, *The Maze Runner* changed me and the way I see the world around me. I felt better after reading your book and all your others. James Dashner, your words changed my life. I want to thank you for helping me become the person I am meant to be.

Sincerely,
William Schell

Jack Schlueter

Zionsville Middle School, Zionsville

Letter to Bobby Knight

Author of *The Power of Negative Thinking*

Dear Bobby Knight,

My team is playing in the state championship, we are the favored team and seed number one. We are playing a small team that was seeded fourth but is running the table. Our team goes to sleep confident, but I am still up worrying. "What if they press or run a zone and we can't get past it?" That's happened before, and is a big possibility. That night, I looked for something to read. That's when I found *The Power of Negative Thinking* and that book changed my whole approach to life.

That night, I learned to prepare for your weaknesses. Instead of worrying about what will go wrong, prepare for it. If I came upon a situation where I had to use my left hand, I will know what to do. One weakness for our team was the zone and how to react to it. Our team wasn't very good at recognizing and reacting to zone defenses, but we have plays to break it. I will be ready to recognize the defense and react accordingly from now on. Once I thought it all out, it was much easier to play basketball.

Another power this book influenced is losing. I have lost countless amount of times over the years, so I don't cry when we lose. If we can diagnose what we did wrong and work to fix it, we can become a better team. Plus, we make sure it doesn't happen again. You also can fuel losing into adrenaline for the next game. If you get angry at the team you are playing, you can use that energy to fuel your game.

Another thing is studying the game itself. If everyone else is playing checkers, you have to play chess. You must be one step ahead of the game to succeed. If you know what plays you are going to run in order to confuse the defense, it can confuse them. On defense, you can throw some zones in there every so often to mix up the defense and get a turnover. The little mental things like that can help a lot over the long course of a game or even the season.

Level I: Semifinalists

When I read your book, it changed the way I look at things in basketball and in life. If you study for a test and prepare, you will do better than if you go off the top of your head. I learned this from experience that you need to plan for oral reports. Your book changed the way I live my life.

Sincerely,
Jack Schlueter

Emma Schwartz

Northview Elementary, Gas City

Letter to R. J. Palacio

Author of *Wonder*

Dear R. J. Palacio,

I have never bullied anyone, but I have experienced being bullied. Auggie's actions in your book *Wonder* made me think and feel things that I have never thought about nor felt. It made a tremendous impact on my life that I will never forget.

When I was about eight years old, I felt the displeasure of being bullied. When the bullying first started, I didn't want to tell anyone about it because I was afraid. I went through a lot of ambivalence trying to decide if I should tell someone or just continue to keep it to myself. About two years later my reading teacher told us that we were going to be reading your book. I knew that the book was about a kid who had a facial disorder and he was bullied for that. The word "bullied" really spoke out to me and that's when I knew it was going to bring back the dreadful memories.

Your book also made me think things like, "Why can't people just accept Auggie for who he really is?" I have learned that people bully other people because of how they look and I think that is wrong to do. If you really get to know people you can think different things about the same person that you thought bad things about before. Another thing it made me wonder about was why kids can be such bullies to other people all the time. I have never thought bullying was a good nor a funny thing. So many kids get bullied each day for how they look or even for who they hang out with. Bullying is not a good thing and it needs to be stopped.

I have never thought nor felt anything like this until I read your book. After reading your book, I told myself I would always be cautious of what I say to others and if I see others getting bullied I should try to put a stop to it. This book definitely changed my ways of thinking and I will always think about what I am going to do before I do it.

Sincerely,
Emma Schwartz

Lainee Sellers

Northview Elementary, Gas City

Letter to R. J. Palacio

Author of *Wonder*

Dear R. J. Palacio,

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can.” I believe everyone should agree with and obey this quote. This quote and your whole book changed me forever.

I used to think that looks were just as important as personality, but once I read your book my thoughts changed. Now I consider looks as a cherry on top of a cupcake. It is not the most important part of someone. Your character Auggie helped me grasp ahold of this idea. When your book revealed that Auggie had a facial deformity, I began to think he would be unintelligent, or that he would talk funny, but Auggie was quite smart. When Summer was the only one to be friendly to Auggie, I felt awful for him. Auggie should have many more friends than just one. He is a very kind boy and smart, too. If the other students would have given him a chance, they would have been surprised. This part of your story caused me to take action. Now almost every other day, I go to help with special needs kids in my school.

The part in your story that had the biggest change in my life was when Auggie overhears Jack Will talking poorly about him. This made me feel bad for Auggie, and it actually made me extremely angry at Jack. No one deserves to be treated this way. I had a connection with this part of the story. Once my closest friend spoke bad about me behind my back. This made me feel awful just as Auggie did. Although I felt angry at Jack Will for what he did, I realized that I had once done it as well. When I realized that I was also guilty of doing this, I made a promise with myself that I would never do this again, and it was all because of your story.

Your story affected my life in many different ways. It made me realize looks don't make a difference, and that no one deserves to be talked poorly about, even if what they were saying is true.

Thank you for writing your book the way you did. It really made a difference in my life, a good difference.

Sincerely,
Lainee Sellers

Carolyn Williams

Union Elementary, Zionsville

Letter to Lois Lowry

Author of *Gathering Blue*

Dear Lois Lowry,

I was very surprised when I first read your book, *Gathering Blue*; it was nothing like *The Giver*! Your whole series changed me, but *Gathering Blue* changed my life in general.

I thought that no one had lives that bad. I mean life can be rough but I didn't think that rough. When I read *Gathering Blue* I learned that life is always going to be hard but some people have lives that are so much worse than ours. *Gathering Blue* changed me in other ways too.

Kira's life was terrible. At first I thought wow people judge her and treat her badly just because she has something wrong with her leg. Then I realized I judged people like that. I was the person that was judging people just because they were different. Looking badly upon them because they were unique and special probably made them look badly upon themselves just a little bit.

Gathering Blue changed me in another way too; when I read your book, it made me realize that there are always going to be cruel people in the world no matter what we do. Just until the end I thought Jamison was a good guy then at the last minute he turned bad. It just jumped right out at me. I almost gasped out loud in the middle of reading time!

Gathering Blue changed me for the better. Your book taught me things I would have never known. Ever since I read your book I have not taken life for granted or judged anyone by how they were born. Thank you for sharing these inspiring things with me.

Sincerely,
Carolyn Williams

Maya Yaari

Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to Sharon Creech

Author of *Walk Two Moons*

Dear Sharon Creech,

Your book, *Walk Two Moons* taught me how to appreciate my family and what it does for me. It inspired me to become a better person. It guided me to a little place where I could think, understand, and where I could learn. Your book was about a girl named Sal whose mother had died, and left her with the burden of how to live without something she loved most. I occasionally look through photo albums, remembering, and reliving the past. Pictures of my parents smiling, or laughing flood my brain. I think “what would I do without them?” This book taught me to appreciate the people I love, and how much they do for me, instead of taking them for granted.

When I was younger, I didn't think about how hard my parents and siblings worked to please me. I took for granted the care I got from my parents, and the friendship from my brothers. I ate dinner without realizing who made it, and spent money without realizing who earned it. Everyone has a tendency to treat their family worse than their colleagues and teachers. They know that anyone else might not forgive you, and treat you badly back, but your family will always love you no matter what. Even to this day I should still treat my family better.

Towards the end of fourth grade, I read your book and it opened my eyes. Sal knew what it was like living without someone you love. The flashbacks she kept having about her mother reminded me of when I look through photo albums at past times. I couldn't possibly think about what it would be like without my family! My life would be so much different. I wouldn't have money, food, shelter, love, clothes, education, and entertainment. I understood what I was doing wrong all this time. I shouldn't take for granted my friends and family, and treat them worse than other people that aren't as close to me. I tried to be kinder to the people I loved.

Level I: Semifinalists

Now, after reading your book, I realize the importance of treating everybody kindly, especially the people you love.

Sincerely,
An inspired reader, Maya

Cora Zink

Fall Creek Intermediate, Fishers

Letter to Tim Green

Author of *Unstoppable*

Dear Tim Green,

This book *Unstoppable* really changed me from when I first started reading it. Harrison had it tough, but he never gave up, he was unstoppable. He was unstoppable in football and even cancer couldn't beat him. This book taught me to never give up no matter how much the odds aren't in your favor. I will always keep fighting like Harrison did and never accept failure without a fight.

This book also put in perspective how lucky I am, and I am much more thankful for what I have now. I may not be rich or tall but others may struggle to get food. For example in your book *Unstoppable* Harrison didn't even get to live with his own real parents. He was a foster kid. Your book made me think less about just myself and more about the people around the world. You made me want to donate to charities instead of buying candy for myself.

Before I read your book, I will admit I was a little more selfish than I am now. You taught me in this story that people have it so much worse than me. I mean I've never had cancer, and I've always lived with my real parents. I am now thankful for the family I have, that I am healthy, and that I get to drink and eat food everyday. Others in the world are struggling to get enough money to have food.

Harrison has troubles in school and has some anger in him and then finally he gets some nice foster parents instead of his first ones. His new foster father is a football coach and Harrison tries to use all his anger on the football field instead. Harrison taught me to not use my anger on other people and to instead use it in a sport you play. Then tragedy struck and Harrison got injured in a football game, and he went for a MRI and they realized that he had a much worse injury. He had cancer, tough luck hit him again. But the one thing Harrison didn't do was give up. Harrison was so inspirational to me and he really kept me going. His emotions came to life and I

Level I: Semifinalists

felt his pain throughout the story. This book taught me so much and I am so glad I read it.

Your book also taught me to be kind to everyone because you don't know what could be happening in their life. You have to give people a chance and accept them for who they are. This book made a huge influence on me and I will never forget about your book ***Unstoppable***. I will always try to be unstoppable myself.

Sincerely,
Cora Zink

Level II

Level II
1st Place

Yael Cohen

Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to Malala Yousafzai

Author of *I Am Malala*

Dear Malala Yousafzai,

From the moment I flipped through the first chapters of your book, *I Am Malala*, I fell in love with your strength, bravery, and kindness. You taught me so much about what you and your fellow Pakistanis went through just to earn your right to an education. I learned so much about life and fighting for what you believe in. *I Am Malala* changed the way I think and the way I live.

I am a religious Jew over the age of twelve, so I practice the Jewish law of being modest. That means I can't wear pants or clothes that are too short and show too much skin. Unfortunately, I am sometimes bullied for my beliefs by people who don't understand or don't care what I stand for. I feel insecure showing my true self and, in turn, change the way I act to be more like the people who bully me, which shouldn't be happening. In your case, the Taliban were the bullies and you and your fellow Pakistanis were the victims. Through your book, you showed me how to react when people are bullying me. You show them that they can't get to you and you continued doing whatever you believe in. Thank you for the lesson, it completely changed my life.

When I was younger, about nine or ten years old, I went to a day camp during the summer. Obviously, I went to camp in a skirt or a dress but I used to sneak shorts and a t-shirt in my bag and change into it when I got there. Then I used to change back into a skirt at the end of the day. I did this because girls in my group constantly questioned me in a condescending way, as to why I was wearing a skirt and not shorts. After that, I was ashamed to be wearing different clothing than the other kids. I continued to do this for the rest of that summer. A couple years later, after reading your book, I realized that I had nothing to be ashamed of.

Recently, I tried out for a volleyball club and I made it despite my unique attire of the team shirt and a black knee-length skirt. My competition didn't care because they were too focused on getting into the club. Some of them even became friends with me. The coaches asked me why I was wearing a skirt. When I told them, they were fascinated. After my club experience, I realized that I was the only one who wasn't okay with me wearing a skirt. I was insecure because of years of people judging me for my beliefs. But that isn't how it should be. I love my religion and no one should be able to sever that love.

Thank you for teaching me that what you love is far more important than anything or anyone that will attempt to stop you. My beliefs are more important than any bully who tries to bring me down. Reading your book changed my personality and made me appreciate the things I have in life.

I am Yael Cohen,
Yael Cohen

Level II
2nd Place

Shay Orentlicher

Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to Julie Andrews Edwards

Author of *The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles*

Dear Julie Andrews Edwards,

I first read *The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles* when I was six. I fell in love with the story immediately, and I identified most with Lindy, who was just a year or so older than me. As a youngest child in my family with an active imagination, I related to the way she wanted to be taken seriously by her older brothers and how she was confused by adult topics that were mentioned, but never explained to her. When I found out that her youth and imagination were essential in getting to the wonderful world of Whangdoodleland, I was delighted. It made me feel like maybe I wasn't stupid for not understanding everything my family talked about at the dinner table, like my imagination could be of value just as much as their knowledge could.

Last year, when I was twelve, I was looking through my bookshelves for something to read, and I came across my family's well-loved, tattered copy of *The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles*. I decided to reread it, and this time, I realized something that scared me. I no longer felt such a strong connection to Lindy. Instead, it was Ben, her oldest brother, who spoke to me. He was old enough that he understood more about the real world and was beginning to be weighed down by responsibilities, but he was still young enough that he felt like a kid.

It saddened me to realize that I had grown up enough over only six years that I didn't have much in common with Lindy anymore. But, the part that worried me most was how I identified with Ben's struggles to train his imagination when it came more naturally to the other two. As a writer, my imagination is one of the things I value most about myself. I've always been proud of the way I can turn a simple word or phrase into a detailed story with its own unique

characters and elaborate universe. But I'm losing that as I get older. When I look at some of my creative writing pieces from first and second grade, I wonder, *How in the world did I come up with that?* I just don't feel like I have the creativity that I used to.

If Whangdoodleland can only be accessed by vivid imagination, I can't help but wonder if I could get there at all. Seven years ago, when I first picked up your book, the answer would have been a clear yes. With minimal training, I knew I'd be able to get there in no time. But now, I'm not so sure. My mind, which was once all about fantasies and stories, is now full of the cynicism and logic that comes with getting older.

There's only one thing I know for sure about this, and it's that I don't want to lose my imagination for good. I'm trying to write more than usual, making my stories creative and unique. Sometimes I play the games that the Professor taught Lindy, Ben, and Tom to enhance their imaginations just to see how I do compared to the three siblings.

If I hadn't picked up my copy of your book to reread it, I don't know if I would have caught myself losing my imagination in time. Now, I can actively try to keep it alive. If I don't have it, how can I be a writer? I know that now I won't ever lose my imagination. I won't let that happen.

Sincerely,
Shay Orentlicher

Level II
3rd Place

Arianna Sia

Greensburg Jr. High, Greensburg
Letter to Maya Angelou
Author of “**Still I Rise**”

Dear Maya Angelou,

Since the time I was little, I have experienced racism and stereotypes. It is those childhood memories that I remember the most. In my first years of school, I had a number of people walk up to me, pull the edges of their eyes, and mock me. This would always dampen my spirits, and it saddened me that we were taught to ridicule each other at such a young age. However, I was determined not to let it get to me.

When I read your poem “**Still I Rise**,” I was touched, and felt as if you depicted the struggles of racism with perfection. You gave the perspective of those who have experienced the harsh words and actions of racism. I read a stanza that held a powerful statement, one that left goosebumps on my skin. It was “You may shoot me with your words, You may cut me with your eyes, You may kill me with your hatefulness, But still, like air, I’ll rise.”

I recall a time when I overheard a group of classmates conversing about my race. They were bashing on Asians, and agreed that they were the most unappealing to the eye, and did not hold the same beauty as others. I was across the room, yet I could hear them loud and clear. For the rest of the day, I had an echo of their insults swirling in my mind.

When I read the lines, “Did you want to see me broken? Bowed head and lowered eyes? Shoulders falling down like teardrops, weakened by my soulful cries?” I was reminded of all the hurtful remarks said to me, ones that were targeted to hit a nerve. All the times where they asked me if my father was Kim Jong Un, to someone telling me to go back to my country. But your poem gives me the confidence and

the mindset that no matter what hardships I face, I will still be able to rise above it all.

Thank you for the inspiration,
Arianna Sia

Level II Honorable Mentions

Barakah Abdo-Baari

West Lafayette Jr./Sr. High School, West Lafayette

Letter to Randel Abdel-Fattah

Author of *Ten Things I Hate About Me*

Dear Randa Abdel-Fattah,

I have read your book *Ten Things I Hate About Me*. Before I read your books, I have seen them in my school library. I thought they would be good books to read, because I saw someone who looked like me. Two years after seeing your books I finally decided to read one. Your book had me hooked. I couldn't stop reading them. *Ten Things I Hate About Me* inspired me, and opened my mind. Here in America there has been racism to the Muslims and African Americans. I am both. I didn't think there would also be in others countries such as Australia. I was surprised when I realized this was happening. The character Jamie/Jamilah is in a way like me. Although I didn't fear being called out, I was and still am insecure about the way I look. Jamie was, too. She changed herself, I didn't. I didn't change because I am afraid of what change can do to me.

Being one of about 5–10 people in my school who wear the hijab, it didn't really mean anything to me until today. My sister was acting out because she wanted to see her friend. My dad didn't allow her to. While scolding her, he said that she wouldn't have as many friends if she wore the hijab. She still doesn't wear it, but my parents are pushing her to it. Now I am 13 and I've worn the hijab since I was 8 or 9 by will, but I still see Muslim women who are older than me, and only wear it for religious reasons. Even though my Muslim friends and I are so young, we debate about the hijab. Some say that in the Quran it tells us to wear it after puberty. Some say it doesn't say you have to wear it at all. Some haven't reached of age yet, but say they plan to wear it when they do. Others say they will never wear it, because their mother doesn't. At first it was a little debate, but it turned into an argument. I have even gotten in trouble for "debating" with my ex-friend about it. This book has taught me that people have their own views of things. It has taught me that I can't change them.

Level II: Honorable Mentions

In conclusion, your book has opened my eyes to something outside of my world. ***Ten Things I Hate About Me*** has taught me about the struggles other Muslims go through. I hadn't really given it much thought before. It has been a long time since I have read a good book. Thank you for writing this book, hopefully girls and boys will read it and give you more recognition.

Sincerely,
Barakah Abdo-Baari

Samarrah Denney

Central Middle School, Columbus

Letter to Robert Frost

Author of “**The Road Not Taken**”

Dear Robert Frost,

I always find myself in different worlds, lost in a forest of my thoughts. “What would have happened if I did this?” or “did I really make the right choice?” Sometimes I feel like I could just drown in them, and I’m always underwater and not where I’m supposed to be when I have to make the right call. I feel like I’m missing my opportunities, a chance to make things better. Perhaps I am just lazy, and I don’t want a map to get out of my forest of thoughts. Or, perhaps, I don’t stop long enough to think about my choices, and I don’t grab onto the safety raft, and I grab onto a sinking branch to pull my head above the water. Life just seems to slip on by, and I am stuck somewhere where I see my opportunities, and the time I didn’t take to travel the right road.

Thinking of my forest, I think of my older half sibling, my brother. He is in his 20’s, but when I get led astray in my forest, I think of him near my age, when he had to make a very tough decision. He had two paths in mind, a path where being lazy is allowed, and a path where life would be much more tough. Which one did he choose? The one that would be harder to travel. Where did it lead him? It led him to be married to a beautiful, intelligent woman, and it led him to a well-paying job. What I like to call that is “Success.”

“**The Road Not Taken**” reminded me so much of my forest, and my brother. The way you describe different opportunities and choices, it really just speaks to me. I understand now that I need to stop and think of the consequences, and where it will get me. All because one road might look better, or if it is just the easier choice, doesn’t mean a thing at all. Where will that road get me? Nowhere, I will just be forever lost in my forest.

Honestly, I never took much thought to your poem until now, where I’m at a point in my life where I am becoming more independent. I need to become more responsible if I want to get somewhere in life, I

Level II: Honorable Mentions

need to take action. I now understand that because of your wonderful poem, and I can tell that you really did take the road not taken. Your poem is famous now, and you had made the choice to write it. It took some work, some deep thinking, and it has truly made all the difference. Now I will sit in my forest, and look at my paths. I will look down them both with my future in mind, but I will also look more than that. I will look behind me, and look at the paths I have taken, and keep them in mind. I will remember my brother's success always, and I will remember your poem, and how thankful I am for it. I will remember the road not taken, and be the one to take it.

Sincerely,
Samarrah Denney

Tal Friedman

Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to Lisa McMann

Author of *Unwanted*s

Dear Lisa McMann,

“People who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones that do.” Before reading this book, this quote from Steve Jobs meant nothing to me. After reading *Unwanted*s, my thoughts have almost completely changed. Many people don’t care about problems if they don’t directly affect them.

I have always felt the need to fit in with everyone else. But, after reading your book, I have been reminded that I do not need to be the same as others. To make a difference in the world, people have to stand out and be different from everyone else. Your book has influenced me to now stand out and to do something that can change the world just like Alex did.

Being a religious minority, my family and my people have struggled throughout history. The Holocaust, most definitely the worst thing to happen to the Jewish people, was a horrific time. The city of Quill in your book reminds me of the Warsaw Ghetto because they were walled off also. They had no communication with the outside world. Thinking of this seemed to remind me that there are still some places right now that are closed off from everything else.

Your characters have made me want to take more risks. My parents have wanted me to try more things, like to go to camp. Even though going to camp was leaving my comfort space, it paid off because I met new people and had fun. Sometimes I do things that my parents and other people don’t want me to do. When I do things that my parents don’t want me to do, I feel guilty at first. But after my choice pays off, I feel very proud of myself for making a decision. You have taught me that some things that seem bad, can end up very well for you. No one believed in Alex but he proved everyone wrong. He had to abandon everyone in his way to become what he was. In the real world, some people have to abandon everyone who loves them to become what they want to become.

Level II: Honorable Mentions

Your book series will always have the power to inspire me, no matter what happens. I now know why my parents got me this book. It made me think of many decisions I will have to make as an adult, but also as a young person now in the world that I live in today.

Sincerely,
Tal Friedman

Brooklyn Halsey

West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

Letter to Rainbow Rowell

Author of *Eleanor and Park*

Dear Rainbow Rowell,

Through the hard times and through the soft times your book has always seemed to find its way to my heart and choke me up with love and suspension.

Every day, I go to school wondering “Am I going to get made fun of behind my back? Am I going to be called fat all over again? Will there be some new rumors that I will never hear?” To the outsider, my life at school seems to be filled with fun and it seems like I’m always surrounded by friends and I’m all happy. But, what they really don’t know is that on the inside, I feel like I’m slowly dying. They don’t know how my past has come and haunted me. The past brings tears to my eyes and pains in my heart. It is hard sometimes to just blow off all the surrounding nightmares and continue with a smiling face and a half-filled heart.

Lately, this kind of stuff has not happened, but it mainly only happened in 5th grade to 7th grade. This year has been good so far, but the memories still haunt my soul and tear at my heart. Remembering them is like having daggers in my heart and a tornado of emotions in my soul.

This book made me realize that even though Eleanor had a rough time at school and at home that no matter what, she always had Park to be there for her. When I read, “‘You can be Han Solo,’ he said, kissing her throat. ‘And I’ll be Boba Fett. I’ll cross the sky for you.’” It made me weak with love, and I could not stop thinking about it. It’s adorable and a little geeky at the same time. Also, it made me think, “Hey, she does not care what she looks like; she just goes through her day looking forward for the good time that lies ahead. She makes me wonder, *what if* I was like her and just went through the day without a care? *What if* I did not care how other people thought about me? The book said to me, just be you—don’t try to be someone that other people want you to be.

After reading *Eleanor and Park*, I don't care what people think about me. I just live my life, even through the tougher times. I just keep looking forward to the good times that may lie ahead. I remind myself to just go through life with a joy-filled heart and a smile on my face. And, I know to always remember that I never know what tomorrow may have in store for me. Now, instead of the dark things, there are some good things that run through my mind when I go through the hall. Like, I get to go see my friends, and they always seem to cheer me up when times are bad. I remember when I was having a rough day, and I just wanted to be quiet. But, as soon as I got to class, my friends started to make me giggle and laugh, and they turned my bad day into an amazing, fun, and joy-filled day I will never forget. When I would get in fights with my relatives, my friends would come over, and we would have tons of fun. They just make the bad day fade away.

I want to say thank you. In the tough times, I remember this book, and it makes all the worries and struggles go away. Now, I live my life without a care, happy with how everything is and how everything is going, I say again, thank you!

Sincerely,
Brooklyn Halsey

Anastazja Krostenko

Stanley Clark School, South Bend

Letter to Erin Hanson

Author of “**Soul Sharers**”

Dear Erin Hanson,

Your piece “**Soul Sharers**” gave me hope. When I first read it, I was experiencing something very similar to the scenario described at the beginning of the poem. I had been bullied by some girls who had been my closest friends. They managed to convince a teacher I was the bully. I was sat down and called cold, frigid, heartless, irrational, negative, bitter, and unforgiving. Unloving, unloved, and unlovable. I was directly told that I was unworthy of friendship. Unworthy of attention. Unworthy of love.

I let out gasps of my story in between sobs and was informed that what I had to say didn't matter because I had no moral compass. My side of the story was not worth hearing.

My grades slipped. I pushed people away. My relationships, stability, confidence, and happiness toppled and crashed. I was threatened with suspension for doing absolutely nothing. My soul had once been filled with light and bubbly champagne, and that had been snuffed out. I stopped talking. I felt I was unworthy of thoughts or words. No-one noticed. No-one cared. After a while, I didn't feel anything. Numbness set in.

I stood on the edge of a void. It was deep, descending, and dark. I would not fall lightly on the rocks at the bottom. I would break. But my demons were pushing me in. They pulled at my edges, ripped me where I was weak. Everyday. I fought them. It exhausted me. Then “something funny happened.” The human inside me, the part that, wanted to win, was lost. Perhaps it disappeared between the folds of shadows in my heart. I ached. I stopped. I fell.

Depression overwhelmed me. I was bitter at first. Bitter at injustice. Bitter that no-one would hear. Bitter that no-one cared. After all, I had been told so. No-one cared.

Level II: Honorable Mentions

But something was growing inside of me. The scars from the rocks had sprouted wings. I traded confidence for compassion. Words for ears. I was broken but kind.

Then I came across your poem. I realized everyone is broken. Now, I try to see where people are a little cracked, to understand where that crack is from. It helps me say what people need to hear. I'd been stuck in the storm so I became the lighthouse.

I wasn't given closure. You taught me that I didn't need it. Every word that had torn me apart, your poem helped sew back together. But I also learned that when I sewed myself back together, I didn't have to keep everything. I could throw away the bad parts of me and sew in the new good ones, new lessons I'd learned.

I sewed on some new parts you might like. I love more than I will ever get back. I wear my smile like a drawn dagger. I keep my posture. Then I added some stardust. I switched up one of your quotes a little, and I'd like to end with it:

If I knew angels had to die
to come back alive.
I'd never have a fear of falling
if I'd known I could fly.

Sincerely,
Anastazja Krostenkot

Madelyn Long

Clark Pleasant Middle School, Greenwood

Letter to Jay Asher

Author of *13 Reasons Why*

Dear Jay Asher,

13 Reasons Why has changed the way I look at the world in so many ways. It is very important to me for very many reasons. I read this book several years ago and I still will never forget the words you felt when you wrote this book. When it discussed the different ways people who are that hurt and are suicidal show signs, such as something like making a huge change to their appearance, it shocked me. When it showed how something like being bullied and rumors being spread about who Hannah had slept with, it changed me.

To the people who know me, it's no secret that I have always had a problem with drama, people spread the same kind of rumors that were told about Hannah even at such a young age. I wasn't always the nicest person, either, and I read about how something that doesn't get to me could affect someone else. With my personality, if people say things about me, I have the tendency to brush it off and laugh, and I will tease or make comments right back. Some people aren't like that, and I can't always treat it the same way. This book taught me to think about others before myself.

I realized that Hannah was affected by some rumors very much, where it wouldn't have hurt someone like me, and it made me think, what if when I'm saying things that I consider to be joking and teasing and making a huge joke of everything I was really hurting someone? I realized that people struggle with depression and anxiety even into adult years from being teased and hurt in school from things that I never would have known.

I took the time to look around my own school and I was saddened that I noticed some people around school were very sad, and started looking out for other people, instead of only looking at what I should be doing, what was hard in MY life, ME ME ME. When I found out some things about my dad and my parents were getting divorced, I lost sight of how amazing my life is! I have so many people looking

out for me and how many people love me, and some people don't have that at all. Some people have parents like Hannah's who didn't take an interest in their kid's lives, or even look out for their kids, or are too busy. Your book taught me to appreciate what I have, and try and share my happiness with someone else.

Your book made me realize that even I might be able to help people by maybe just saying hi to someone who looked sad, or compliment their new shoes, or their haircut, some people just need a little encouragement, or someone to say hi or someone to talk to. Instead of adding to their sorrows and teasing them, or taking compliments like Zach did from Hannah's positivity bag, or doing something that could hurt, seriously hurt someone, I could take an interest in someone else's life and make a new friend or put a smile on someone's face who really needs it.

The thing that I took away from your book the most was that some people like Hannah only wanted someone to notice her, or support her, one nice comment could have changed her whole life. Maybe if there was someone at her school would have just shown that they were on her side, or asked her for her side of the story or did something other than judging her for something that wasn't true, she could have had a totally different experience. So maybe at my own school where this happens, something even little, such as a smile in the hallway could help someone. I could stop a rumor with just a couple of words in someone's direction. I haven't always stopped rumors and I'm disappointed in that, but your book showed me how to change myself, and I have changed. Your book is so important to me, because I might be an entirely different person without it. I could be someone who didn't think of others, and I am so glad I read ***13 Reasons Why***.

Thank you,
Madelyn Long

Katie McLean

Greensburg Jr. High, Greensburg

Letter to Robert Frost

Author of “**Nothing Gold Can Stay**”

Dear Robert Frost,

It is true, death is inevitable. Everything has its time. All things beautiful will eventually fade. Your poem “**Nothing Gold Can Stay**” was always fascinating to me. However, I never truly understood the meaning behind the words until my grandfather passed away nearly a year ago.

My grandfather was the kind of guy that anyone could have a conversation with. I remember whenever we would go out for dinner, by the time we had finished eating, he knew the waiter’s whole background story. He could form that connection with complete strangers. From the deep connections he formed, to the many lessons he taught me throughout my life, my grandfather was amazing, golden even.

It took me a long time to completely accept the idea of his death. For me to stop expecting to see him sitting in his favorite chair every time I walked through the front door. To stop listening for his beautiful laugh to ring through my ears after I attempted a joke. Change is a peculiar thing. A few months before, I had memorized “Nothing Gold Can Stay” because of its beauty to me. For some strange reason, in the days after his passing, I would continuously repeat the final line of the poem to myself. “Nothing gold can stay, nothing gold can stay.” The words had finally clicked inside my brain. Of course I had already known that nothing can last forever, of course I knew that everything must come to an end. But why the most beautiful things in our life?

In this poem, the seasons are used to represent the continuous cycle of our lives. Flowers will die but bloom again the next spring, people will perish but their legacies will live on. My grandfather was so important to me. The way his eyes lit up when he saw his grandchildren. The way he would tell the stories of his life with such enthusiasm and laughter. He was the gold that couldn’t stay. Through

Level II: Honorable Mentions

your captivating words, I have managed to get through one of the most difficult times in my life. I am now able to find peace with the fact that he is no longer here, that the beautiful things in our lives cannot last forever. Thank you for that.

Sincerely,
Katie McLean

Grayson Russ

Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to Jeff Kinney

Author of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*

Dear Jeff Kinney,

Your *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series has deeply affected my life, and me as a person. In your books, everyday problems (and a little bit of drama) are represented through hilarious mistakes and jokes, that in the end, just make you crack up until you slowly begin to cry. In many ways, the character of Greg Heffley resembles me. Each day, we both wake up to the dangers and realities of the modern world with hopes to accomplish something that day. However, while doing this, we still recognize the fact that there are still the boundaries and obstacles that are associated with being just an average kid, stuck in middle school, spending the day staring at the clock above the classroom door.

About a year and a half ago, during the very first day of 6th grade, I walked briskly down to the cafeteria, anxious to get my very own permanent seat at a lunch table with all of my buddies from elementary school. As I entered the cafeteria, however I noticed that almost every seat in the cafeteria was filled! Then, I was soon heartbroken to discover that some of my best friends from elementary school were sitting with students from one of the other elementary schools in my town. This is similarly represented through Greg and Rowley in the first book of the series. Weeks later, I soon came to the realization that my friends no longer wanted to hang out with me, and several others from our old school anymore. Shortly after, the rest of us decided that we would start our own table and we would fill it with the same kids that didn't get the opportunity to be reunited with their old friends.

As I grow older, and become more aware of the current global issues; and even some local problems too, I have realized that the world isn't always sunshine and rainbows. Everyday, new conflicts will arise, and new breakthroughs will lead to positive and negative results. Your books have taught me to expect the unexpected, and how to cope with the drama, gossip, and embarrassment that comes with

Level II: Honorable Mentions

becoming a young adult, as well as being a middle school student in this new, modern world. I would like to thank you for creating these books, for they have truly helped me transition from a wimpy kid, to a mature young-adult.

Sincerely,
Grayson Russ

Level II Semifinalists

Amelia Ahner

Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to Gayle Forman

Author of *I Was Here*

Dear Gayle Forman, the beloved artist of the amazing, deep and revealing book *I Was Here*, a book of battling life, love, death, and forgiveness,

I am so thankful that I was able to read your book, and that I did. Your book, *I Was Here*, not only changed my view on the world but more helped me to understand what I was going through in a way that no best friend, or even a counselor, could have helped me. Your book helped me to understand that sometimes the ones you love keep secrets from you because they love you back, not because they can't trust you. Cody's battle to find herself after Meg left helped me to understand something I was still trying to process and understand.

About a year before I read your book, my mom left, leaving me only a few lies about what she was actually doing behind all of our backs, for me to uncover slowly. She left me with false reasons about the divorce and her relationships with friends and family. I began to question if she really loved me or if that was just a lie too.

Through Meg and Cody's relationship, your book helped me forgive my mom, someone I loved, trusted, and didn't feel like they trusted me back or even loved me. Even though Meg wasn't my best friend and didn't technically commit suicide, I trusted and loved her with everything, and I thought she trusted me just as Cody felt. I could relate to Cody because, like her, I didn't find out about their truths until they left. The journey to truths were rough. I had little faith in my mom, and wondered why I trusted her with my secrets if all she did was lie to my face. I was trying to figure out if I should forgive her, or if I should hate my mom for everything she didn't tell me.

Cody and I battled together through all the revealed truths, and the tears, and the new friends. We traveled the slow painful path of

Level II: Semifinalists

forgiveness; taking the first baby step of understanding Meg's reasons for lying. I am so thankful for your book showing me my first step I needed to take and helping me to take it.

Your book helped me to understand three important truths that I will use for the rest of my life. First, love means wanting what's best for you even if it means hiding some truths from you. Second, sometimes you don't find out about the truths until you're ready, whether that means when they die, when you're a certain age, or when you die. It's ok, however, to not know everything. Third, forgiveness is understanding their reasons and that their reasons were not necessarily wrong, even if it's not what you would have done. I am so thankful for those lessons I wouldn't have been able to learn any other way.

With life, love, death, forgiveness, and many tears,
Amelia Ahner

Hannah Allen

Jasper Middle School, Jasper
Letter to Katie Davis
Author of *Kisses From Kaite*

Dear Katie Davis,

Whenever I unraveled the purple piece of paper my mom handed me on Christmas of 2015, I couldn't believe eyes when I read "Haiti Mission Trip July 2016." I knew my life was about to change. I was scared the people might think, "what is this white thirteen year old doing in our country." I was scared that I was doing the wrong thing. After reading *Kisses from Katie*, I knew my thoughts were wrong.

One thing that I can relate to you is your 14 girls you adopted. My church sponsors an orphanage in Haiti and when I read about your daughters, it reminded me of the girls in the orphanage. I know you get scared and worried when one of your girls gets sick or hurt. Just recently, one of the girls at the orphanage, in Haiti, had to go to the hospital because she couldn't feel her legs and couldn't walk properly. Quickly, my heart sunk to my stomach when I first heard this. You felt this when you heard about how your daughters' "grandma" had passed away.

Whenever God called me to help in Haiti, I didn't feel ready because it was unexpected. When God called you to Uganda, you felt ready and excited. But in the end, we can relate that God has welcomed us into a new world that we didn't know existed; he wants us to call a different country our home.

Since reading *Kisses from Katie*, my heart changed drastically. It made me change my views on things. This book taught me how to be grateful for what I have and how it is important to work in God's kingdom, be a kingdom worker, and how to put all of your faith in God.

Whenever I hear the word "starving" my mind immediately goes back to when I was in Haiti handing out packages of peanut butter crackers. The people I handed them to were working their tails off to try to meet their needs for that day. What really stuck out to me

Level II: Semifinalists

was they didn't eat them right away. My mom told me that they were probably saving it to give some to their family. I almost broke down in tears. When we think of a package of peanut butter crackers, we think of them as a snack or packing them in our lunchbox for later. We don't stuff them in our pockets for our family or to keep them for dinner for the next week. So when I tell people here that they "are not starving" or "you're just hungry" they look at me with confusion. I tell them why they shouldn't use that word and after hearing me they usually don't use it in front of me again. The word "starving" also reminds me of a story you told in your book about how you passed out food to people you didn't know. All of those people were so grateful for the big pot of beans you brought for them.

Reading this book really put a light in my eyes. It showed me how to work in God's kingdom not just in my community, but also anywhere in the world. This book taught me how to love others who are not like me. It taught me that anyone can be like you in God's kingdom. This book helped me learn that we should love everyone. Just because we are a different race, doesn't mean we can't love them too.

Sincerely,
Hannah Allen

Kinsey Bruder

Lebanon Middle School, Lebanon

Letter to S. E. Hinton

Author of *The Outsiders*

Dear S. E. Hinton:

Your novel *The Outsiders* really opened up my eyes. The book made me realize how rough some kids' home life can be. I guess when you grow up living in a good home, taking amazing vacations, and getting pretty much everything you want you do not notice or think about the other kids who wear bad clothes and flunk school. But once I read this book I started thinking about the kids that run about the streets in the middle of the night because they do not want to go home to nasty home lives. I also started thinking about the kids who are extremely rich but their parents don't pay any attention to them. Ever since I read your book I have been thinking about kids that are not as lucky as me.

When reading this book it showed me that where you live or what your home life is like can affect you mentally and emotionally. A character in the book named Dally is mean and vicious because his father didn't care about him. Dally also went to New York and joined a gang and got very hard. Another character named Johnny is always depressed because his mother hates him and his father abuses him. Home is where you spend most of your time besides school so it should make you feel safe and relaxed. Since you spend most of your time there it can affect how you act, your personality, and your emotions.

Something else that I have learned from this book is that even though someone might be rich it doesn't make them happy. In the story, a character named Robert has everything he wants. He has a huge house, but his parents never tell him no. So Robert does illegal activities because he wants his parents to tell him no. But in the story his parents don't end up telling him no which digs him an even bigger hole. When I was a little kid I wanted to have everything when I grew up and I wanted to be a millionaire. But I realized when reading this book that being rich and having everything you want doesn't make you happy.

Level II: Semifinalists

Throughout reading this book I have realized how blessed I am. I did not used to be thankful for my loving family. I would sometimes forget to thank my parents for buying me things, and taking me on fun vacations. Also I would forget to thank my parents when they do so much work for me and my sister. After reading this novel I am grateful that I have such a wonderful life. I would not change anything about it. Thank you S. E. Hinton for writing this novel. I have realized to be more appreciative for everything I have. This book has also inspired me try and find ways to help kids around me. Thank you S. E., and I will always remember to “stay gold.”

Sincerely,
Kinsey Bruder

Peyton Bryant

Central Middle School, Columbus

Letter to Lemony Snicket

Author of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*

Dear Lemony Snicket,

You have greatly influenced how I feel about reading and writing. In third grade I was on the second book in your series, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. While reading this in my room upstairs, my mom came up to tell me that we were moving 2 hours away from where we lived then. I was devastated to be moving away from all of my friends and my grandma. I cried and the only thing I would do was read the book. I wouldn't even talk to anyone, but your series helped me escape to a world I could relate to.

I could relate to this book in many ways. For one, where we lived at the time was with my grandma in a huge house. My grandma was basically my mom, and I had to separate from her. I also had a little brother that had to move with me also. The main reason that we moved was because my mom had gotten a new boyfriend, that we had to move in with. He did not like me at all, I thought of him as being Count Olaf. He despised me, didn't want to be anywhere near me, and would never let me do anything that I wanted, he even hit me a couple of times. So by the time we moved in, I was hypnotized by the book series. I wanted to do everything Violet had.

My dad's girlfriend was 6 months pregnant when they decided to tell me. I prayed for a baby sister, and about a week after they announced that it would be a girl. I tried to convince them to name her Sunny, but she ended up getting named Lyla instead. I had always volunteered to babysit because I wanted to be just as amazing of a sister as Violet had been to Sunny and Claus. I was fully convinced that I was an inventor, also. I would take all of the cereal boxes, toilet-paper rolls, and basically anything I could conjure up a way to use.

To this day, I still love hands-on activities and building things. This is what makes me aspire to be an engineer. I have been on many teams like robotics and solar car which are building certain things. I have also gone to many classes about engineering, about the types, what

Level II: Semifinalists

it requires, and how you should plan to get there. I have planned my way to getting to my goal. Thank you so much for getting me through tough times and influencing what I choose to do. I still make connections from your books to real life situations and I am grateful to have read such an interesting series.

Sincerely,
Peyton Bryant

Adrian Buczkowski

Klondike Middle School, West Lafayette

Letter to Theodore Gray

Author of *Molecules*

Dear Mr. Theodore Gray,

I cannot look back enough on your book *Molecules* to find the hidden facts and amazing realization of what our world is made of. Even simply realizing that “chemical free” things are still completely made of chemicals is a vast idea that I can only begin to understand. This impacted my life because I have always wanted to learn about what everything is made of but never had an adequate tool to teach me. After completely reading the book I still re-read chapters just to learn another fact about something that is confusing me. I thought my perspective of the world was changed. Now I realize that was a mere foothill compared to how this book changed my life. Chemistry has always been a class I wanted to take in college and high school. Since we have not been taught this in depth before I now know more than my peers on this subject. Even though there have been plenty of ways this book has changed me I would also like to mention that I received it during Christmas break and helped me through many boring hours of down time when I was desperate for things to do.

In the text there are several passages that make you rethink how you view what things are made of. First the author provides a picture of indigo eyeliner container with the big bold letters “chemical free.” Then he points out that everything is made out of chemicals, and that indigo is an important chemical. It is concluded that the container would be more truthful if it said “only natural chemicals.” The beauty of this short summary of a page is that it wasn’t even the best one. There are hundreds more captions like this. All of them provide just a little piece of a huge puzzle that is artfully explained. One more caption that I liked was where a trick for someone who told you not to use a product because of the chemicals used in it. Ask the person if they would prefer natural soap or artificial detergent. The idea was that the person would choose the “natural” or “better” product. Although one of the main ingredients in soap is lye which is made out of hazardous elements. This proves that no matter what chemicals are in a substance the compound is completely different. There are many

Level II: Semifinalists

more pieces of this book that I would like to recall, but I already feel like I am getting off topic. Which just proves that once you start talking about this book you can't stop.

The final aspect of this book that I find great is how it has put me ahead in life. I now know so much more about a subject that has not been touched on in school so far in my life. I am pretty sure that we will have a class about this, and now I have had a pre-lesson on this whole subject probably extending far past the eighth grade and into high school. Overall, if someone asked me how to get ahead in school, or just get a new view on the world this is the book I would refer.

Adrian Buczkowski

Rivkah Bunes

Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to Wendelin Van Draanen

Author of *Flipped*

Dear Wendelin Van Draanen,

In science class, we learned about evolution. I think that there are two different kinds of evolution, the scientific theory and your personal evolution. As we grow up, we learn from different experiences to form our perspective. A huge part of our personal evolution is who our parents are. In the book *Flipped*, Juliana and Bryce evolve slowly throughout the book. Bryce's dad constantly mocks and verbally attacks the Baker family. At first Bryce doesn't see too much of a problem with that until his perspective changes. Seeing his grandfather work with Juli Baker on her yard started to shape his perspective and how he judges others.

In my own evolution, I have learned that a person is more than what they seem to be. Juli's father tells her that some things are more than the sum of their parts, and Bryce's grandfather also shares that some people are less than the sum of their parts. I think these ideas will really help me in my life. When I was little I used to judge people very quickly without really knowing them. Before I really got to know my best friend, I hated her and she felt the same way about me. Honestly, I never knew why we hated each other. Once I started to actually talk to her, we slowly realized that we had a lot in common. Now this girl is my best friend, and talking to her made me see that not everyone is what you think they are. Of course this works the other way, as well. Just like Bryce, I had a friend who I later realized was not the kind of person I wanted around. In the book, when Bryce opened up to Garrett, his best friend, about liking Juli, he instantly started questioning if Bryce had lost it. In my life, I had a "Garrett." She was one of the most toxic people I have ever trusted. Not only did she make fun of my interests, she also told people my biggest secrets.

How we treat people is closely related to how we view the world. Juli's uncle has a mental illness. When Juli visits him on his birthday she sees him for who he is, not his illness. Personally, I believe that

anyone who has a mental illness should be respected and treated like a real person. Sadly, not everyone believes that. Garrett doesn't see Juli's uncle as a person, but as a mistake. To Garrett, someone different than your average human should be treated as less than. Hopefully, most people have Juli's perspective.

When I read the part where everyone was making fun of Juli's uncle, David, it reminded me of something that really makes my heart sink. Last year, the now president-elect, Donald Trump, mocked a reporter for his disability. I find this highly disrespectful. I am very close with someone like David and he has told me from his own experiences that when people mock him it is very crushing. Juli and I believe that everyone should be treated based on who they really are. It's one of those perspectives that I wish more people shared.

Personal morals are created and shaped based on how we see the world, known as our perspective. Perspective not only shapes who we are, but it also shapes the world. Changing perspectives can fix problems or defeat evil. As a teenager, my perspectives change frequently, so figuring out my personal morals and ethics is a struggle. The battle between right and wrong is a struggle in my life right now. Just like Juli and Bryce, I have to decide what is right on my own.

Sincerely,
Rivkah Bunes

Lyrika Burman

Salem Middle School, Salem

Letter to Tanya J. Peterson

Author of *Losing Elizabeth*

Dear Tanya J. Peterson,

My mother works at a domestic abuse shelter. There's a lot that goes on there. Little boys and girls come there beat up and mortified of what they have heard and seen. There are constant nights of them staying awake crying. After reading *Losing Elizabeth*, I now understand how it feels to be hurt, crushed and why you might want to go back to a dangerous relationship. You have changed my point of view on the topic of abuse. Even my mother tells me about abuse but you have brought it to my attention in a whole other level.

I truly picked up your book on accident one boring school day in my language arts class. I didn't even read the summary on the back of the book. When I started reading it the first day, I was intrigued and I couldn't stop reading it. You had me sucked in with the first chapter. Your book was the best mistake I have ever made! When Elizabeth got asked out by the school's hottest jock, it was like every high school fairytale; little did I know it would be a nightmare. I couldn't bear to read the part when Brad had knocked her out at the playground, but you already had me sucked in. That part of your book taught me not to be silent during bad times; she didn't say anything until he knocked her out and beat her badly. Your book, *Losing Elizabeth*, taught me to not judge a book by the outside until you read it. Elizabeth dated Brad only because he was every girls' dream guy. Brad had a lot of mental problems with his dad which caused him to be abusive to Elizabeth. When I get a boyfriend I will try to dig deeper and look what's in the inside and try to help, if I can.

I would like to thank you for teaching me not to judge and not to be silent during bad times. You helped me realize that there's so much more to abuse and there's so much abuse in the world as well and I would like to stop it. For now I am starting with being a volunteer at my town's local shelter, where my mother works. I help on Tuesday

Level II: Semifinalists

nights and babysit while the women have their nightly study. Being there makes me feel like I can do so much in the world, one step at a time.

Sincerely,
Lyrika Burman

Macy Clark

Southridge Middle School, Huntingburg

Letter to Ellen Hopkins

Author of *Crank*

Dear Ellen Hopkins,

When my mom handed me *Crank*, I did not want to read it at all. Little did I know, it would change my perspective of myself and of my mom forever. I tried my hardest to look mad while reading *Crank*, but it was difficult to hide the fact that I was falling in love with what I was reading. My mom wanted me to read this book because she was an addict and she didn't want me to go down the same path as she did. I never did drugs and I don't plan to, but I still feel a strong connection to the main character, Kristina/Bree. I have experienced through my mom. My mom's sobriety is based on my sister and I. That's what happened to Kristina/Bree when she had her baby.

Kristina was a very good example of a split personality. In the beginning of the book, she was Kristina, a very nice, innocent, respectful girl, but towards the end, Kristina had totally changed into Bree. Bree was the half of Kristina that said, "Yes" to doing drugs. I think that I can relate to that on so many levels. As teenagers, it's a revolving door of attitudes, opinions, and our goals in life.

Crank, the monster. Everyone has their own monsters or addictions. Something itching their skin until it reaches the surface and is satisfied. My addiction is success. When my mom left, I was in 3rd grade. I took on the adult role. I took care of my sister, cooked dinner, cleaned house etc. By no means am I trying to make you feel bad for me, but because I had to do those things, I am strong and independent. It made me the person I am today. If I hadn't been faced with those duties, I would be a different person. Kristina/Bree went on a roller coaster that took her upside down and all around. Eventually she got to the end of the roller coaster meaning that she did good and stopped what was probably fun at the time.

Level II: Semifinalists

I'm very glad that I read ***Crank***. it made my relationship with my mom stronger because now I know how she felt and why she did the things she did without having to do them myself.

Sincerely,
Macy Clark

Taylor Cooney

Greensburg Jr. High, Greensburg

Letter to Doe Zantamata

Author of “**Thousands of Reasons**”

Dear Doe Zantamata,

People in our world today could not list reasons why their life is good. Many people focus on what is going wrong with their life. I too sometimes think about all the things that have not gone my way in my lifetime but one of your poems changed that. I first read your poem “**Thousands of Reasons**” in my eighth grade language arts class. We had to write to an author who had a piece of writing that inspired us. I did not have one book that had inspired me well enough to write about, so I figured that a poem might work. I searched “inspirational poems,” and I first saw yours. Once I read it there was no doubt in my mind that I could not find a better, more enriching piece of writing. Thank you so much for writing this poem. It truly inspired me and taught me a well needed life lesson.

The first thing that crossed my mind once I read your poem was how I focus on some of the negatives in my life rather than the positives. My friends talk about how their parents won't get them this or their parents won't let them go hang out. I am also guilty of that. My friends and I have it way better than most people. We have a house, a family who loves us, food to eat, a great school, and many more luxuries that we don't even need. I now see that I need to say how I am so lucky, rather than saying how unfair it is I can't hang out with my friends.

One of my best friends had to go through the passing of her father. It was heartbreaking to see her sorrow. Some people are lucky enough to have both of their parents and a family that all lives together while others are not so lucky. I learned to cherish every moment with my family and the people I love.

Ever since that day in Language Arts class, in the mornings I always say, “Yes, it's going to be a beautiful day.” Every afternoon during lunch, I state, “Yes, it is a beautiful day,” and every night before I go to bed I announce, “Yes, it was a beautiful day.” Each time that I say

Level II: Semifinalists

it, I always mean it because of your poem. You taught me how to see life in a different perspective. You taught me how everybody should be optimistic. We should always think that something better is going to come of it in the future and to make every moment of your life precious because it doesn't go on forever. The words in your poem are so powerful and would inspire anyone that read your poem.

I just want to thank you for teaching me the way to live my life. Positives outweigh the negatives because they are what make you happy. One day I hope to inspire someone to be a better person just like you did for me. I want to teach them everything you taught me; to be grateful for what you have and not furious for what you don't, to be thankful for loved ones because some people don't have any, and last but not least, to always love, laugh, and live to my fullest. Thank you a million times for these four sentences that inspired me to be a better person.

Sincerely,
Taylor Cooney

Rachel Curry

Belzer Middle School, Indianapolis

Letter to Reg E. Gaines

Author of **“Please Don’t Take My Air Jordans”**

Dear Mr. Reg E. Gaines

Your poem **“Please Don’t Take My Air Jordans”** is phenomenal and very well-written. It was a very powerful piece and spoke volumes to me. Although your poem has a lot of messages and points, one particular message stood out to me the most. A message that I connected with and made me reflect on my own life.

At the beginning of my 7th grade year I wouldn’t have considered myself as the most stylish person. Even though I didn’t have True Religion Jeans or Polo Ralph Lauren, I was still at the top of most of my classes, and overall enjoyed school. Now at around Christmas time is when I started to notice how a lot of the kids at my school dressed and looked. Designer clothes, hair done, makeup done, and expensive trendy book bags. Naturally because I saw all these girls with all of these things I asked for these things and hoped I would get some things that I asked for. Christmas time comes around, I get the gifts I wanted, and I’m almost bursting with excitement to go to school to show off all my new clothes.

It’s the first day back from winter break. I’ve got on my new jacket, shirt, jeans, and my new Nike Air Force 1’s. I got a lot of compliments that day, from my friends, classmates, and even people I didn’t know. I loved the attention, and knew I wanted to have attention like that everyday. So I wore new outfits to school everyday for the past 2 months, The compliments kept coming every day and I was incredibly thrilled. Because of my new wardrobe, I started to make new friends. Kids that had never spoke a word to me, but now that I had these new things suddenly wanted to be my best friend.

By around March is when things started to get ugly. All I wanted to do was look good at school and impress my new friends. I was falling behind on homework and wasn’t making the grades I was making at the beginning of the year. So as a result I started doing my homework

Level II: Semifinalists

less and less, causing my grades to drop really low. It was the lowest I've ever seen them in my entire life. My parents noticed that my grades were slipping, so like any normal parents sat down to have a chat with me. They sat me down and talked to me about why my grades were like they were. My parents were surprisingly not angry, just wondering why their High Honor Roll student was suddenly making C's and D's. Whenever my parents had asked me question about why one of my papers was missing, or why I had failed a test, I would lie my way out of it. My parents believed my lies. And how could they not? I had always been an honest student and was serious about my work. My lies worked. I went on normally trying to look nice, and impress people that didn't even matter.

One particular day in Spanish class I was sitting in my seat right next to my friend Camille. My teacher Ms. Smith announces that we'll be having a test in two days, and to be prepared for anything. I knew I wasn't going to do well on that test. I had done none of the homework and rarely studied the material. It's the day of the test and one of my so called "friends" tell me that half the class are using their phones to cheat on this test. I hadn't done anything like this before. Sure I used to take quick glances at neighbors papers back in elementary school, but this was taking it to a whole new level. I actually went through with it and got out of school that day feeling pretty proud of myself. So proud of myself that when I got on the bus, I bragged about it to everyone on there including my twin sister, Kelly.

I remember the exact day I got in big trouble with my parents, April 29th. I was feeling real good about my test grade, I'd gotten an A on it. My parents asked me to their room to discuss my grades. They hadn't gotten better since our last talk, in fact they had got worse. I sat down with my parents and they discussed with me and said they were very

angry with me. At this point in the school year I didn't care what my parents said to me or what punishments they gave me I was turning into something that I wasn't. Someone who doesn't care about school and their future. When the lecture seemed like it had come to end I thought I was out of the clear for punishment, then out of the blue my mom starts talking to me about the Spanish test. I wasn't really sure where the conversation was going but I had a gut wrenching feeling about the entire thing. My parents ripped it off like a band-aid. They knew I had cheated on my test. At first I tried to lie my way out of it, but there was no denying it. Someone had snitched on me. Then at that very moment I knew my sister had told my parents everything. I was angry at first, mad that she would break "the sister code," but then I was just upset. I felt betrayed and thought the whole world was against me.

Me cheating on my test resulted in getting my phone taken away and taking a zero on the test. The score I got really affected my grade, and I almost didn't pass the class. That grade is going to affect me forever because it was for high school credit and the grade goes on my college transcript. So I've told my story, but I haven't told about the message that connects my story and your poem together. In your poem one line says, "and the reason I have to look real fly well to tell you the truth man I don't know why." It also says, "my crew's laughin at me cuz I'm wearin old gear." The young man in your poem doesn't know why he dresses the way he does but it makes him feel good inside. And because he hasn't gotten anything new in awhile his so called "friends" are laughing at him and poking fun at him. This is in some way how I felt. I wanted to fit in with all the "cool" kids, and wanted to be accepted by them. When I did started to fit in with these kids I had to make a lot of sacrifices, just like boy in the poem. At this time in my life I wasn't in a very good place. It was the beginning of middle school and I was trying to find my place in the world, and till this day I'm still trying to figure it out. I let materialistic

Level II: Semifinalists

and unimportant things control my life, I'd forgot what was really important to me. Now that I think about what was going on, I'm glad that my sister told my parents what had happened it was a wake up call for me. When I read your poem at the beginning of my 8th grade year, it was powerful and I had an instant connection with it. Thank you for making me realize something about that event, and just life in general.

Sincerely,
Rachel Curry

Emmy Gottsman

Brownsburg East Middle School, Brownsburg

Letter to Jerry L. Ross

Author of *Spacewalker*

Dear Mr. Ross,

As long as I can recall, I've had goals for the future. However, I never knew what it would take to attain my goals. When I heard you speak at Purdue University's Space Day, I was intrigued and sought out your book. Your book, *Spacewalker*, has given me inspiration, assurance, and lessons that I will incorporate in my life.

I have loved animals all of my life. One of my goals is to become a veterinarian. Although I have different goals than you had in your childhood, I gain inspiration from your story about becoming an astronaut. I am inspired by your drive when you decided to become an engineer in elementary school. Although you didn't really know what an engineer did at the time, you knew that it would lead you to space. As your family encouraged you when you first began to love space, my mom constantly encourages me and helps me pursue my dream of becoming a veterinarian. My mom encourages me even when I have concerns about becoming a veterinarian. I have realized from this that family support is also important.

Your book has given me confidence that I can reach my goals. As I read about your experiences, when at first you didn't make it into the space program; I was encouraged by your persistence in trying again and finally making it. It made me realize that even when I want to give up on my dreams because of grades or financial issues, I should continue to try and try again by finding different ways to get past obstacles. After reading of how you broke NASA's record by going to space seven times, I understood that anything is possible, and anything can be achieved if I put my mind to it and am willing to work hard.

From reading your book, I have acquired the lesson of determination. I learned that having determination can help me reach my goals, as it helped you when you were trying out for the space program. You were determined even when you struggled to swim, one of the

requirements to get into the space program. It was because of your determination that you got your scuba certification, which allowed you to progress in the space program. *Spacewalker* made me realize how much determination and work I would have to put into my goal of becoming a veterinarian.

Spacewalker has shown me that I can overcome my challenges and achieve my goals. It has given me inspiration and has taught me to be determined. Thank you for writing this book. I have learned so many lessons from your life story.

Sincerely yours,
Emmy Gottsman

Jordyn Hagerman

West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

Letter to Jane Yolen and Mark Teague

Authors of *How to Make a Dinosaur Laugh Out Loud*

Dear Jane Yolen and Mark Teague,

Your book *How to Make a Dinosaur Laugh Out Loud* means a lot to me. I read the book to my brothers all the time. I would sit on the floor, and they would sit beside me. My brothers know the book so well that they can answer all the jokes correctly. My brother Javan would answer the jokes so fast you wouldn't notice. Then, my youngest brother, Julian, would get upset and say give him time to answer. He would have to think about it for a long time, and my brother Javan and I would laugh so hard. And, every time it makes a memory of love and joy.

I love my family more than anything; they are important to me. I don't know what I would do without my family. I have a friend who does not get along with her sister, and she tries to sit as far away from her as possible. She says her sister is annoying, a brat, a pain. But how can anyone say that about their family? I love my brothers a lot. Sure, they can get little annoying, but I still love them. I sit with them all the time, and I say I love them all the time. But I have never heard my friend say that. All I hear is how bad she is. It drives me crazy sometimes! There are some little kids on my bus, and they watch sometimes how I show love for my brothers and how much fun we have. They have told me once that they wish they had me as a sister. They have a sisters themselves, and their older sisters don't do what my brothers and I do. They sit separately on the bus and yell at each other, or they don't talk to them at all. But those kids can't really mean it, even if they say that, I *know* they love their sisters (even if they don't want to say it.) When my brothers hear those kids say they wish they had me as a sister, they get all protective and say, "She is ours!" I love me brothers, and they love me back. That is what makes us a great family.

How to Make a Dinosaur Laugh Out Loud brings those memories out, and when I get mad at them, I think about the good times, the

Level II: Semifinalists

fun times. And, *that* always reminds me of how much I love them. No matter what. So, for the future, I will always love this book. I want to read it forever and keep making fun, joyful, and happy memories.

Sincerely,
Jordyn Hagerman

Gabbie Haviland

Greensburg Jr. High, Greensburg

Letter to Laura Hillenbrand

Author of *Unbroken*

Dear Laura Hillenbrand,

Your book, *Unbroken*, was recommended to me by my dad. He told me that your book told a very inspirational story, so in 7th grade I decided to do my book report on your book. Before I had read this book I knew that war was a terrible time, but I hadn't fully understood all of the complications that those soldiers had to go through. Your book also taught me how to push through the pain that you feel in everyday life. Louie's story was phenomenal already, but your book made it come to life, and relate to everyone, young and old, veteran or not. After reading this book I will never look at the world the same way again.

The title of this book is worth a thousand words to me. *Unbroken* can mean many of different meanings, to many different people. To me the title *Unbroken* means that no matter how many struggles we have in life, we cannot let those struggles break us, we have to stay unbroken. This title alone has inspired me to never let those struggles in life intimidate me, because once that happens you have become "broken."

My dad, my grandfather, and my great grandfather are all veterans. My dad served in Afghanistan, my grandfather in Vietnam, and my great grandfather had served in WWII, they don't like to tell us stories about what had happened in the war, so I didn't really understand how terrible it was, but your book has given me a new sense of knowledge. After reading all of the struggles that Louie went through has helped me to realize what my family members went through. After reading that book I will never stop thinking about all of our veterans and soldiers, I am forever thankful for all of those men and women, and I will never stop the gratitude that I now feel for them.

"A moment of pain is worth a lifetime of glory." This was a quote from your book, that was spoken by Louie's older brother Pete. Not only

Level II: Semifinalists

did this book teach me about having gratitude for veterans, but also about running. I love running XC, and after I read your book that quote flows through my head like a waterfall, but not only when I'm running, but in everything I do in life. In my first year of XC I had tried my best to run hard, but whenever I thought about the pain it would hold me back, so my goal the next year was to not hold back. Every time that I would run I would think about this quote, and I ended up improving SO much! It's the same way in my everyday life.

After reading this book my outlook on life will never be the same. I look at our struggles as a sign of strength, instead of weakness. My goal in life is to push through the pain, because once we do, that feeling of pain will be minute compared to the feeling of accomplishment and glory that we feel after it's over.

Sincerely,
Gabbie Haviland

Vianai Herrera

West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

Letter to Laurie Halse Anderson

Author of *Speak*

Dear Laurie Halse Anderson,

Your book, *Speak*, influenced my life so much. It taught me that if you see something bad or someone did something bad to you or to someone else, you should speak out.

The main character Melinda felt like she had no one to talk to about her problems and was depressed because something terrible happened at a party, and she didn't speak out. I had a connection with Melinda because I know what it is like to feel like you have no one to talk to about your problems. I have gone through depression like Melinda. I didn't have a very close relationship with my father because he was in prison for almost 10 years. When he came out, all we would do is argue. Then he later went back to prison. I felt anger, and I used to cry all night. I felt unloved. I felt like no one would understand. I felt like no one would even listen, which was how Melinda felt.

When Melinda had a close relationship with one of her teachers and felt like she did have someone that would listen, I decided I should have a close relationship to express my feelings to someone who would listen. I needed to feel comfortable to talk about my problems like Melinda. I had built a wall with my mother and wouldn't tell her how I felt or talk to her about anything. I later broke down that wall and expressed my feelings to her. Now, I have a close relationship with her.

Your book helped me realize that I'm not the only one who has felt like that and made me understand how people sometimes skip school or don't care about school or act certain ways because most people are depressed or something terrible has happened in their life like Melinda. Before I read your book; I had a close friend that would use to skip class. She would yell at teachers. And, she just didn't care about school. She later told me about what was going on. After reading your book, I understood why she acted that way because she was going through depression. Every now and then, I would talk to

Level II: Semifinalists

my mom about wanting to do something with people going through depression like Melinda, such as taking walks with them or taking them out to eat, anything to make them feel like someone does care and would listen to them.

I was confused about becoming a psychologist for teens or not when I'm older, but when I read your book, I really wanted to become one. I wanted to know why Melinda was depressed and what happened to her that made her depressed and had no one to talk to. Since then I would ask my friends what was wrong if they were sad or lonely.

I don't really like to read but when I read your book I was so into it I couldn't stop reading. I am so glad I read this book because of the impact it caused my life. Thank you for writing *Speak*. I now have a close relationship with my mother, I know what to be when I am older, and I want to comfort people going through depression so they don't feel lonely.

Sincerely,
Vianai Herrera

Kendalyn Hurm

Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to Raquel J. Palacio

Author of *Wonder*

Dear Raquel J. Palacio,

Growing up, I was never exposed to any out of the ordinary things. I never knew that anything, such as a face, could look any different than any other one. I went to a private school and everybody, including myself, looked pretty similar. In fifth grade, when your book was read to me, I thought that there was no way that something like that could happen here, in such a small city. I never saw anything bad happen and I thought it was just because the world was perfect, but as we all know, nothing is entirely perfect, especially the world.

Moving into middle school, a whole new perspective approached me. Middle school was much larger than my elementary school. A grade level in my new school was equivalent to my entire old school. Comparably speaking, August Pullman went to a real school, after being homeschooled his whole life, and was overwhelmed and scared. I know my situation was much less intense than his, but I still received a feel of what he went through. As I walked through the halls everyday, it became clearer. I was no longer a child who was protected from the harshness of the world, but a girl getting a glimpse of it. Time after time, I see people getting put down by the people they call friends. Because of Auggie's deformation, he had a ton of horrible things said or done to him by his so-called friends. Girls in my school say one thing to someone's face and a whole different thing to me, behind their back. When people say something jokingly to someone, sometimes that person brings offence to it. I've tried and tried to work up the courage to say something and help stop this insincerity, but I never could.

I'm in seventh grade now and that means I've been in middle school two years. Although I would consider my life to be close to a perfect one, I know other people aren't as fortunate as I am. I have good friends, but I know of some who don't have such good friends. Auggie Pullman wasn't the most popular kid in school, but he had one friend who he knows will always have his back, even after what

Level II: Semifinalists

happened. Reflecting on what happens at my school, there isn't much harsh bullying like what Auggie went through, but the little things hurt too. The students here don't take down the ones who you would think. They take down their own friends, or the ones who do fit in with all of the others. I will keep on trying to stop the discrimination against the people who don't have the best appearance, don't fit in, or anything else. If I try hard enough, I can stand up for those who are afraid to stand up for themselves. Persistency is key, and I will, at sometime, help someone who is being bullied. Thank you for writing such a wonderful book, and giving me a sense of the real world.

Sincerely,
Kendalyn Hurm

Tanner Kane

Southridge Middle School, Huntingburg

Letter to George Orwell

Author of *Animal Farm*

Dear George Orwell,

I now feel that certain people control, schools, government, and the world. The popular kids control the school, the rich and wealthy control the government, and the government controls the world. This has been this way my entire life, and I am in the most free country in the world and I still feel controlled by society that were once my equals. I hadn't noticed this feeling until reading your book, *Animal Farm*. At the beginning of this book they were all equals as so called lousy farm animals. They all decided to overthrow the farmer and put the pigs in charge. Then the pigs decided they are better than the rest of the farm animals. After watching how the pigs treated the rest of animals and the world it made me take a big step back and take a look at today's society.

The sense of urgency in the book from the animals shows how the people of the world should feel. We are constantly being controlled more and more by the leaders and other people of the world. Take North Korea for example, what they watch, listen to, and hear is what they believe because they are controlled by their leader and so is what they watch. They should feel like trapped animals that have no say but they just trust and believe their leader. It should not be this way. He is an awful person. They are like the sheep in your book. They follow and do what they are told to do. Should people be like scared little sheep? No, we need to stand up for ourselves and your book has taught me that.

Your book has also taught me to stop and look at my situation, not just be like a sheep and not just do what I am told, to look at what I am doing, and if I am being treated equally to everyone else, and if I am not to take a stand for what I believe in. It's my life and I need to stand up for it!

So I am here to thank you George Orwell for not only giving me a good book to read and enjoy but for teaching me simple life lessons.

Level II: Semifinalists

You have taught me to take a stand for what I believe in and to take a big step back and really take a hard look at what is going on whether it be at lunch or working on a project. This is what you have taught me with your wonderful book *Animal Farm*.

Tanner Kane

Sophie Mariacher

Wisdom Builders, Zionsville

Letter to Kate DiCamillo

Author of *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*

Dear Kate DiCamillo,

As I read your book, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, I felt a personal connection to Edward. My heart ached for him, as he journeyed from place to place. At the beginning, he was self-centered and vain. As he went along his journey, he experienced the heartache of loss. Then, he became less self-centered and began to see others as more important than himself. In the end, he was humble, selfless and caring. He learned the significance of being loved and loving others. Reading this book made me realize that I, like Edward, have not always been thankful for the things I have. I spent some of my years focusing on what I didn't have, what I wanted, and what I thought I needed instead of the many wonderful things that I already had.

When I read your book, as Edward saw how hard some people's lives are, I realized how fortunate I am. I have the freedom to homeschool, I have a family, a place to call home and countless other things. In the beginning of the story Edward didn't realize how he had everything, much like me. As I perceive my life I can't even comprehend how amazing my life is.

I used to live in Mississippi. I lived in a neighborhood with kids around the "loop," we would call it. All of us kids would play games, ride bikes, have mud fights, and adventure into the "woods" behind our house. I was happy. I didn't feel I needed anything else. I had a best friend. We would go to each other's houses every day and go home with memories that I still cherish today. I was homeschooled, so she was really the only friend I had. She was always adventurous and I would worry about little things.

In the year of 2013, everything changed. A job opened for my Dad in Indiana with Eli Lilly. My parents wanted us to live in Indiana because our extended family lived there. I wanted to do everything I could to stay put in my little neighborhood filled with memories. I

Level II: Semifinalists

was happy in our house, with my friends, in my neighborhood. Life was wonderful and I couldn't comprehend how anyone would think I could leave it all behind. The dreaded day came when we had to move. My day was filled with tears and heartbreaking goodbyes. We packed up our things, said goodbye and began our journey ten hours across the country to Indiana. Like Edward was lost, I felt lost. I hated living in Indiana. I had no friends, we lived on a street with no kids, and I missed my home in Mississippi. The first year I lived in Indiana was the hardest. I was in fourth grade and went to public school. I really had no true friends there. I began homeschooling again in fifth grade. I accepted that I lived here now and went on with life, but I never thought it would feel like home.

Things changed when I joined the swim team. I began swimming and loved it. I finally found something I enjoyed. I made friends that I still have today and started feeling more at home here in Indiana. As life went on, I made new memories and new friends. New families started moving in, on our street. God brought me a best friend. I felt so much more excited about living here when I could share it with someone, especially someone who was just down the street. I love life in Indiana. Today I feel like home is nowhere but here. God has brought me amazingly wonderful friends I couldn't imagine life without. I've made memories that make me laugh and cry. My life is a wonderful one and I would never regret moving here. Indiana is home to me.

As I moved, like Edward, I went on a miraculous adventure of ups and downs. I thank God for the wonderful life he has given me with so many things to be grateful for. The memories of moving are a part of me now, and also memories I have made. Even though Edward didn't know it, he was lost even when he wasn't. I felt this way on my journey. Edward was happy with life, like I was in Mississippi.

Both not knowing what else may be out there. This book changed the way I look at things. Whenever I'm ungrateful about something I remember that Edward didn't realize what he had was so amazing until he lost it. When he began feeling comforted by the new families he was with. Like Edward, I have found a new comfort in living here. When I'm ungrateful about something I rethink the situation and realize I might not have everything I desire in life but I definitely have more than I need.

With love,
Sophie Mariacher

Level II: Semifinalists

Caroline McCance

Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to Anne Frank

Author of *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*

Dear Anne Frank,

It takes 365.25 days for our world to revolve around the sun. Some of those days can be spent with nothing but a smile plastered across your face. Some of those days can be spent searching for something to smile about in hard times. On some days, there is absolutely nothing good that can come out of the bad. The evil in the universe simply rips out every last stitch of the good, leaving no band-aid to patch the wounds of the world.

Sometimes the world streams tears of joy, and you are trapped in your own personal shell isolating yourself in fear that facing the world will rip you up again. Sometimes the world mourns, and you have the courage to smile.

I used to be one of those people who spent every day with a smile painted across my rosy red cheeks. But come 2016, I lost hope in myself. I came to school every day to be constantly bullied and harassed. The negativity was all around me. They bullies began striking almost everywhere—school, online, and even at community events. I reported it to the school when it had gotten out of hand. The vice principal told me to work it out myself. It was impossible for me. I tried and tried all different ways to kill them with kindness, but every method failed. Everyday, it took all my energy to fight back tears. I would not allow myself to cry because I did not want to be labeled as the crybaby. I did not want the bullies to know they were bothering me. In fact, I remember spending my first moments of 2016 with tears rolling down my cheeks as I tried to go to sleep. I had so many tears built up in my eyes as I had been holding them back so long. For me, I thought it would never end. In March, I read your diary. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* was put into my hands by my seventh grade language arts teacher. By reading from the perspective of a fellow thirteen year old, Anne, who struggled in hiding everyday in fear that she would be caught and yet found

a smile in hard times, I was given a different outlook and was determined to find something to smile about every day. The hard times continued until May when I transferred schools. I thought nothing would ever be that bad again. I was thankful you inspired me to find my smile everyday, but grateful to return to being the person that was always smiling. I continued to smile every day from May 7–December 6 when things changed.

One of my close friends, Ryan, told me he wanted to kill himself. I did what I thought I should do—report it the next day at school. Based on my morals and your inspiration, I understood that if there was any hope of that person being happy again, I would need to report it instead of living with that burden. The most fearful thing is knowing that Ryan’s life was in my hands—whatever I chose to do would determine the rest of his life. After this, I struggled as I kept getting dragged in when I wanted no part of it. No one could understand, but I knew it was important to surround myself with happy people. I thought that all of the evil around me was taking out the beauty in my world, until I reread your story and I remembered the quote, “I don’t think of all the misery but of the beauty that still remains.” This made me, again, look for a reason to smile everyday. Yes, times are hard and hope is running low. But, my world is still spinning and the stars still twinkle in the midnight sky. You found happiness in something as simple as writing in your diary every day. When I had nothing else to smile about, I began keeping a diary. I wrote out all my struggles and the times I found happiness. You taught me that there is a balance between when the world does evil and you have to find the courage to smile, and when the world frowns and you find joy. This applied so many times in the situation.

I could never picture anything like these situations happening to me; it still seems like a nightmare. Your family did not leave home because the possibly of being caught was so minimal in the eyes of

your family. I could not escape before it began, too, because I never thought I would end up being that unlucky person. Your book gave me answers to my questions—why would God put us through these hardships? What exactly did we do to deserve this? From you, I learned that you cannot worry about the things that you have no control of. You could not control Hitler's actions. I cannot control Ryan's actions nor could I control any of the bully's actions. Yes, I can let it eat away at me every single moment of my life. But, I would rather choose happiness. So, I am not writing to you only to thank you for helping me as I struggled; I am also writing to you for inspiring me for the future. After reading your book, I have promised myself that I will never spend a full 24 hours frowning again. I will find a reason to smile. I will find a reason to laugh. I will find a reason to be happy. I owe this to you; you will never be forgotten.

I know people affected my last year for the worse and made me struggle, but you taught me that despite everything, people are good at heart. Even though I found something to be happy about every single day, there is still a tiny place in my heart, and I spend time every day hoping and praying and waiting for that one day I will be freed of the sorrow, the terror, and the grief of my 365.

Sincerely,
Caroline McCance

Jackson McPherron

Southridge Middle School, Huntingburg

Letter to Ray Bradbury

Author of *Fahrenheit 451*

Dear Ray Bradbury,

All my life I've wondered how things could have been in the future. I think about who would be leading us if some events did or didn't happen. I think about how the world would have been without certain inventions or people. *Fahrenheit 451* has brought a new approach to my thoughts. Now I think about how our generation can shape the future. I think if our generation banned something, that it could cause problems for future generations. I believe that anyone can stand up and speak out about something and express their opinion. They should be entitled to the same rights as other people.

This showed me how our society would function if we banned books. This was a very good interpretation of how I thought it may have happened. Many problems happened in the society because they did not learn from their mistakes. The literature was banned because it had knowledge, but it also had history.

Our generation should be here to preserve freedoms and not limit them. We should be educated about the past to make decisions for the future. We need to shape the future. What would the world be like if *Fahrenheit 451* wasn't written? This book has opened many people's eyes, not just mine. Thank you for writing this book. This book has shaped generations. We should not make the same mistakes as the past, learn from the present, and look to the future.

Sincerely,
Jackson McPherron

Level II: Semifinalists

Madison Morgan

West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

Letter to David Bowden

Author of **“Inner Net”**

Dear Mr. David Bowden,

Your spoken poem **“Inner Net”** really changed me. I’m in 8th grade and that’s when I heard this spoken word poem that really touched my life. It had made me look at my life so much differently. I completely agree about how Facebook and Instagram, just all of the social media is tearing us as human beings apart. It keeps us connected but in a whole different way.

For example, one time I messaged my friend that I haven’t seen in forever and told her that we need to see each other face to face. She replied saying, “Okay, what time do you want to Skype?” Back then I never caught on to that problem, but now I do. Because of all the apps you can have to talk or text or send photos, they are just tearing us apart little by little. And, most of us don’t even see it. We don’t see that we are not really connecting to each other. But I hope one day it will all change.

I used to be so interactive before getting a phone. But then the whole Facebook and Instagram and other stuff like that, pulled me in and I got attached to it. I guess I thought it was cool because other people had it, and I wanted to try to fit in. But then I watched this and I noticed it. I had to stop. I had become attached to my phone and that’s not healthy.

One day all we will be known for is technology and that’s not going to end up well. Eventually we will be replaced by moving and working robots. And the sad thing is, it’s us who are going to replace human kind without even realizing it. Before I heard your poem, I was constantly on social media. That is until I watched your video in class that one day.

You said, “We search daily, but find nothing. Add friends, but lose community. Look for love but get pornography.”

When you talked about how we add friends but lose community, I really connected with that part right there because it almost seems like when I accept friend requests, I will try to message them and get to know them and see if we can meet in person but I never get a text back. And this made me realize how blindsided we are from technology. When I finally realized that just wasn't right, I stopped getting on social media so much because I would much rather talk to them in person than over some device, which is dividing all human beings. I thank you for this poem that helped me open my eyes and see that I myself need to detach from my device. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Your admirer,
Madison Morgan

Herschel Nathan

Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to Joseph Boyden

Author of *Three Day Road*

Dear Joseph Boyden,

To me, a friend is someone who is there for you when you need them most. They are so close that you trust them until death. You call upon the final memory you had with them, and retell the story just to have one last moment with them.

I drew from your book, *Three Day Road*, that friendship can survive even when the other person changes. Your book documented the struggle of losing a close friend. Elijah's death and the way Xavier reacted to it reminded me of the loss of my grandfather. Xavier and I retold the story of their deaths to ourselves to make sense of what happened and why. My grandfather's passing caused a similar reaction in me to Xavier's reaction to Elijah's death—the cycle of denial, anger, and acceptance.

Mass death is close in our world. The Syrian civil war and the recapture of Aleppo is causing families to be obliterated with a lot of bloodshed. Even closer is the terrorist attacks in Europe where people are losing close family members. Something even closer, in my backyard, are all of the mass shootings happening in the United States over the last year. The family members and the friends of the victims go through the same thing Xavier and I went through when our loved ones died.

Throughout your book, I saw that Xavier was yearning for Elijah to come back and be his friend again. Losing a friend is not always death, sometimes a friend moves away and you lose contact. I had a friend who moved to a different state and I have yet to speak to them again. But, I have another close friend who also moved away and I try to keep in close contact. It is harder than a non-long distance friend because it takes more effort to stay in contact. I need to remind myself to set a time to contact them. We regularly use Facetime to catch up with each other or even to do homework together.

Your book opened my eyes. Everyone changes, and some friends grow together while others can become foreign to you. Xavier and I have something in common, the way our friends change without us. Sometimes our friends change in a way we do not want, yet we still stay friends.

Kind regards,
Herschel Nathan

Desiree Null

West Noble Middle School, Ligonier

Letter to Prince Ea

Author of **“Can We Auto-Correct Humanity?”**

Dear Prince Ea,

“See technology, Has made us more selfish and separated than ever.”
—Prince Ea

Your poem, **“Can We Auto-Correct Humanity?”**, explains a lot to me. All people ever do is post on social media. It’s ruining everything. We start to become selfish, needy, and also greedy. It’s horrible how one little program can change a person so much. Technology can be used in good ways but can also be negative towards humanity. And I feel like if we just had one day, one day with no devices, we could actually spend time with each other. We could meet new people. We could also find out some things that may just blow our mind.

I started to read your poem more and more. The thing is, I don’t really like poetry. It’s not exactly my favorite thing in life but yours... I loved it. It not like any other poem. You speak about how you feel in the most impressive way.

You have impacted my life in the biggest way possible. You made me understand that social media isn’t something we should use everyday. It drags us apart. Not many people like to meet in person. Instead, we put our faces up to our devices. We text instead of using the one thing we were given to speak—our mouth.

My family isn’t on good terms at the moment and never really was. We’ve been through a lot but never gave up. That’s what I love about them most. They’re pretty much all I have. Without them I don’t know where I would be or if I would even make it this far. But social media has pulled us apart. We don’t meet up anymore because we can just Face Time now. It’s nice to talk to them, but I wish I could see them in person. Actually hug them and really connect with them.

There is that popular saying that we only live once. Do we really want to spend it looking at our phones? Your poetry could really change

someone's life. It could really make a child understand that we should take advantage of our life. It definitely made me think twice on how I look at the world. You helped me understand that life can be a lot more interesting and fun if we just take a moment to realize it.

Sincerely,
Desiree Null

Ty Ofer

Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to Alan Gratz

Author of *Code of Honor*

Dear Alan Gratz,

Your book *Code of Honor* changed the way I thought of others and changed the way I thought about myself. I learned to be thankful for my great friends, my family, and having no one to judge me off of my skin or my beliefs. I also learned that just because you are a professional at a certain job or a hobby/sport you can still be incorrect about certain things. Unreasonably, the FBI falsely accused Kamran's brother Darius of being a terrorist. The FBI saw multiple videos showing that Darius could be a terrorist but never got all the evidence. They missed out on the smallest things like the small bush that made a huge difference in the end of the book.

I never expected to find a connection between Kamran and I. I felt the hardships of being bullied and being ignored by everyone around you. I know what it feels like be alone with no support at all. I saw this in Kamran as well when he was being harassed by some of his peers and fellow teammates as well. I remember when I was in second grade and I got bullied. It was a long time ago but I still remember how the bully made fun of my height. He of course was tall and I was short.

At the beginning of the book, I was shocked to hear that Darius was a terrorist. I thought that a man of honor with a military background would never do such a thing, but maybe I was wrong. Some people can go wrong in their life like some of the criminals we see on television today. I know that nobody is perfect but why would Darius betray both his country and his family? He just left his family to a whole bunch of angry neighbors and news reporters.

When this one neighbor spray-painted "terrorists" on Kamran's house I was furious. We Americans believe every single rumor we hear. We judge people off the color of their skin or what religion they worship. It angers me to see how one microscopic story can make all of us want to backstab one another rather than support them in a time of crisis.

Eventually when the DHS arrested Kamran and took his family for interrogation I was confused. There was only a few bits of evidence that they found at their house, why did they feel it was necessary to take them to one of the most secure complexes in the United States? Apparently just some Muslim prayer beads are just enough for us to think someone is a terrorist.

The worst part I thought was when the DHS separated Kamran's family. I couldn't imagine being alone in an austere room for an entire year. I can only be away from home for about two weeks before I start to miss my family and become homesick. It wouldn't be easy either being treated like a criminal or convict.

When Kamran meets Mickey Hagen, an Irish CIA detective, I knew the tides had turned. Mickey and Kamran managed to figure out a secret code between Darius and Kamran. The time it takes to create a code with a friend, brother, or a cousin is huge amount of time; it seems like forever. Time isn't enough either, the couple need a special bond in order to connect to each other.

I was so stunned to hear that Mickey actually broke Kamran out of the DHS, he risked his job, he could have gotten arrested, or he could have been killed. He still broke Kamran out though just to find Darius. That is a special bond between two people right there.

Towards the end when Kamran and Darius try to stop the Super Bowl bombing they would rather sacrifice themselves than see other people get hurt. Together they evacuated the people out of the stadium and tried to defuse the bomb. Even though the bomb blew up they still managed to stop the terrorists there and even got them arrested. They both showed a true code of honor not only between each other but to the people at the game and to the people who died trying to stop

Level II: Semifinalists

those terrorists. Without this book I probably would not be the same as I was today. I learned many lessons from your book and I have you to thank for that.

Sincerely,
Ty Ofer

Addison Reed

Salem Middle School, Salem

Letter to James Patterson

Author of *Word of Mouse*

Dear James Patterson,

Before I read your book *Word of Mouse* I always thought bigger was better. I thought because I am small I can't do as much as my fellow classmates. Isaiah helped me gain confidence because I could look at him and see myself. If Isaiah a mouse can do anything so can I.

Whenever I think about myself before I read this book I think about the times I cried myself to sleep because I wanted so badly to fit in but, now I know I can be different and I don't need to let other people judge the way I look. I shaved the back of my head and put a heart design in it! I even skateboard now because I know it is okay to be myself. Some kids at school laugh at me because I am different, just like the way the other mice think Isaiah is weird because he is blue. Hailey never laughed at Isaiah and I now realize that is the kind of friend I need. I am making new friends that actually care about me the same way I care about them.

I like how Isaiah and I are really alike. We are both small and we both have big hearts. For example, when I was at my old school one of the smaller kids got pushed down by a bully and I ran over to help him up and I played with him for the whole time at recess. I really understand what it is like to be bullied because it has happened to me. I didn't want to see anyone else get bullied either.

While I was reading your book, I thought about some things that I have never thought about before. I thought about how animals are kept in labs all the time being abused and tested on. I thought about how animals deserve to be free and how they really are intelligent from the smallest mouse to the biggest elephant. I have confidence in myself now and things still get to me sometimes but, I know I have to express myself. There is no one just like me and I have to embrace that.

Sincerely,
Addison Reed

Truly Reffeitt

Wisdom Builders, Brownsburg

Letter to C.S. Lewis

Author of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

Dear Mr. C.S. Lewis,

I am a homeschooler who made valuable connections with your book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. For some years now, I have had a tough time. From the beginning of 2013 to the end of 2014, my family had moved 8 times. Through various issues and mistakes, including mold, flooding and others, every house we tried to move to was made unavailable to us. One of the houses, which seemed to be our dream home, was on five acres and was a foreclosed home. Instead of closing on the 5 acres, the bank closed on 0.9 acres, which didn't even include the house. We finally found the perfect place (aka no problems!) in 2015 and have lived here since. During this moving period, I began to get confusional migraines consistently, prohibiting me from eating numerous things. So basically, I felt like numerous doors were being slammed in my face.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, I made a connection with the fact that what most see as an ancient wardrobe, some can see as a whole new world. When Lucy first discovered Narnia, she attempts to tell her siblings who, of course, do not believe her "nonsense." They had to be transported into Narnia before even acknowledging its existence. The same is true with many. As humans, we are so submerged in our own selfish lives that we become oblivious to the whole picture that is being painted around us. With my migraines, I was forced to miss several social events, which would make me feel left out. Since reading your book, I have tried to wake up knowing that I am truly blessed to even be allowed to witness this amazing picture that is life.

Another important connection I made with your book is the unlikely friendship of Lucy and Mr. Tumnus. They encounter each other coincidentally, or so it seems. I have a friend, Olivia, who has journeyed with me through my most difficult times. Even with their short time together, Lucy and Mr. Tumnus trusted each other tremendously, even to the point of captivity and persecution. This outstanding relationship has assisted me and shown me that I should

trust my friends and be willing to do anything for them (as long as it isn't against my moral values).

As I stated earlier, I moved a lot and was insecure and frustrated about my surroundings. In the book, Aslan is like a father figure, or God, controlling the situations of his children. I read the book when I was in the midst of my moving experience. Reading about Aslan and his sovereignty over his children reestablished my Christian faith, even if I did not realize it at the time. Thank you for investing your valuable time in writing *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, which has inspired and encouraged me and I'm positive many others would like to say the same thing.

Respectfully,
Truly Reffeitt

Ethan Solomon

Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to Jon Finkel

Author of *Heart Over Height*

Dear Jon Finkel,

If I could do anything in the world, I would choose to play in the NBA. Basketball is more than just a sport to me, it's like an art in some way. I got into basketball when I was around six years old and to this day I love it even more. When I was a little kid, my dream was to play in the NBA, so I did as much research as I could about how to make it into the NBA. Right now, I'm not growing at the speed that I want and I'm not very tall. The doctors say I'm a late bloomer but that doesn't make me feel better. I worry that no high schools or colleges will let me play basketball because of my height. In order to follow my dreams, I want to have a role model in the NBA. Of course, the 5'9" guard from the University of Washington, Nate Robinson, popped into my head. In school I had to read an autobiography, so I decided to read Nate Robinson's autobiography *Heart Over Height*.

Heart Over Height is a book that changed my life and it has given me hope to follow my dreams. Nate Robinson had a hard life growing up and he tried his hardest to follow his dream. Robinson had a difficult childhood because he had to move away from his friends and go to a new school. I have also struggled the last few years because my father passed away. All I want to do is make him proud and show him that I will never give up no matter what. My dad and I had a very close relationship and we had a very special bond. I want to repay him and make him proud. Like Nate Robinson, I have doubters and believers. Nate's parents were his two main supporters growing up and they helped him keep his confidence. I am similar to Nate because I take my mother's advice for hard decisions like he did.

Decision making plays a big part in growing up. Nate Robinson had to make a huge decision- whether he wanted to go pro in football or basketball. Few people get the choice whether to play in the NFL or NBA. Nate's friends said that he should just play pro football because he was a much better football player than basketball player at the

time. Nate wanted to prove his friends wrong and achieve more, so he worked and worked to be an NBA player and it happened.

As I read the book I came across a part that shocked me, and I mean really shocked me. I read that Nate Robinson was playing varsity football and varsity basketball his freshman year in high school. I thought that playing two varsity sports during freshman year was nearly impossible. I know that people say going pro is impossible, that you have a less than one percent chance but look at Nate. He is, still to this day, not even six feet tall and he made it into the NBA. I think that if I work my hardest both in school and out on the court, you never know what can happen.

People say that they can do anything they want to do when they get older but most people don't understand that you have to work for it to get there. If you want to become a rich doctor or a successful lawyer, you are going to have to work for it. I know I'm still young, but after reading Nate's life story I think that if you never give up and work as hard as possible then you can do whatever your heart desires.

Sincerely,
Ethan Solomon

Samrawit Solomon

Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to Sharon Draper

Author of *Out of My Mind*

Dear Ms. Draper,

Two sides, one person. That is pretty much the definition of my life. A side that is nice and quiet and the other that is loud and mean. I screamed my lungs out and held my tears in almost every single chapter, reading this helped both sides of me to fuse into one unique perspective. Because of *Out of My Mind*, I now want to change the way I think so I include both sides of my personality.

At school I am usually so quiet and focused that I forget that I'm even there. Crazy, right? I really don't know how it happens. I just hear and see everyone and everything and it feels like I am watching an episode of a TV show. I feel disconnected from reality. Isn't that just like Melody? She is trapped in her barely controllable body. She sees everything and doesn't get involved unless she needs to. Although I may not have the same physical condition as Melody, I just can't speak out. I'm a coward that hides in the shadows and only comes out when called to.

Home is where I make most of my mistakes. Thankfully, I only take out my frustration on my family and they have to stay with me for the rest of their lives. I'm like Melody during her tornado explosion. I can't control myself and I scream at everyone one I see (including my parents). I am uncontrollable and only add fuel to the fire of the already loud mess caused by my other three siblings. Just like Melody, I have parents who are not so fond of our volume and actions. Since my parents still care for us, they are kind enough to still give us food and shelter and get over the fact that we will argue. I'm pretty sure if you knew only the "school me" and caught me act at home, you would be beyond shocked.

Out of My Mind helped me realize I really need to get my act together. I can't be two different people anymore and I won't. Reading what Melody had to go through made me more appreciative that I'm not physically disabled. I mean, there was a doctor that called

her retarded. You should know I hate that man from the bottom of my heart. I was screaming at him and my older brother told me to be quiet (I don't blame him, I was already moving all over the house with my eyes glued to the words). Believe me, if I was in Melody's life I would be one of her actual friends, not like the rest of her team (humph!). I want to be like Melody and jump over the hurdles of my life with my TRUE friends (cough*Rose*cough) at my side. I want to finally be both Samrawit from home and from school at all times.

Thank you so much for writing *Out of My Mind*. Because of that book I am finally sure that I will be one person. I know it will take time, which I hate, but I am going to try my best not to be the audience but a character in the story of my life.

Sincerely,
Samrawit Solomon

Emilie Sondhelm

Hasten Hebrew Academy, Indianapolis

Letter to Holly Goldberg Sloan

Author of *Counting by 7s*

Dear Holly Goldberg Sloan,

I'm just an average girl from Indiana. I haven't really experienced loss. I haven't really experienced being alone. I've always had someone with me, whether it was my parents or siblings. Willow didn't have that. In *Counting by 7s*, right at the beginning of the book her parents died in a car accident, leaving her with nothing—no family, no friends, and nowhere to go.

Reading *Counting By 7s* made me realize how lucky I am to have a family who loves me. My family isn't just made up of my parents and siblings, but also my good friends who I spend time with. Willow found a family after her parents died in her guidance counselor, Dell Duke; her new friend, Mai; Mai's brother, Quang-ha; and their mother. They took her in when no one else would. Your book made me appreciate everything I do have and not to focus on the things I want, like a laptop or my own room. Although I do want a laptop and my own room, I would rather have a loving family more than anything else.

When my dad was twelve, his mother and father got into a car accident. His mother was badly burned and his father passed away. Not having a father was very difficult, but my father is an amazing dad and I couldn't have asked for a better one. He didn't have a dad to teach him how to play sports, shave for the first time, or learn how to drive a car. There are many people who have both of their parents and take them for granted. Seeing what my dad has gone through has made me understand that I'm so lucky to have an amazing dad and family.

My grandmother was never very affectionate to my mom. She owned a school, so she wasn't home much. Most nights, my mom would make her own dinner. As my mom grew up, she learned to make friends everywhere she went. Just the other night, her friend from Russia came over with her husband and son. My mom didn't have

loving parents, so to make up for them she found many friends who loved her. Willow did the same thing. They both found family within their friends.

Your book taught me that I should be thankful for everything I have and not complain about the things I don't. Your book also taught me that family can be found anywhere. I am so lucky to have a family who loves me and friends who care a lot about me.

Sincerely,
Emilie Sondhelm

Madison Songer

Southridge Middle School, Huntingburg

Letter to Ray Bradbury

Author of *Fahrenheit 451*

Dear Mr. Ray Bradbury,

Fahrenheit 451, a book that tells the odd life of the nearby future. The future in which they burn literature at the degree of Fahrenheit 451. A book that has taught myself about the world around me and to not take the literature given to me for granted. Literature is a very important material in our society, and people do not have a sincere passion for going and seeking the literature that they could have.

In the book, *Fahrenheit 451*, it has not only taught me to search deeper into the text, but to take the literature I have and run with it. The future may not hold what we are all expecting and just like that all of our knowledge in the literature could be gone. And then what? Do we listen to those who are older and wiser like the group of men across the river, or do we listen to those who run a society that they want and those who do not believe in literature?

I consider myself as a Clarisse in your story. The reason I say that is because Clarisse is a definite unique person in the novel and likes to look at things differently than others. She is a seventeen year old that likes to study the things around her and has a significance that no one else has. She asks Montag, "Are you happy?" That question really put him on the spot and later in the story he started to realize he isn't like all of the other average people in his society. He started to grow into a deeper relationship with Clarisse and she helped Montag seek his inner self and find his clarity that he needed to accept that he wasn't like the others. He later started to steal the books and find that literature was a major thing that their society needed, but didn't accept.

Montag made me realize how much our school is like this book. Montag played along and did what the others did and believed in what the others believed. He was fearful of being his own kind of person and he needed to fit in with the others. The reason that it shows in schools is because I see students everyday scared to do

something wrong and feel like they are going to be judged. They feel the need to fit in and be popular. I am often referred to as a popular kid, but that is a label, and that is not who I am. Montag is given a label as a firefighter that burns literature but that isn't who he truly is, and he later shows everyone in his society that is not who he is. I hope that this book has put an impact on people the way it has done to me and to help people realize that you're not just what people label you, you are more than that and you can be a Clarisse and show your inner self.

Sincerely,
Madison Songer

Level II: Semifinalists

Sarah Springmeyer

Greensburg Jr. High, Greensburg

Letter to William Stafford

Author of **“Assurance”**

Dear William Stafford,

At the start of the school year, I struggled with shoulder pain. My shoulder blade and my front shoulders had been hurting since the very end of last school year. My mom and dad reasoned that it was just growing pains. I had been to a doctor, but they told me the normal things: ice and take it easy with swimming. Everyone thought that swimming caused my pain, but the pain was the effect of overusing my shoulder. On most days, I attended swim practice for an hour and a half, and then headed home to finish my chores, which included taking care of the chickens. After that, I completed my homework. Taking care of the chickens wasn't a laborious chore, but we decided to purchase three pigs. I would obtain my own pig, and my two brothers would each get a pig. The plan was to raise the pigs and to show them for 4-H in the summer. When it was time to pick out the pigs, I felt anxiously excited to choose the cutest little pig. Now I almost despise the beasts. When I took care of the pigs, I carried two five gallon buckets full of water from the water hydrant, about thirty feet from the building, to simply water them. Luckily, my one brother took the job of feeding the pigs. I remember my grandpa warning me about the weight, but I shook it off. Oh I wish, I could go back.

In August, I went to a doctor who specializes in shoulders. The doctor concluded that I had sick shoulder or scapular dyskinesia. I didn't have unimaginable pain, but rather the small pain felt annoying and it wouldn't go away. They also sent me to physical therapy. I went twice a week for four weeks. I yelled; I cried. I wasn't mad at anyone; I was just mad. So I went to school, tackled my therapy at school during gym, and my mom drove me to physical therapy after school. Thankfully my gym teacher was kind enough to let me fulfill my chore of physical therapy during the fifty minutes of gym. I showed up at swim practice but could not fully participate. I kicked with a board, and I observed my friends and teammates swimming and participating in the normal routines of practice. I prayed as usual—at

the dinner table, when I said my nightly prayers, and when morning came. I participated in religious education class every Wednesday. My shoulder pain gradually improved. My physical therapist informed that my recovery would take months and that the annoying pain was the hardest to get rid of.

When I came across your poem “**Assurance**,” I was intrigued by the meaning. “Rain will come, a gutter filled, and Amazon, long aisles—you never heard a sound so deep, moss on rock, and years.” This line is a refresher that bad times will always happen in life. But, after the storm a beautiful rainbow will come. Signaling that God is always there for me. Another line in your poem reminds me of my faith: “You will never be alone, you hear a sound so deep when autumn comes.” The poem talked of the elements of nature and being alone, and how you will never be alone because of nature. I thought there was a deeper meaning of not being alone. Nature makes sure that we are never alone, but God created nature. When nature calms us, it is as if God himself gives assurance to work through all the troubles of our lives. The strangest part is that I really never thought that God was with me. I knew he was there, but I never really came to think about that during this. I am always caught up in the routine and stress of life. Now, after reading your poem, I know that God is with me through the smooth and rough times in my life.

My shoulder pain continued, but it decreased in pain. After going to the doc again, I was sent back to swimming. He instructed me to swim only 30 minutes for a while, then 45 minutes, and so on. But, he commanded me to swim slow. So when I leaped into the familiar cold waters, I tried my best to not actually try or excel my standards. Swimming felt awkward and sore at first, but the awkwardness faded away, and I wasn't sore as much. I increased the amount of time I swam. Right now, I can swim the full time of practice—an hour and thirty minutes. My shoulder feels better, but I still have some pain.

Level II: Semifinalists

Initially, your words spoke to my heart. I found my meaning of assurance. Now, I am going to thank God for getting me through a small mountain of the continuous chain of mountains, thank Him for his presence in my life, and most importantly, I will thank God for His assurance in my life.

Sincerely,
Sarah Springmeyer

Mya Stiles

Jasper Middle School, Jasper

Letter to Sharon Draper

Author of *Out of My Mind*

Dear Sharon Draper,

“They think my brain is messed up like the rest of me.” Melody’s situation with her disabilities and her judgmental peers brought me to a comparison with an event in my own life. Ever since the first day of my kindergarten class, Dylan, an autistic boy, and I, have been like two peas in a pod. I have learned from him more than I have anyone else. He, to this day, still inspires me to be the best version of me.

Just like Melody, Dylan has many similar struggles. All the way up to now, people tend to think of him as a dumb kid who doesn’t know how to do anything right which is completely incorrect. Just like Melody, Dylan is a math genius. He is often mistaken for his incredible ability in which he is amazing at.

“Hi Mom!,” Dylan would call across the room as my mom walked into my classroom every once in awhile. Just as Melody’s relationship with her teacher, Dylan and I had shared the same type of love, the type in which when he was put in the corner, he automatically started to yell my name to help him. As our friendship grew, my heart did as well. My new appreciation for children with autism, down syndrome, and other such diseases and disabilities has exceeded in which I have joined clubs and programs to help and do activities with them.

God made everyone different and it just so happens that Melody and Dylan were created even more different than what people expect. For everyone in the book *Out of My Mind* and I, our visions and intentions of judging others has taken a completely different path. Judging people by their physical appearance is one of the very few lessons that I have learned not to do. With my experiences with helping and conversing with Dylan has changed my whole perspective on how intelligent anyone can be.

Sincerely,
Mya Stiles

Tatton Strassheim

Wisdom Builders, Zionsville

Letter to Bryan Davis

Author of *Raising Dragons*

Dear Mr. Davis,

As I ponder the days I have lived after reading your books, I cannot fathom life before them. It seems like just yesterday that I was looking into the smoldering face of Arramos. I could just barely grasp the notion that an army of giants are underneath my feet. However, as I remember the perilous journey, I now know that there was so much more to the masterful tale than dragons, explosions, and knights in gleaming armor.

As I read, I noticed many small details. Little things that seemed unimportant like markings on a wall. Maybe a person without much visible significance to the story. Over time I started to notice these things coming back into play. The markings on a wall were a key to a door. The lowly villager became a strong general willing to make a sacrifice for his people.

I recognized this pattern over and over again in your writing. Slowly but surely, I came to the conclusion that no matter how minute or insignificant everything had a purpose. Every little obscure detail had been beautifully woven into a fabric of poetry and promise that was sewn into a startling coat. Even the most seemingly unimportant or hardly noticeable things in life are more important than we realize. The man in front of you who offers to pay for your meal at the restaurant, or the little girl at the ER who smiles and waves at a complete stranger; it's the little things that can make the most difference.

Another thing I picked up was that nobody started out being an important piece of your story at first. They had to grow and develop into heroes. They had to build up strength and courage to outweigh their fears and became the tools used to shape our imaginations. This reminds me of riding a bike; you have to slowly build up courage and determination. From the first ride to the moment your father lets go, you build up strength and courage that outweighs your fear to become an independent rider.

Your books have found me laughing, crying, and hanging in suspense for your characters. As the characters of your books grew, they inspired me to grow also.

Thank you for your wonderful work.

Sincerely,
Tatton Strassheim

Konner Thyen

Southridge Middle School, Huntingburg

Letter to Ray Bradbury

Author of *Fahrenheit 451*

Dear Ray Bradbury,

For more than 60 years your book has predicted a bundle of things in the future. Our society is becoming worse. This is what you were trying to tell us when you wrote *Fahrenheit 451* in 1953. You were trying to warn us from the future that was to come.

Technology; you predicted this would happen. The government is only telling us what they want us to know. They aren't telling us all of the details of the wars that are going on right now. When you turn on the television tonight you will see 30 seconds about the war and a hour of who won Dancing with the Stars and how their dance routine was top-notch. Our government is trying to only inform us about the pleasant information and not the horrific. Another thing technology is destroying is books. Less people are reading books each day. Most of the people are watching videos online. You can say the internet is kind of like the parlor walls in the book. The videos are always on the internet, you can never watch them all. This is like how the government in the book were with their shows, they would always keep producing more so you can't think on your own. It is almost the same in real life. I don't think that anyone thinks on their own while watching videos. I know I haven't. Like Mildred, I was brainwashed.

Your book has changed me in a particularly noticeable way. I used to be fairly addicted to videos online. I would watch video after video and I could not pause for a second. I would lose track of time and do nothing but observe videos all day long like Mildred. I don't think that I even move when watching videos. This book has also made me realize that the government doesn't give us enough information about the wars going on, just like the government you predicted it would be. Thank you for writing the book *Fahrenheit 451*.

Sincerely,
Konner Thyen

Millie Tredway

Southridge Middle School, Huntingburg

Letter to Stephen Chbosky

Author of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

Dear Stephen Chbosky (Friend),

When I saw this book sitting on the shelf, I didn't think much of it. It was a tiny book almost microscopic compared to the ginormous *Harry Potter Series* sitting directly to its left. And if I'm being completely honest one of the only reasons I even decided to open the front cover was because I had seen the movie. I was on the midst of depression, trapped in my head as most teens are at my age. Much as Charlie was, I was troubled by the fatigue and vast opportunities of *school*. Something so common, experienced by almost everyone I knew, was my nightmare. I didn't know where I fit in. Where I belonged. I didn't know how to envision my life ever getting *any* better.

From the very beginning I was hooked on every sentence, like a fish on your line I dangled on your every word. Rereading every sentence that had meaning. I had never thought of life like that before. You wrote in a different way, a meaningful way. The words upon the pages were not just words, they were thoughts, from a real human being. It was not an action-filled book, with every page having some burly dude getting shot or having his leg cut off. It was tiny book filled with more meaning than any novel could perceive with a million+ pages. The writer, Charlie, is anonymous to the reader. People have questioned who Charlie was writing to, and why he was writing to them. I think Charlie was writing to the reader. I think just the thought for Charlie of having someone out there, reading *his letters*, supporting *him*, made it somehow easier for him to get over the awful things he had been through. It wraps light feelings to a person's heart knowing that even the unknown, "fictional" Charlie is hurting. The novel made me think differently about life. I thought of things I'd never thought of before, things no person ever thinks of. The reason behind the action. The "X" factor of a human's thoughts. Reasoning, I believe, it is a whole different type of thinking altogether. "Normal" people only think of the person's actions itself, not the reasoning

behind it. The smallest details that make the biggest difference. I just feel like Charlie needed to let people know that good people still exist. That “you didn’t sleep with that person at that party even though you could have,” and “there’s a lot of good to tell you about life and a lot of bad,” and that everything you see isn’t exactly what it means.

It brought me through a tough time. It was my wool sweater on the cold days; my sunscreen on the hot days, and a happy thought on the sad ones. I know this is 100,000,000 times more than a book to people. I know it means a lot to a lot of people, and I know I’m just one of those people, but because it means something to me, it’s changed me and the world around me. And hope that knowing that it’s changed one girl’s life means something.

I’ve been a lot of places, and met a lot of messed up good people. No one is who you think they are. The messed up people are the best. They are closed out and hidden away because they see the world in a *different* way. In a more real way. The way everyone else is too *afraid* to see it.

About a year ago this time, I had just been released from a facility. I spent 3 weeks there, and I realized some things:

- 1.) The boy with tourettes told the funniest jokes.
- 2.) The girl who raked her nails up and down her skin could create the most exquisite drawings.
- 3.) The girl who abused drugs had the wisest soul.
- 4.) The boy with schizophrenia had the biggest heart.
- 5.) The girl who tried to kill herself told the boy with sleep insomnia stories to help lure him to sleep.
- 6.) The boy who wanted to kill himself had the deepest passion for cooking.

- 7.) The girl with slits and scars all over her body dried my tears and told me I was beautiful.
- 8.) The boy with anger issues gave me the warmest hugs.
- 9.) The girl with bulimia told everyone everyday that they looked beautiful in their bodies.
- 10.) The boy who was a compulsive liar told us that he wanted us all to get better, and for once he was telling the truth.
- 11.) The girl who almost drank herself to death stood up for anyone who felt they were being bullied.
- 12.) The boy with social anxiety made sure no one sat alone at meals.

“People,” we are not who you think we are.

Seeing this now, all written down on paper, creates a hollow part in my heart, a place for more good people and more good memories. A place for more people like Charlie, he was a wallflower, he saw things, he kept quiet about them, and he understood, but I guess that’s just some of the perks of being a “wallflower.”

Love always,
Millie

Level III

Level III
1st Place

Bronwynn Woodsworth
University High School, Indianapolis
Letter to Ivan Lalić
Author of “**Places We Love**”

Dear Ivan Lalić,

I'm sure that as a poet, you must have hoped to someday write a piece of work that would make someone pause and consider his or her life, maybe even feel a little flame flicker inside of them where ashes had previously lain cold. I don't come across writing that does this to me very often, but your poem “Places We Love” did just that. I found it again a few months ago while cleaning my room, and when I flattened out that piece of paper, I was not expecting to come across the bombshell that lay hidden beneath the folds. After rereading the poem, I sat down on the floor and took some time to really think; the words mean so much more now that I am older. Let me explain.

I've always been a person who doesn't deal especially well with change. I become attached to places, people, and ways of doing things. I like routines and the feeling of knowing what comes next, which leads me to do certain things the same way over and over again, whether it be taking the same route to school every day or erasing words until the letters are written in exactly the right way. I find comfort in sticking with the same friends over the years, which allows for so many great experiences and a real sense of trust and knowledge, but when those friendships fade away or end, I am lost; my closest friends mean so much more to me than they may ever find out. The issue with growing so close to people is that it leaves me vulnerable; over the years I have experienced both headache and heartache, but it's all been valuable. The fact is that for 17 years I have had a hard time letting go of things and simply going where the wind takes me. I have trouble trusting myself and really believing that I am a strong person. I wish to leave a mark on this earth, but I don't know if I can leave one as great as those left on me by the people and places that I hold dear.

Level III: Finalists

Now I am a senior in high school, and your poem has given me a sense of reassurance for which I have been searching exhaustively. In six months, I will graduate and prepare to leave for college; it would be an understatement to say that I am scared of doing so. For the first time in twelve years, my friends will be in other cities and states instead of just a 45-minute drive away. I know that friends grow apart in college, and it hurts to even think that I may never see or talk to some of them again. After all these years, I will be set adrift from the people whom I trust and count on the most; though I will do my best to keep in touch, I will find myself flying solo for the first time in a long time. I will be in a different state, away from home for much longer than ever before. Nothing will be normal as I know it now. As others say, the only constant that can be expected is change.

But I think that not too far off in that uncertain future, I'll look over at the poem taped onto my dorm room wall and be reassured. I'll draw my knees to my chest and read the lines:

“And is this room really a room, or an embrace,
And what is beneath the window: a street or years?
And the window is only the imprint left by
The first rain we understood, returning endlessly,”

and I'll remember that as you say, “Places we love we can never leave.” The walls will fade away and I'll be inside the embrace of another night and another place. Perhaps it will be the time that my friends and I stayed out late after a school play, setting off the panic alarms on our cars in the pitch darkness after being scared by someone else's. Maybe it will be the time when I read a book on the porch swing

at home or burned my way through an entire season of a television series with my mother. When I hurriedly finished memorizing my piano piece a week before the recital. When my friends and I got together on the last day of school and drove around on a golf cart through the yard, letting the sun shine on our faces and the clouds carry away our worries. The Winter Formal dance freshman year. The hours spent struggling over AP Physics homework. The conversations with friends that were so normal and yet somehow still so meaningful. Watching a movie while working on the group Halloween costume. Laughing so hard at lunch that I started crying into my yogurt.

Your poem gave me hope; I see now that I can make it in worlds other than my own. This year has been different: I have made fantastic new friends, erased fewer words, wandered in state parks and lain flat on the ground as the world spun slowly by. My excitement for the future is becoming more noticeable though the fear still lingers. I am doing my best not to fight that fear by hiding in the past, but instead focusing on the present and making the most of every day I have left. Now I flash forward as often as I flash back. It is beyond reassuring to know that the places and people that have shaped me will travel with me. It's not the room or setting that matters but the words, the actions, the lives, and the people there. The memories.

Someday in college late at night, when my ceiling is no longer concrete but the night sky and my bed is no longer made of wood but instead the driveway of my old house, I will see the stars: those glowing balls of gas that somehow never disappear, much like the small flame that came to life when I read your poem. That flame may falter and flicker, but it won't go out. And eventually the walls won't fade away anymore: they will stay strong, and so will I because I know that the people and places live on in me, and that moving on and

Level III: Finalists

making new memories is okay. So when the night sky turns back into my ceiling, and my bed back into wood, there will still be a part of me up there among the stars because I will finally trust myself enough to fly free.

Sincerely,
Bronwynn Woodsworth

Level III
2nd Place

Luke Schirmer

Four Seasons Academy, Lizton

Letter to Steve Chapman

Author of *A Look at Life from a Deer Stand*

Dear Mr. Steve Chapman,

I love hunting white-tail deer. I enjoy reading books while I sit in my deer stand because it helps pass time. I especially enjoy reading books that make you think. My mom gave your book, *A Look at Life from a Deer Stand*, to my grandfather years ago. She bought this book for me because she knew I would gain some valuable knowledge about life and why people sit in deer stands. You see, until she read your book, she didn't understand why her dad, her brother, and now her husband enjoyed hunting so much. It definitely changed my own understanding on why I am drawn into the woods. As you referenced in this book, hunting is really more than "the healthy meat and the healing therapy of simply being in the wild, there is one other benefit... the "harvest of truths." Each time I have gone out hunting, I too learn something new about a hunting tactic or a technical improvement to my equipment. However, I realize now that in the quiet and alone time there are "greater lessons about life that I have "bagged" that are now mounted on the wall of my heart." I agree wholeheartedly that "those hours of waiting were never wasted as I sat and observed the nature that surrounded me and studied the process of hunting."

When you wrote this book you were older than I am so when you talk about parenthood it really didn't speak to me much. However, you talk about taking your son out hunting for the first time and it made me think of when my dad took me hunting for the first time. Your parenting advice really made me think of how I can be a better son. I realize the benefit of the togetherness that I have had with my father during our hunting trips. As you know, "our hunting experiences have provided some great father/son time." Taking a hunting trip together with your dad is really something special. There is a special bond that is developed and memories that will always be cherished.

Stories of success, stories of the one that got away, and some stories we won't ever admit to! I hope someday to share this special time with my own children.

Another connection that you and I have is we both went on our first hunt at about the same age. Neither of us shot anything and thus faced disappointment and failure. This book helped me understand that I was not alone with these feelings. Although my hunt was unsuccessful, it taught me many things such as managing my own expectations, persistence, and patience. As you stated in your book, "Life is a lot like a day in the woods. It has a beginning and an end. We take the alpha with the omega." Even at age 15, I have learned that in life we don't always reach our goals, that sometimes it isn't what we expected, and that sometimes it just doesn't seem fair. Deer hunting is really a lot like life. After five seasons of sitting in a deer stand, without bringing anything out of the woods, I have certainly experienced disappointment, frustration, and anger because I didn't reach my goals. However, my patience and persistence finally paid off this year. I finally reached my goal. I shot my first deer and it was a buck! Was it in my time? No. Was it the biggest deer I saw this year? No. Did I gain something from those five long hunting seasons? Yes. My first deer was so much more than venison for my family. It was much more than finally reaching my goal of hunting and shooting a buck. In those five seasons, I grew from a being a nervous youngster to a confident and capable hunter. I look back and see the path of learning about hunting and more importantly about myself. I was in the woods, on my own, when I finally met success. Was the wait worth it? Absolutely!

While our life experiences may be much different right now due to

age, your book helped me appreciate the opportunity that all hunters have to reflect on life while sitting in a deer stand. We can find peace in God's creations. We can search for acceptance and understanding of the world we live in. As I look over the field of cut down corn and barren trees, as I listen to the rustle of the falling leaves and the scampering squirrels, I see my own breath in the cold morning and I realize that sitting in my stand provides me valuable time to reflect, mature, and appreciate my life. There are events in my life that I can look back on and analyze while I sit in the quiet of the woods. It isn't just the hunt is it? It is truly an experience being "out there."

My mom was right. This book really made me look at my life from a deer stand in a different light. I am going to keep this book because I know that reading it again from time to time will allow me to connect with your stories and advice as I grow up and mature. Whatever life holds, the ups and downs, the struggles, the triumphs, the sadness, and all the joy, I know that in each there is value. You envisioned your Grandma Chapman leaning over the balcony of heaven, saying, "Steve, hold on. Don't give up. Be faithful to finish the race." Mr. Chapman, each time I sit in my deer stand, I will take the time to stop, take a deep breath, smell the autumn morning air, and remember to enjoy each precious memory of my past. I will relish in the gift of having goals for my future. I will not only hunt for deer but I will hunt for the meaning of my life. I will continue to honor my relationship with nature, my friends, my family, and the One who created the majestic white-tailed deer. I won't give up on myself, my dreams, and my goals. I will maintain and rely on my faith in my Creator. I pray that I can someday look back at many years of sitting in a deer stand before I am tapped and those words are spoken to me... "The hunt is over."

Luke Schirmer

Level III
3rd Place

Sarah Smith

Northwestern High School, Kokomo

Letter to Rose Lewis

Author of *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes*

Dear Rose Lewis,

I grew up in America since I was ten months old. I was just like any other ordinary little girl in the world, except there was always one difference that sets me apart from all of my other friends. I was a little girl blessed to have been given an opportunity to have been adopted from China and brought into an amazing family. I grew up celebrating my regular birthday and the day I was adopted, otherwise known as my “Gotcha Day.” I have tons of scrapbooks of pictures in China situated in various places around the house. I have multiple paintings and pictures with Chinese sayings in my room. My parents love to make me dumplings and rice with green tea. My life has become a mix of two completely different cultures, and to some people my life might seem weird, stressful, or embarrassing because it’s so different. Your book, *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes*, just reminds me more of why I don’t think any of these thoughts. It makes me remember why I love my unique life so much and it helps me appreciate it so much more.

My mom would always read *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes* to me when I was younger. I loved to hear every little detail of how my mom felt when I was adopted. I was amazed at how one person could feel so strongly for someone she had never met before. I always knew that love was very strong but what amazed me more was what the power of love could will someone to do. For example, travel around the world to adopt a little girl who was in desperate need of a mother. Your book allowed me to understand how my mom felt through the mother in the story. My mom, like the mother in the book, made the bold decision to take a risk and adopt a little girl from a country she knew nothing about. My mom always tells me that she knew there was something missing in her life. She also told me how she wanted my life to have a good balance between feeling normal and fitting in but also remembering where I came from. Unfortunately, in my

mind I was here in America and nothing from my past would really mean anything to me now. I usually did not think much about my life or my heritage. I often took my life and the people around me for granted. Even though love was important in my life it had never really willed me to do anything. There were millions of other children who would love to have my life. I never really thought about any of it. I expected to have a perfect life because that's just how I grew up, and in my mind having a perfect life meant fitting in with all my friends. I expected too much and strived to achieve unrealistic and pointless goals. I never took the time to stop and think of how lucky I really was.

As I got older I found myself just wanting to fit in. I did not want to bring up that I was not actually from America. I never denied my heritage if I was asked, but I never voluntarily brought it up either. I didn't want to be different and I felt like being adopted was an invisible wall that separated me from everyone else. I lacked the confidence and courage to love my different background. I never put in the effort to really learn about my heritage either, despite my parents' wishes. One day I came home and my mom told me to clean my room. I went upstairs and started cleaning my bookshelf first. The first book I pulled out was *I Love You Like Crazy Cakes*, and even though I had a million other things to do something willed me to open your book. As I read through the book I came to the line "Then you smiled as if to say I'm home." and it made me realize that being home is where I'm around people who I love and trust. I remembered that it didn't matter that I was different because I'm loved. I was no longer stressed about being different because it just reminded me that being different is good. As soon as I made this realization something inside of me, something I had felt had been missing or empty, had all of the sudden completely filled up. I was once again able to feel

the way I felt about my heritage when I was a little girl, when fitting in meant nothing and life was all about standing out and being myself. Your book was the key to making me appreciative of the life I have now.

I constantly asked myself *why, out of the millions of children in the world, was I the child adopted and given such an amazing life?* I didn't find myself to be more special than the person next to me. I didn't discover something that had revolutionized people's lives all over the world. That was a question that at one point I had felt I would never have an answer to, but your book gave me the answer. I will always be loved no matter what and that's not something to take for granted. I am, of course, lucky to have been given such a great family, but I have also realized that my adoption wasn't just for me. My adoption was an uncontrollable connection between two worlds and two people who were both missing something in their lives. My different heritage is a part of me that I will never let go of. I've learned that my background doesn't separate me from others in a bad way. Celebrating the day I was adopted and my birthday isn't embarrassing anymore. When I have friends over I no longer have to feel like I have to put away all of my Chinese paintings and hide my scrapbooks. My background is what makes me special, it's what makes me who I am. ***I Love You Like Crazy Cakes*** continues to give me more insight on all of the little blessings in my life and family. The wall that had once separated me from the others came crashing down, not because I hid my background from everyone, but because your book helped me to open up and see the bigger picture. My two selves, Yu Lu Ke and Sarah Smith had combined into one self, a self that continues to embrace my differences in a life in which being different is what makes me better. Even though I had started to feel stressed and embarrassed, your book pulled me back into my understanding that

my heritage is something to be proud of and I shouldn't let anyone else determine who I am.

Sincerely,
Sarah Smith

Level III Honorable Mentions

Shelby Giffen

Centerville High School, Centerville

Letter to Mitch Albom

Author of *Tuesdays with Morrie*

Dear Mitch,

I really loved reading *Tuesdays with Morrie*. It truly impacted my life and I am positive that I will carry Morrie's lessons on "the meaning of life" with me forever. I listened to the audiobook, while reading along with the physical copy, and hearing the way that Morrie talked about death changed the way I perceived it entirely. As someone who lost her father in elementary school, I thought of death as something evil. In my mind, it stole my dad away from me, way too early, for absolutely no reason. I was stuck in the anger and depression phases of grief for much too long and it seemed like I could never truly come to terms with the fact that my dad had died. As I listened to Morrie's lessons, especially his lesson on acceptance, my view of death began to change. It wasn't this scary, evil concept anymore. He made death sound peaceful, almost beautiful, even, and I gradually began to accept my dad's death. This is how I know that *Tuesdays with Morrie* truly changed me. I formed a much healthier view on death and it didn't seem as scary or unreal to me.

Morrie also seemed to teach you about the things that should really matter in life, such as love and family, as opposed to money and fame. When trying to decide what I want to study in college, I used to focus mostly on the salary. After reading the book, I decided that I wanted to be a teacher. I want to be able to impact other teenagers in the same way that my teachers have impacted me, similar to the way that Morrie impacted you. He also really valued living in the moment and not holding back your feelings. He discusses how sometimes you need to sit with your feelings and let them fully wash over you and I think this is so true. If we just push our feelings to the side every time we start to feel even a smidgen of pain, those feelings will stay with us much longer than they would if we would just confront them. Morrie was the first person that made me realize that my feelings were always valid and that it is okay to be upset or sad.

I always felt so inspired to be a better person after reading from the book. *Tuesdays with Morrie* made such an impact on my life. It is one of the first books that I have connected with in such a deep, meaningful way. This book changed my entire view of death and allowed me to accept my father's death. It gave me a sense of peace and closure. It taught me the things that should be priorities in my life. It allowed me to understand my feelings and be okay with them. It helped me decide on what I want to do with my career. Morrie seemed like such an incredible person and your bond was so special. Thank you for writing *Tuesdays with Morrie*. It truly changed me.

Sincerely,
Shelby Giffen

Mikayla Miller

Centerville High School, Centerville

Letter to Robert Munsch

Author of *Love You Forever*

Dear Robert Munsch,

When I was younger my parents would read me your book *Love You Forever*. I never understood why my parents would get so emotional when reading to me before bed and I always wondered what it was about the book that elicited such a sad response. When I was younger I never understood, but I do now.

Around Christmas last year I lost my Grandfather, and I can't remember ever feeling such intense grief. Every day I had to force myself to wake up and go to school, and some days were so bad that I couldn't get up. There were many days during school when something would remind me of him. I would become overwhelmed with panic and sent home. I had no motivation to do anything. My grades slipped, my friends left, and I didn't want to spend time with my family. I had lost one of the most important people in my life and I saw no point in continuing on without him.

I had gone through many novels attempting to distract myself, but I couldn't find anything that would relate and make me feel normal again. I read classics and I read sci-fi and I read romance novels, but nothing made me feel any differently about the world. I couldn't finish novels because they weren't realistic enough. The world seemed glamorous in these books, but to me, it had become a dreary place where I was trapped without a purpose.

I began to look through all of my old bedtime stories from when I was younger. One specific book stood out to me. The book was *Love You Forever*. I picked it up and read through it, thinking that it would be a pastime and that it was a stupid idea to read it in the first place. I mean it was a children's book with about twenty pages and even reading *Pride and Prejudice* didn't help me. I was not prepared for the story that you had written. In your book there was a little boy whose mother would rock him and sing to him. She would say "I love

you forever; I like you for always, as long as I'm living, my baby you'll be." Throughout the story the little boy grew up, and even though he wasn't a baby anymore, when he was asleep at night his mother would come into his room and rock him and sing her song. When the boy was an adult his mother called him on the phone and asked him to come see her because she was sick. As his mother was dying, he rocked her and said, *"I love you forever, I like you for always, as long as I'm living, my mommy you'll be."* The boy's mother dies with him there. That night the man goes home and in the midst of his sadness, he goes up to his baby daughter, picks her up, rocks her, and says *"I love you forever, I like you for always, as long as I'm living, my baby you'll be."*

I cried for a solid fifteen minutes. When I read the book, it brought me back to when I was younger and with my Grandfather and I began to think of all of the memories we shared. I remembered playing games and singing songs and telling stories. I also remembered being there with him those last moments in the hospital and being with my whole family. I remembered holding my sister and my cousins and crying and knowing that they needed help as much as I did and they were hurting as much as I was. This book made me realize that no matter what happens, you will always love. Even when you are in your darkest moments and have lost so much that you can barely breathe, others love you and need you just as much as you need and love them. Even though the people you love are gone, they still love you and would want you to be happy. I realized that I had to love and protect the other people I loved as much as my Grandpa loved and protected me. It taught me that even though we are all busy growing up, we have to remember that life is only temporary and that we need to love with every second of every day. I realized that we have to love our family because one day they won't be there, and all you'll have is the memories. If you don't love with every second, then are the memories really worth remembering? Even though this book was

Level III: Honorable Mentions

meant to be for younger children, it helped me get through the most difficult time of my life and helped me remember who I was and who I needed to be.

Thank you for more than I could ever explain,
Mikayla Miller

Sheena Tan

West Lafayette Jr./Sr. High School, West Lafayette
Letter to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
Author of *The Little Prince*

To my idol,

My first impression upon opening *The Little Prince* was that the book smelled weird. The first two pages were stuck together by a strange stain, and I tore the second page while trying to pull them apart. Hearing the rip, the librarian stared at me over the metal rim of her glasses, but she must have detected no threat from the four-year-old Asian girl struggling with a chapter book, so she looked away. Flipping past the boring introduction and translator's note, I carefully separated the pages to Chapter 1.

I do not remember the next part very clearly. What did I think of the boa constrictor digesting an elephant? Maybe I thought it was a hat. Maybe I was already thinking like an adult. Maybe I had already grown old. At that time in my life, I prided myself on being a responsible young lady who preferred doing her math worksheets over wasting time staring at a book and imagining. At four years old, I had already decided there was absolutely nothing to be gained from being idealistic. Instead, I told myself, I would study hard and memorize all the right answers, so I could become a doctor and earn a lot of money.

When I saw there were pictures in the book, I skipped all the words and only tried to look at the pictures. But the pictures were so confusing that I had to go back and read the words. But then I realized I could not read the words, so I had to ask the librarian to read them to me. She was a nice lady, and, despite probably having many other responsibilities to attend to, decided to read the book to me anyway. I told her to start on the page where you meet the little prince.

There is another gap in my memory here. I cannot remember what I thought of him. I also cannot remember what I thought about the rest of the book, for that matter. All I remember is that I cried when my mom came to pick me up, and I begged her to buy the book for me later.

Your book made me fall in love with reading.

Four-year-old me would have asked, Mr. Antoine, why did you become a pilot? I looked up the average salary: Air Force pilots earn about \$36,000 a year, so it probably was not the money. When I was four, I could not understand why anyone would put themselves in such a dangerous position for such little pay, but now I think I understand your thinking. On page 63 you wrote, “And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: One sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential is invisible to the eye.” I’ve since memorized it, but the first time I read it and actually understood what it meant, something about me changed.

Your pay was something that was invisible to the eye; you were a pilot because you enjoyed being one. Earlier in the book, you write of five planets each inhabited by five curious grownups: a king, a very vain man, a drunkard, a businessman, and a lamp lighter. There are lessons to be learned from all of them, but the businessman in particular struck me. The little prince and the businessman have a short exchange, where the little prince asks many questions about his wealth, and the businessman replies with ridiculous and extraordinary responses.

“And what good does owning the stars do you?” the little prince asks on page 38.

“It does me the good of being rich,” the businessman replies.

“And what good does it do you to be rich?”

This astounded me. What good was it that he owned the stars? The businessman didn’t even have time to lift his head to return the little prince’s greeting because he was busy performing “matters of consequence.” His cigarette had gone out, he was crass and rude, and most importantly, he was of no use to the stars he owned. The little

prince didn't have five-hundred-and-one million, six-hundred-twenty-two thousand, seven hundred thirty-one stars; he had one flower and three volcanoes. But every day he watered his flower and cleaned out his volcanoes. The little prince may not have had much, but he had much more than the businessman, who was of no use and was thus worth nothing.

When I was four years old, I had already decided my future. I was going to work my whole life and earn a fortune as a doctor. This wasn't because I wanted to become a doctor, nor because I wanted to help people. I just wanted to earn a fortune. But what good would it be if I was rich? What good would it be if I owned those stars?

You know what I actually want to do? I want to travel abroad and use my love for reading to teach English as a second language, so one day my students can read the same books I did, and one day my students can fall in love like I did. Through your book, I became worth something. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, thank you for meeting the little prince and falling in love.

Send my affection to the little prince,
Sheena Tan

(P.S. Has the sheep eaten the flower yet?)

Level III Semifinalists

Emilie Deibel

Centerville High School, Centerville

Letter to Harper Lee

Author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Dear Harper Lee,

I have read *To Kill a Mockingbird* at least five times, and it is still the best book I have ever read. When I read it for the first time, I had no clue about severity of the discrimination of African Americans. Of course, we studied civil rights in elementary school, but the extent and duration of the discrimination was never fully explained. My best friend growing up was African American, and I could never imagine a world where we were not equals. Reading your book opened my eyes to the world of hatred that unfortunately is still present today. Because of this, I realized the struggles that faced many Americans and people around the world.

I was a very sheltered child and had never seen this type of discrimination. That little girl was my best friend, not any less of a human because of the color of her skin. At first, I related to Scout's character because she never understood discrimination either. The whole idea of someone being bad based on the color of their skin was a concept she could not fathom. This was exactly how I was, young and innocent. As I grew older and began to watch the news, I realized the discrimination was still active in the present. Soon, I began to relate more to Jem. He was aware of the problem and tried to protect his little sister from the harsh reality. Jem made sure that Scout was always polite and respectful to everyone, even if some folks disrespected African Americans. I started to do the same for my younger brother. Being raised to be kind and respectful to everyone has allowed me to easily share my behavior with my brother.

I noticed my views about the world changing. From a child's fantasy world or perfection, I began to see a dark cloud covering the sunshine. Suddenly, the world that I thought was full of love was tainted by unreasonable hatred of neighbors. I was no longer an innocent child after reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I became a girl upset with the

world around her, but I refused to believe the stereotypes. This book changed my outlook on life, but it also taught me that stereotypes are worthless. The story contained a horrific white man and an outstanding black gentleman. That is the real truth. People are not bad or evil because of the color of their skin. They are wicked because of the quality of their morals. Children are taught from a young age to never judge a book by its cover, but adults around the world continue to judge others based on their skin color. My wish is that everyone could read your book and gain a new perspective of the problem at hand and work toward creating a better future.

Sincerely,
Emilie Deibel

Emily Krieger

Taylor High School, Kokomo

Letter to Scott Westerfield

Author of *The Uglies*

Dear Scott Westerfeld,

I am an aspiring writer but I used to hate reading so much. I fell in love with reading and writing soon after I read *The Uglies* series. It changed my view of how the future could be, what the present is like, even about how I feel about myself and my appearance. The books made me think about so much and it instantaneously became my favorite book series and fueled my love for reading and writing.

My sisters nagged me to read some of their favorite books but I always rejected them. They kept finding new books to show me, but I wasn't interested. However, when I read the very first sentences of *The Uglies*, I knew I was going to love the series. I was so enthralled with how much Tally went through. I felt attached to her and I felt like I could relate to her in the sense that my best friend moved and that I was turning 16 soon. I felt like people were going to want me to be more adult, almost like everyone else. I also wanted to be prettier than what I felt.

When Shay was introduced, she made me think of my best friend at the time. Shay and she were so much alike which made me relate to Tally more. Shay was so fun and daring. She knew how to get around things without getting caught. My friend was daring and fun as well. They both knew how to have a good time. Shay got mad at Tally when David ended up falling for Tally; my friend also got mad at me when her boyfriend started to like me. Both of these girls were amazing people. They both did crazy things that could have gotten them into copious amounts of trouble but they never got caught.

When reading the books, I thought about how society is slowly getting to the point where everyone thinks they need to be beautiful to fit in. Everyone is changing her appearance to please someone else. I felt like that is exactly how our world, our reality is going, and it seems that that society is arriving there more rapidly than before. The way you detailed the story made it seem like it was happening in a

movie. The books made me want to write like you. Every time I read the books, I notice more things than before and I fall deeper in love with Tally's story. The books are so amazing at showing that everyone wants to be beautiful and peaceful. Dr. Cable told Tally that it was imperative to find Shay. Dr. Cable told Tally that the surgery was made to make the world how they thought it should be, everyone the same. They made everyone alike to make their world peaceful and beautiful. Everyone had to be mindless so they could be peaceful, so there would be no more conflicts. Dr. Cable relied on Tally so much just to get everyone from the Smoke to be beautiful and dumb. Those situations describe how the "government" wanted to take away people's individuality, to make everyone the same person.

I love how the books show the unsureness of Tally. In *The Uglies*, when Tally goes to the Smoke, it is abundantly clear that she is shocked to see a bunch of Uglies. She is unsure on what to do when she first got there and when she met David. She started to live like them and she loved how it was, that is how I saw it. She eventually was unsure about using the necklace Dr. Cable gave her. When David confesses and kisses her, Tally realizes how everyone is beautiful on their own and doesn't need a surgery to have beauty.

I encourage my friends to read *The Uglies* and share with them the love I have for the books. My love for this book made me realize many things. There are so many reasons that have increased my yearning to read and share the books with friends. They show how teenagers deal with body image. Teenagers are expected to accept the inexorable, inevitable fate that awaits them when they turn 16. It made me think so much about society. I have always loved the Utopia-turned-Dystopia books, and *The Uglies* series will forever be my favorite book series and I will always share the books with my friends.

Sincerely,
Emily Krieger

Brooke Minch

Switzerland County High School, Vevay

Letter to Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Author of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*

Dear Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn,

As I sat there curiously wondering how hard others had it, I picked up *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and began reading. As I began reading the first chapter, I started feeling horrible for the main character Shukhov. I did not think it was humanly possible to go through the things that he was encountering. The first chapter of this novel was a real eye-opener for me. As I am reading this book and anxiously waiting to flip to the next page I am in total despair. How can one human actually be punished for being ill? How is it humanly possible to live off a little ration of bread and gruel? I could not believe the challenges that the inmates at camp HQ encountered. When I read that the guards get most of the parcels that get sent to inmates at the camp, I became angry and found myself wanting to help the inmates get their parcels that their family sent to them. I wondered how someone could be so cruel to go as far as taking someone else's belongings, especially the ones that their loved ones had sent.

After reading this novel I truly believe that I have a different perspective on life. This novel opened my eyes and made me realize that not everyone has a decent life; that some people have life so rough they do not even look forward to the next day. After finishing this novel, I felt exhausted for all the inmates in it. I kept thinking to myself how in the world do these people actually survive in this kind of climate and treatment? I believe that this novel made me realize that I never truly know how hard someone has it so I should always treat them with respect. Just because I have an easy life or someone else has an easy life does not mean that there are not people that absolutely hate their lives and cannot wait to escape reality.

I know this novel changed my point of view on things; before I read this novel, I never really put in much thought about how other people had it or how hard his or her life may be. After reading *One*

Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, I realized that life is really hard and people may be punished for things they never did or may be mistaken for someone they really are not. I know that Shukhov lost who he was before he entered camp HQ because the camp totally destroyed his personality and individual identity. I cannot imagine going somewhere where someone is punished for being ill or someone is punished for hiding food so they can have something to eat tomorrow. This novel definitely showed me that life is not always great and you should never take any second for granted.

Sincerely,
Brooke Minch

Marlon Robertson

Centerville High School, Centerville

Letter to Thornton Wilder

Author of *Our Town*

Dear Mr. Thornton Wilder,

I would like to thank you for changing my world view and helping me through some difficult times with your play, *Our Town*. At the time of my reading, I was going through severe mental duress. Indeed, I almost killed myself, feeling that the world no longer had any color. However, that all changed when our school put on a production of *Our Town*. After auditions, I was cast as Constable Warren and Professor Willard and though they were minor roles, they still impacted me greatly. I read the entire play that night and fell in love. *Our Town's* set is intentionally drab and barren. This felt so similar to my colorless world. At the end, the spirits of the dead accept their fate, realizing that they had not fully appreciated life. However, Emily tries to go back, and relives her memory of her twelfth birthday. Through this heart-wrenching scene, Emily realizes that she doesn't miss exciting situations such as birthdays, but rather the humdrum of everyday life. We so often take the little things for granted, not realizing how quickly they could be gone. Even the side role characters I played touched me. Constable Warren continued on his little patrol in every scene, though he knew there was no crime to be had. All of us have our own seemingly pointless activities that we do anyway. Professor Willard was delighted to inform the audience about minute scientific details about the town, even though no normal person could understand a word of what he was saying. We all have our hobbies, even if everyone else may find them soporifically boring. The stage design mirrored my world: colorless and dull. However, everything had its place. The scenes couldn't have been accomplished without the boring benches, chairs, and ladders. Everything matters in this world, whether we notice its purpose or not.

Immediately my life was transformed. I realized all the small, seemingly insignificant things I would miss if I were gone. I wouldn't be able to eat cute, little desserts anymore. I wouldn't be able to hear my grandfather tell me stories of his childhood anymore. I wouldn't be able to make jokes anymore. I wouldn't get to fall asleep at night

in a warm bed anymore. I would miss all of this. I was inspired to seek help for my depression and today I am so much happier. I try to find a purpose for everything now, even though it may seem pointless. ***Our Town*** brought back the color to my life. So again, thank you Mr. Wilder for not only changing my world view, but also, in essence, saving my life.

Sincerely,
Marlon Robertson

Jolie Rusznak

Centerville High School, Richmond

Letter to Jojo Moyes

Author of *Me Before You*

Dear Jojo Moyes,

Before I read your book, *Me Before You*, I was always so concerned with changing other people's lives for the better, that I was blind to how others had been changing mine. Your book opened my eyes to how even the smallest person can make a significant impact in your life.

In your novel, William had a wonderful, almost perfect life before his accident. When he first was injured, he was bound and determined to regain the skills he once had. As time went on, his hope plummeted and his depression and motor function became worse and worse. His parents were desperate for someone who might change his mind about suicide and Louisa Clark seemed to fit the bill. Miss Clark wanted so badly and worked so hard every beating second of the day to change his mind, that she failed to see how much he had been impacting her life as well. I related to the interaction of Will and Louisa in this book so significantly that it impacted how I viewed a certain someone in my life and how much she had made a difference for me.

As a fifth grader, a girl joined my girl scout troop who I was bound and determined to befriend. She had a stroke when she was only a child and had been suffering the effects ever since. Although her brain was not affected by the stroke, she had several fine motor skills that were not up to par. She had limited use of her hands and speaking was often very difficult for her. Every time we were together, I spent moment after moment sharing kindness and trying to help her in any way that I could. My mind was set that she was the one who needed help and I was going to be the one to do it. Little did I know, emotionally, I was the one who needed a lot more help. If I saw frustration on her face when she struggled to do something, I would immediately jump in to try and fix the problem. Blinded by my own need to help others, I did not realize that she could do almost anything she set her mind to. From zip lining hundreds of feet in the

air, to crawling hundreds of feet below Earth in a cave, this girl was so adventurous that she would be the first to try something new with a smile beaming across her face. She was never negative and always turned a bad situation into something worthwhile.

During the time I was trying to change her life, mine was on a downhill spiral. I needed a positive light, a saving grace, a simple friend, but I failed to see such a beautiful soul sitting right in front of me. The exact girl whose life I so desperately thought I needed to improve, was impacting me in ways I could not begin to imagine. It wasn't until I read your book, that I started to see how someone you never expect can change your life without you knowing it or sometimes, wanting it.

Just as Louisa was adamant about changing Will, I was adamant about changing this girl. I was so focused on making her life better, just like Louisa, that it didn't occur to me that she could impact my life as well. At the conclusion of your book, Lou realizes that while she was indulged in convincing William to change his mind, Will had changed the way she acted, thought, and believed in herself.

As a twelve year old, I had no idea that this girl who struggled to speak and write with a pencil, would be the one I admired and who ultimately, saved my life. She was such a positive soul, shining bright, and going at every situation with her head up, ready to attack the challenge. She made me realize that it is not always our words that help others through terrible times, but our actions and optimism. As my depression, frustration, and self-doubt was crippling my life, her situation began to change me. Even though she struggled every day, she never once frowned or thought less of herself because she was different. She helped turned my negative thoughts and doubts into optimism and big plans for the future.

Level III: Semifinalists

Because of her influence, I can now say that I do my best, put my heart behind every situation and look at life with a glass half-full attitude. I never once thought that someone like her could change the way I thought about myself, but she did. I see this girl every day at school and many times outside of school, as I consider her to be one of my best friends. Everyday, I am thankful that she is a positive light in my life and I have no idea how I would have made it through those years without her optimism, confidence, and goal getter attitude. Your book truly opened my eyes to the ways she changed my life, that I was once blinded from.

Many thanks and admiration,
Jolie Rusznak

Alex Shukri

Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School, Indianapolis

Letter to Betty Smith

Author of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*

Dear Betty Smith,

I've read your book twice now- and each time I've been in different places in my life. Once, I read as a young girl of 11 or 12, similar to Francie's age as she discovers the love for reading. Next, I read as a girl who's just in the middle of freedom and childhood, a girl who can touch both but knows she can only move forward towards independence.

If I think about my life, for a split second, I don't believe anything has changed. I'm still me. Then, all the memories of what I have done, what I haven't, what I could have done come rushing at me. When I read your book for the first time, I read it, but I didn't really read it. It was just looking at the characters and their actions and their thoughts- I didn't make any connections towards me, or towards my life or actions. Reading the book for the second time, sitting by my window as it grows dark like in my childhood, I realize something...

I am Francie.

When I usually read books, I see some shared characteristics with the main characters, but I don't fully see myself within any of them. But with reading *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, I saw myself in Francie, as Francie. Both Francie and I found our love for reading at young ages, venturing to libraries every possible day to get a new book, trying to read all the books in the library. Our imaginations were our best friends when we were younger, since both Francie and I didn't have any people to call friends. For some reason, I didn't seem to effortlessly make friends as the other little girls did. I wanted to make friends so badly, and so did Francie. We didn't get those friends until our teenage years. But not having friends hurt for a while, but books took me away from the hurt I felt then, and now. And with our imaginations running farther and faster than we ever could, running to lands unknown and unreal, we both found writing to be our solace, our dream, our best friend all in one. However, the connections don't

simply stop at our childhood dreams and lacking of real friends... We both found that there was beauty in truth, and truth was in the reality of life. In the book, Francie's family struggles with money up until she was able to get a high-paying job herself, which means her childhood was full of worrying. Now, times are somewhat different than they were in the 1900's, but one thing that pops out to me about both our mothers is that they say not to worry about money or anything like that sort, to be kids and to enjoy our lives. But, people worry, and I find that it's a natural instinct for me, like Francie, to worry about things that don't even need to be worried about.

The reason for this letter was to say how the novel changed our perspective in life. Well, like I said, I never felt connected to a character in a way that I felt that they were truly alive beyond the words of a page. And so, when growing up in the Catholic faith, a lot of people don't seem to have doubts about their faith or the existence of a higher being. I, however, even at a young age, seemed to question everything—and a lot of times it came to be about religion. I always thought that, before reading this book at least, that I was alone in my questioning thoughts about heaven, about hell, about what's after this life on earth. I thought that I was a loner in more ways than one. But Francie, especially in times of trouble, turned to God or away from him, sometimes questioning and sometimes loving, same as I. And so, seeing my thoughts, my questions, my fears, my life on paper, I realized that I am not alone. There's at least one person out there that knows what I'm going through. It changed the way that I thought about myself, and I realized that I'm okay questioning everything, that I'm okay being sometimes alone, metaphorically or physically. I'm okay.

Sincerely,
Alex Shukri

Abby Stewart

Centerville High School, Richmond

Letter to Jennifer Niven

Author of *All the Bright Places*

Dear Jennifer Niven,

I have lived in Richmond, your hometown and the city described in the book, my whole life. My biggest fear was being stuck in this town forever and never escaping. I constantly looked at the city with disappointment and boredom. I never went out of my comfort zone or adventured or even thought to wander Indiana. Then, I read your novel, *All the Bright Places*, and my life transformed forever.

As soon as I finished the novel, I drove straight to Hoosier Hill which I never knew existed even though I live almost ten minutes away from it. I will never forget the feeling of seeing something described in a novel appear before my own eyes. Right in that moment, I knew your book was changing my life. Random places in Richmond that I would normally drive by suddenly became meaningful and special. I started seeing how beautiful my hometown was and how lucky I am to live here. After reading your novel I became much more grateful for the city around me. I saw beauty in places I would have never viewed as special. Once I started viewing my city with interest, I started adventuring. I added every single stop that Violet and Finch made to my bucket list. I became passionate and adventurous and I discovered parts of me that I never knew existed.

While I was inspired to be adventurous and appreciate my city, I also have a deeper appreciation for mental illnesses. Finch's bipolar disorder and suicide deeply affected me. I started researching mental illnesses and how to prevent tragedies like Finch's suicide. I am happy to say that I am now considering a career as a psychologist. This novel allowed me to get a more personal view of mental illnesses and how it affects people. I am definitely inspired to make a change so people like Finch will overcome their illnesses and live a long life.

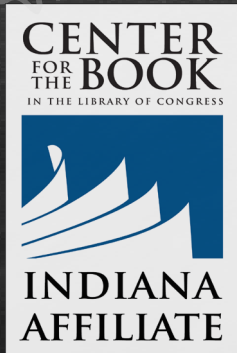
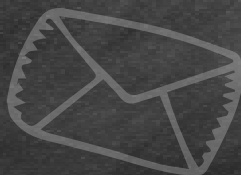
Overall, I have never been so inspired and transformed by a book. I am grateful I had the opportunity to read such a stimulating and passionate novel. I will never forget the lessons I learned. I made a

Level III: Semifinalists

post-it note wall of meaningful words, started a wander Indiana diary, and started reading *Germ Magazine*, just like in the novel. I am a better, more adventurous person now and I have a deeper respect for mental illnesses. Ultimately, I fell in love with my hometown and the possibilities it can hold.

Sincerely,
Abby Stewart

2017 Letters About Literature Anthology



2017 Indiana Center for the Book
www.in.gov/library/icb.htm