

1998 Letters About Literature Winners

Level I--4th Grade through 7th Grade

First Place

Ben Hartley
Obsidian Middle School
Redmond
Teacher: Stephanie Garber

Dear Ms. Lowry,

My name is Ben Hartley and I am a sixth grader at Obsidian Middle School in Redmond ,Oregon. I thought that *The Giver* was a very sad story. While reading, it, I felt that I was right there with Jonas. It was written so well, it seemed real. One thing that disturbed me when reading *The Giver* was that they killed, released, any people who were abnormal or different. I don't understand why they called it being released. Released from what? How could such a cruel and inhumane punishment be taken so lightly by the adults? The world would be a terrible place if being released was the only punishment. I had a serious birth defect when I was born. I would have been killed. Many of the people most important to me would have been released, including my father and twin best friends. I would hate to know what it feels like to have your baby taken away to be killed, just because of one little speech impediment or a physical or mental defect. It made me look at our world and see just how special everyone is, and how valuable every individual is. In *The Giver* they had no respect for the individual. They only cared about being perfect, cooperative, and flawless. What is more, they had so little respect for human life, they didn't even give the dead person a funeral, they just dumped them down the garbage chute!

Their society reminded me of an ant colony without a queen. Everyone is content with being a worker. No one seeks to better themselves, and they are only working for the satisfaction that everything is in order and nothing is ever a surprise. Is their society better than ours? They were more orderly and cooperative, yes, but is being perfect important enough to kill little babies or flawed people for? Or to ignore all the people that are being killed and to just forget about it? This book made me realize that I would not be content in being a grim minion of such a society.

I admire Jonas, who was going out against all odds to escape the horrible slaughter house that is his world, and seeking out another, better, imperfect world with all of the things that he had been without for so long. I hope I would have the courage to do the same.

The Giver made me really stop and think about how different the world in the book is from ours, and how grateful I am to live in a world that allows personal decisions, mistakes and surprises.

Sincerely
Ben Hartley

Runner Up

Peter Wenzel
Good Shepherd School
Boring
Teacher: Mrs. Strickland

Dear Arthur Roth,

I liked your book a lot! I thought you were very brave. Nobody could have made it through seven years in the ice cold. You had many good ideas. I am glad the polar bear saved your life.

I thought it was good that you never gave up. That is hard for me to do. Sometimes when I am working on a hard piano piece and I want to give up. But when that happens I should remember you. After all being out in the wilderness is way more tough than practicing the piano!

You were also very smart. You thought up ways to make things and to get into things. Like when you made knives and figured out ways to get into the boat. Whenever I have troubles I should try to think of ways to take care of my problem instead of getting discouraged.

You ate whatever you had to in order to live. Even if the food or drink was not good. Sometimes I know I have to do things I don't want to do in order to keep going. For me it is things like doing my chores, going to bed on time, and not getting to do every fun thing I want to.

Overall your bravery, courage, wisdom, and never say die attitude helped you to survive. I hope I can have these things in my life too.

Sincerely,
Peter

Honorable Mention

Jennifer Fulfer
Chenoweth Middle School
The Dalles
Teacher: Susan Stewart

Dear Lois Lowry,

Our class just got done reading The Giver. I have a few important questions to ask. HOW COULD ANYONE NOT HAVE COLOR!!? There would be no way to express thoughts and feelings. Wait...they don't have feelings.

I think The Giver taught me I'm lucky to have choice and freedom. And if I was trapped like they are, I would be released instantly. --Wouldn't you?

But....I do have to admit The Giver is one of the best books I've ever read in my life. It gave me a real, incredible feeling that I will treasure for a long, long time.

I think I'm alot like Jonas. Jonas likes choice and freedom, and I do to. He's not a nature freak and neither am I.

I think it would be cool to visit that world and see what it's like, but I'm REALLY glad I don't live there. All I have to say is I really like The Giver.

From,
Jennifer Fulfer

Honorable Mention

Amanda A. Morreira
Gates Elementary School
Gates
Mrs. Johnson

Dear Ms. Wilder,

I really enjoyed the Little House on the Prairie series. Thank you for allowing me, the reader to read about your life as a pioneer and your childhood experiences in the 1800's. It was very interesting to read about your everyday life of the chores you did, the schools you attended and how you celebrated the holidays. I especially enjoyed the holidays. The community Christmas Tree at the church was real special and so was the Glorious 4th of July celebration.

I liked the friendships you made, the good relationships you had with your family and how important you were to each other. Though the times we live in are so far apart, I too have had similar experiences with friends. Feelings of trust, friendship, envy and jealousy. Feelings that are in every generation of time.

Some things that you and I have in common are we both love school and horses and we both enjoy being outdoors. When I was reading your books it made me feel as if I were in the pioneer days along with you. I felt like you were a personal friend of mine sharing your everyday life with me.

There are so many neat things to do on a farm on the prairie. Milking a cow, churning butter and baking bread. After reading your first book, I wanted to bake bread, churn butter and milk a cow. It all sounds fun! There is an earnest simplicity in your life time that I wish my generation valued more.

Reading your books has encouraged me to do my chores, keep up with my tasks and to do my very best in school. And most of all to value family. If I could make a wish and that wish would come true; I would wish to go back in time and visit you in the Little House on the Prairie.

Sincerely yours,
Amanda K. Morreira

Honorable Mention

Doug Nichols
Ackerman Middle School
Canby
Teacher: Mrs. Curtiss

Dear Francine Hughes

I enjoyed reading your book Space Jam. I wanted you to know a way that your book

affected me. Once we were playing in the Gladstone tournament championship baseball game in Lake Oswego, Oregon. We were behind in the first inning 1 to 0, 3 to 0 in the second inning, and then in the fifth inning, 5 to 0. In the last inning it was do or die, our best guys were up to bat. We had to get the team out of the dump. At that moment we didn't believe in ourselves. Just like Michael Jordan told the Tunes that he had magic stuff, which was only water, the important thing was to believe in themselves. The Tunes thought that the magic stuff gave them special powers, which is what Michael wanted them to believe. We got everyone on our baseball team to have confidence in themselves, and not to give up. We were behind but we still didn't give up. We kept trying our hardest, and we came back with a 7 to 5 win. In that inning we hit one grand slam, two home runs, and two doubles.

Another way your book affected me was in a basketball tournament. We ended up in first place because we didn't give up or think that we would lose it. We kept trying our hardest. Your book taught me to believe in myself and never give up. Space Jam was a very good book and I learned from it. Your book taught me why it is important for me and the whole team to understand what it means to believe in ourselves.

The character that I am like is Michael Jordan. I am like Michael Jordan because he is the one who told the Tunes to believe in themselves and not let down. The little bottle of Michael Jordan's secret stuff, they thought that it was something magical. That is what Michael wanted them to think. He knew they had the ability to play basketball, all that they had to do was believe they could do it. The Tune team had to believe in themselves and have confidence to win the basketball game. They had a person like Michael Jordan to lead them to believe. By believing, they were able to win the game. My team has me! I am not one of the larger players on the court, nor the fastest or most skilled, but I have the heart to believe I can keep up with the skilled, fast, and tall players. I try to keep my teams spirit up when times are down. They watch me go out and try and try and try. A lot of the time the odds are not on my side, but because I think I can do well and I want to do well, I do. The team sees this and it gives them the extra little spark that they need.

I am glad that you wrote the book Space Jam, so kids like myself could read it and learn from it. I wonder if other kids feel the same way that I do? Did you have the believe in yourself theme in mind when you wrote the book? I also went to the movie. I enjoyed the book more.

Sincerely,
Doug A. Nichols

Level II--8th Grade through 12th Grade

First Place

Stephanie Krohn
Madison High School
Portland
Teacher: Susan Green

Dear Harper Lee,

I'm not sure if you have any children, but if you do you will be familiar with the look. It's a partial roll of the eye, tilt of the head, and annoyed sigh saying in a whining voice Da-a-a-d! Right away from the tone of their voice you will know you are not yet cool enough for your kids, that somehow the twenty some odd years that stand between you and your precious one has separated you by a million miles.

This is the exact expression I gave my father every time he'd try to impart a moral lesson on my little sister and me. Our tow heads would nod up and down as he'd say the same things over and over. You can't judge a book by its cover. You'll never know a man's travels until you walk a mile in his shoes. was no stranger to clichés. By the time I was eight they would run right out of his mouth, into my right ear and through my left. Starting high school, I found these same clichés tumbling out of my mouth. Soon enough I was receiving the look from my own friends. They would eye me with the look and shake their heads.

It was not until my junior year in high school that I took one of my father's clichés to heart. It actually held meaning in my mind, which to a sixteen year old is usually filled with boys and clothes, not moral values. That year I was introduced to Scout, the eight year old tomboy in your novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Through this girl's innocent eyes you gave an incredible lesson on judgment and perception.

Looking back on the story I can see many places where you tried to demonstrate the message of acceptance and understanding. The one I saw first was the growing relationship between Scout and her reclusive neighbor, Boo Radley. Scout, like her neighbors, was fearful of the mystery that surrounded the Radley home.

It was when I came to the end of the book that your message became distinct and clear. Throughout the course of the novel, Scout not only exaggerated the horror stories that revolved around the Radley family but also fantasized about the looks of the monster Boo Radley. When Scout came face to face with Boo she realized he was much more normal than she had ever imagined. You made Scout become even more innocent when she quickly tried to befriend Boo by taking his large hand in hers and walking him across the street to his house. When Scout's fear of the Radley home disappeared as hastily as Boo did into his home, Scout and I realized something at the same time. It wasn't that the world was afraid of Boo Radley, it was Boo Radley afraid of the world.

I still have a mental picture of Scout standing on the large front porch of the Radley house, looking down the dark street at all the houses she knew well. Scout was realizing how Boo saw the world. He did not know a single person. Then everything my dad had ever said to me made sense. It is true that you cannot judge a book by its cover, or that you don't really know a man until you walk a mile in his shoes, or in this case, stand on a man's front porch.

As I was closing the faded paperback in my Honors English class, I looked around. I wanted you to know at that very moment how much you changed my life. I wanted to write you this letter a year ago. Instead, I did something much better. I forced myself to do what you forced Scout to do. Two girls sat before me, Jen and Laurie. Once we had been friends, but now they were alienated from me over something so stupid I can't even remember it. For the first semester of that junior year it did not matter what they had done, all I remembered was that my feelings had been hurt. Up until that day I never tried to see the situation through their eyes. But when I stepped into the small Dr. Marten Mary Janes of Laurie's and the size eleven Jack Purcell's of Jen's and looked around it sure was

a lot different. I realized their feelings were hurt too.

My dad still gives me his lectures, but now there are far fewer looks. To Kill a Mockingbird is like a bible to me. get along with people better because of it. truthfully never thought a book could change the way I thought, but yours did. Today, as I look around my Seniors Honors English class I see Jen, still wearing Jack Purcells. Now she is laughing with me, not at me. Thank you for making it possible to bridge that relationship with the message from your book.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Krohn

Runner Up

Lauren Heagerty
Whitford Middle School
Beaverton
Teacher: Jeff Hicks

Dear Ms. Mansfield,

McAllister Patrol was recommended to me by my grandfather, a professor of English, and a very special person to me. He loves Western literature because he grew up on a small farm and ranch in Idaho, so of course, this book is one of his favorites. We had the copy, which he got from his one room school house when it was closed, that he had read when he was my age, so I decided to read it. It has become one of my most cherished books as well.

It's a very meaningful book to me, not only because it is so well written or has lots of adventure in it, but because it brought me a closer understanding of my grandpa, and what he knows and loves. It has brought out his past that I now am very interested in. I have been able to talk and write to him about how much I love the book, and he is so pleased. It's our thing that we can talk about. It has opened up a wide range of other old books that he has enjoyed and recommends to me.

As I read McAllister Patrol, I imagined myself in the place of Lee McAllister, and my grandpa as Big Tim. He'd teach me everything about being a ranger, since he knew it all, and the more I learned, the more I wanted to learn. I was becoming very interested in something so significant from someone I love and respect, and I was growing into my ranger position. I was his Cub, always eager to hear more exciting ranger stories.

Even though I don't live in a national park, or have a grandpa who's an expert ranger, I feel I'm getting closer to him, and it all started with this book. I know what it's like to ride a horse, climb the side of a majestic mountain, go fishing for breakfast- all things my grandpa knows, and I hope to experience one day. His past has come alive in this book, making the story so individual and unique for me. It really is exciting to be close to someone who can relate to the story because he knows the way Big Tim and Lee lived. Out in the wilderness, up in the fresh air of the mountains, it prompts me to become a ranger, myself.

I've always thought of my grandpa's interest as neat but I've never really gotten a feel for it like I did in McAllister Patrol. It is a very unique feeling when you share such a special interest with such a special person.

Sincerely,
Lauren Heagerty

Runner Up

Tennille Wright
Madison High School
Portland
Teacher: Susan Green

Dear Maya,

Strength mirrors through your work, Maya Angelou. I own a book of your poetry. People oppressed overcoming obstacles and becoming stronger, this is what sings through the bars of a caged bird because music is its only freedom of expression. Like you, Maya I am a woman, a woman with a painful past. Like the determined voices rising from your words, I to will rise and become whatever I wish because I will it.

Like many children in America, I did not have a perfect childhood. A man I trusted hurt me in away that damaged my innocence. He was a powerful influence over me and taught me that what was happening to me was right. Just like bigotry was drilled into the American society, so was my childhood forcefully taken from me. Fortunately, I have darkened my memories and blocked them out, but the history of the African American people cannot be forgotten. This violent lesson was learned too well. No, we will not forget slavery just as we will not forget our names.

Maya, your work has encouraged me tremendously. The confidence you have is phenomenal. You must have lived through so much to have gained and learned all the lessons that have strengthened you. I love poetry and you have influenced me to write my life down in words. I want to share my favorite poem that I have written with you. It does not have the power and strength that emanates from your work, but it has the potential to be strong.

Nothing, Nevermind

I wanted to, nothing, I just, nevermind,

Can you see through these words and find, my heart, soul, and mind?

And if you did, would you care that my nothing is everything

And that I contain so much behind

the times I say nevermind?

Do you feel anything for me, Or do you just not see me as anything besides
the nothing I say?

A person's past must not bind them. What a person has learned should be used to instruct and construct a more successful future. I thank you, Maya, for sharing your life and your history with the world, to teach us lessons of love and liberation. No two people are alike and I believe if they shared each other's poetry then they would have more respect for one another, because they would know that they, that we, are all just human. Maya, when did you start writing? I remember that I began early. I wrote corny poems in the first or second grade. What is your favorite poem that you have written and that you

have read? What did you do for a living before you began to make money writing? Do you have any advice for someone who wishes to be a writer? I liked your caged bird poem and the poem about a child lost at sea. What exactly does that poem symbolize, or is it just a story of a drowned child? Why did you choose to publish your poems? Who is someone in your life who has influenced you?

One of the experiences in my life that has influenced me is outdoor school, where the atmosphere is great for writing. Nature and children seem to bring words right out of my soul. I have gone there to counsel sixth graders five times. I think I want to be a teacher and a writer because those professions touch people.

Besides writing poetry, I love writing songs. Most of them don't have a permanent beat because they are soon forgotten, but there are a few that I can not forget. I have a twin sister and if I ever were to sing professionally, I would sing with her. I believe that she is writing to you as well. My sister has similar tastes to mine, she is my best friend.

Both my sister and I were extremely shy in school, but we could always sing. Maybe we were like the caged bird in your poem. We did find freedom through singing. We always could sing in talent shows and assemblies, but being outspoken otherwise did not happen. In school, I also found a way out of myself through writing. I loved writing short stories and poems. One of my teachers said that my poem seemed to be written by an older child. My freshmen year I won an award for creative writing.

Thank you for writing your poems. They are very inspirational. Each one gives character and strength to the everyday woman. I know that your poems will outlive you and reach far beyond the bars of this life. They will ring in the ears of people for a long time. No one can forget words that strong and that beautiful.

Tennille Wright

Honorable Mention

Noël Gurrola

Whitford Middle School

Beaverton

Teacher: Jeff Hicks

Dear Emily Dickinson,

Your book of poetry touched me in so many ways, mentally, physically and emotionally. You are the main reason that I want to become a writer of poetry. I have written several for school and for myself. Here is one of my recent ones,

Misery,
Misery is not yellow
but it tastes like lemons
It's a never ending road going nowhere.
Misery is cold, dark, and wet. Misery is what I feel inside,
cold, dark, and wet.
Misery.

It's a start at what I hope will become a famous poem one day. I have loved your

work ever since my mother gave me your book of poems. Your poems bring out my imagination and the writer in me.

At night ,when I read your poems, I think to myself, is this how she is feeling or is it total opposite? A few of your poems really stand out in my mind, so much so, I could tell them by heart. Here they are:

VI

If I could stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I could ease one life the aching,
or cool one pain,
or help one fainting robin,
I shall not live in vain.

This particular poem says that if I have a problem that I shouldn't dwell on it, but help others that have the same problem.

The next poem is a real favorite:

Power

You cannot put fire out;
A thing that can ignite
Can go, itself, without a fan
upon the slowest night.
You cannot fold a flood,
And put it in a drawer,
Because the winds will tell it out,
and tell your cedar floor.

This poem to me says that even if you think you have power, you really don't. Plus it says you cannot control power. It controls you.

I don't know this poem means to you, but to me they mean a whole lot. These poems may not relate to me, but they make me think about the kind of person who can relate to them. I must ell you that not many poems touch em the way yours do. I know you're probably thinking how could a thirteen year old know how to respond to your great poems. Well, I have one thing to say, I haven't had such a wonderful life and when I write poems, it relieves the pain that I have inside.

Your poems have made me a happier person and a happier writer in many ways. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Noël Gurrola

Honorable Mention

Justin Jordan
Lakeview High School
Lakeview

Teacher: Margy Turner
Librarian: Rebecca K. Duffy

Dear Mr. Pat McManus,

I have been reading your stories for years, and love every one. It wasn't always that way though. I used to never read, unless I was forced to, usually in school. One night my dad finished one of your stories, and made me read it too; I told him I didn't want to read his stupid book (no offense). It was probably just like all the rest of the books in the world-boring, dumb, etc. After reading that ONE story, I read the whole book that night. Ever since then I have read every one of your stories that I could get my hands on. I read them over and over. Sometimes my dad and I will be recommending your books to someone and start repeating our favorite parts, and laughing at what one of us says. Just yesterday, I was talking to my friend Tim, and you came up, not long after, we were both almost in tears because we were laughing so hard.

In English for the past few years, I have been giving different speeches on different things. All of them were boring and no one liked them, but last year I gave a eulogy speech on you, even though I know you are still alive. I gave it as though I were Retch Sweeny. I told the stories of your experiments with black powder, your first car, and the cabin at Spooky Lake. After I had concluded my speech, everyone started clapping louder than usual, and all said they liked it and thought that I should make it to semi-finals. I had them all practically rolling on the ground with laughter. I did make it to semi-finals, which was a first, and everyone thought I should make it to finals, except the judges. It was definitely the best speech I have ever given. I have learned from this that I am a better speaker than I thought.

I have noticed many similarities between my life and what you write about. For example, I too, in my short 18 years of existence have noticed that the trails have gotten steeper and longer, and that the ground is harder and colder. I also notice that almost every time I go camping, it seems to pour, after weeks of sunshine. I have also spent many years in prison (school), as you have. I used to spend so much time in the principals office that I started receiving my mail there. Ever since I have been in high school, I have been trying for one year without a trip to the dean. So far I have been cut short by one teacher each year.

I have the same power over elk as you do. Last year when I went hunting, the guys I was hunting with told me I would see something and to be ready to shoot. All I saw was tracks that appeared to have been made sometime in the previous century.

I have a totally different effect on fish. I can be fishing with someone, and they don't think I will catch anything, but I always catch the most and the biggest. For example, I was fishing with Tim for the first time, we were after bass. Right away he landed a nice fish, but he threw it back. I hurried over to where he was and caught a 14 1/2 inch bass, quite large for that particular pond. All together that day, I caught seven fish. Tim caught that one, and his brother didn't do so well; he did catch lots of moss though. My dad and I went fishing once, but I was content just to watch as he pulled in one small fish after another. At one good hole, he had caught some little fish; however, he knew there was a big one in there, but he had already caught his limit, so I took his fish pole and in two minutes I landed the giant fish; it was about 12 inches.

I would like to have you come and fish here, with me as your guide. I am not nearly

as boring in person as I am in my letters. I would be honored to have you come to see me, and to go fishing with me. I have several good places that have never failed to produce at least two fish, and that is on a bad day. Sometimes I am able to catch over 20 fish in an hour. We shall see if your anti-fish-field works on my waters. If so, then you can mark me up as yet another guide you have beaten. I have no guide fees either. Thank you for your time and reading this clear to the end.

With MANY thanks,
your biggest fan,
Justin Jordan

P.S. I would rather meet you than any other famous person.