

2000 Letters About Literature Winners

Level I (4th-7th Grade)

First Place

To Sharon Creech
Walk Two Moons
From Caitlin Turner
Wallowa Elementary School
Wallowa, OR
Jennifer Gibbs, Teacher

Dear Miss Sharon Creech,

After reading your book Walk Two Moons, I took into consideration how much it hurts to lose someone or in my case, part of someone. Sal lost her mom to a casualty, I lost my mom to a disease. At least I thought I had lost her. I had lost the mom I knew. The mom who would walk 10 miles a day. Or the mom who would make an entire Thanksgiving dinner.

I guess I should explain. One night, two years ago, in October of 97 my mom felt a weird tingling up and down her arms. As the year went on the tingling turned to pain and tremors. My mom and Dad were gone several times during the winter, The one time I remember most was on Valentines Day. They went to OHSU in Portland, OR. There mom had all sorts of tests. Nothing turned up.

That summer mom was almost back to well...mom. My family and I rejoiced. She's better was all I was thinking. Except for passing tremors my mom was almost 100% better. Our luck didn't hold. That fall my mom went back to teaching after being a "home mom" for two years. From that fall on the disease has gotten progressively worse. The disease was diagnosed finally as MS or Multiple Sclerosis.

After mom was diagnosed I read Walk Two Moons a second time. It really hit me hard when I made the connection between Sal and me. Sal and I have both leaned on a friend to help pull us through the not so easy times. Sal was strong, she kept going. I can only hope, and cling to that hope that I can be as strong. Sal thought maybe the miscarriage was her fault. In the same way I thought that in some weird way my mom's disease was my fault. Am I too much stress? Have I hurt her somehow? Those were questions I asked. I feel I'm over that now.

Just recently my mom went to a local doctor. He can't do much more for her until he finds out the type of MS it is. Oh yea, we thought, more tests. We were right. In January my parents are going back to Portland to get more tests.

Like Sal, I'm trying to get on with my life and keep the birds of sadness from nesting in my hair. I think that that's what Sal's mom wanted her to do. I know that's what my mom wants.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Turner

Runner Up

To Mildred D. Taylor
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry
From Ericka Sohlberg
Fox Hollow School
Eugene, OR
Ms. Watrous, Teacher

Dear Mildred D. Taylor,

Your book, Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry, touched and moved me. The lessons you taught and the memories you shared will be with me forever. I'd never realized before how a book could carry me back into so many difficult and painful but loving times. Such a grand experience it was to be carried into the depths of your story! I was soon lost in Cassie's world, standing beside her, feeling her feelings and acknowledging her pain which came from discrimination.

I was changed in more than one way by reading this book. I never realized that outside of my comfortable, cozy life, lives of others were far less easy. My heart cried out for the Logans, wishing I could save them from humiliation and from ridicule, wanting them to be treated equally.

But at the same time I realized that they had something terribly precious that even some other white neighbors didn't have. Family love. Not only family love but friendship. No matter how hard life might be the Logans were tied together with love: the strongest rope in the world. I treasure my family and friends ever so much and they mean so much to me.

I know that if my life were as hard as theirs, I couldn't possibly be as brave. I admire Cassie, Stacey, Little Man, and Christopher John. They had to learn to respect the fact that whites had more power than blacks and to live with it. I don't think I could have lived with the fact that I was not considered equal to others because of my color.

Cassie had so many gifts and I want to be just like her. She opened the door of her pain and let me look inside. So horrible was that image, I drew back - not wanting to see or hear more. But so powerful and understanding was the Logans love for each other that I turned the knob and walked in.

For many minutes after finishing your novel, I cried. I cried for the cruelty whites showed towards blacks, the love and friendship the Logans showed towards each other, but mostly because an experience far too thrilling and complex had ended. I had opened the door to your book, rather timidly at first, but finally walked through it with confidence. I had learned something about love and about compassion and about bravery through struggle. And then I had to say good bye to the Logans and move on. All I could say was 'Bye Cassie, I hope we meet again.' Then I closed the book with a 'clap' and settled my thoughts on the future. Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry affected me in a way that not many books have. It opened my heart and helped me realize the importance of my loving family and friends, and of equality for black and white.

Thank you,

Ericka Sohlberg

Honorable Mention

To Tom Birdseye
I'm Going to be Famous
From Matthew McGlade
Roosevelt Middle School
Eugene, OR
Charlotte Richardson, Teacher

I'm Going to be Famous

Dear Tom Birdseye,

I'm Going to be Famous: what a great title for a book! I met you when I was in first grade at Author Day at my school. At that time I read your book eagerly, roaring with laughter. Not I'm in fifth grade and I read it again. It has a totally different meaning for me now.

In first grade, I enjoyed the humor and the plot of your book. I could really imagine a boy shoving bananas down his throat in attempt to break a world record, while his sister was trying to set her own record spitting watermelon seeds. Humor is important in my life. From the time I was little, people have always said I had a great sense of humor. Humor helps me to be optimistic, to see things from a different angle, and to lighten more difficult moments.

Now, in fifth grade, I notice you may have had different objectives in writing this book. You emphasize the importance of a "can do" attitude of believing in yourself. I have a positive attitude like this in my life. I am writing an autobiography right now which sometimes feels like an impossible task. When I feel overwhelmed, I remind myself that I can do it; I can do anything if I set my mind to it. To succeed I have to try my best and to believe in myself.

You write that it's important to tell the truth. When Arlo tried to deceive his friends by pretending he had eaten seventeen bananas when he'd really thrown away six, he felt ashamed and guilty. His friends knew the truth, which made him feel even worse. Like Arlo, I realize that if you lie, it sticks with you and you feel guilty for a long time. Your friends and family learn not to trust you, and you don't feel good about yourself either. Many young people aspire to be "famous." Arlo and Kerry both wanted to become famous by setting a new record so they would be remembered in the Guinness Book of World Records. I want to do something great in my life, to leave a mark so that people will remember me clearly, just like Arlo. I want to leave an impression on the world. You only get one chance at life, and if you don't make the most of it, it's impossible to do it over. Whether I'm remembered for being a great scientist and winning a Nobel Prize, for being a star soccer player in a World Cup game, or for being a wonderful father, I want to be remembered as someone who made a difference. This, to me, is being "famous."

The messages hidden behind humor in your book enhanced my understanding of my own feelings. You wrote this book when you were teaching a fifth grade class because you were struck by how many of your kids wanted fame and glory. You really understood your fifth graders. Now that I am nearing the end of my fifth-grade year, I realize how much more there was to your book than I first grasped when I read it in first grade.

Banana eaters, on your mark, get set, go!
Sincerely,
Matthew McGlade

Honorable Mention

To Avi
Perloo the Brave
From Jason France
Hazelbrook Middle School
Tualatin, OR
Mrs. Rothenberger/Mrs. Debisschop, Teachers

Dear Mr. Avi,

The book Perloo the Brave forced me to look at some virtues that will make me a better person. It is a very good book that tells about a rabbit that has a lot of courage and persistence. I hope this will change my life because it tells me that nothing is truly impossible if you're will to work hard for it. This book also tells you that if you are smart, though small, you can still make a change in the world. I learned that you must be brave and be will to try hard if you want to succeed. Another very important thing this book taught me is that a traitor will always be caught and pay the price. You have to stay true to your friends and family. Your book indicates that you value friendship quite a bit because you have the characters working together to defeat the villains in the story. This is the only way to succeed. The value of all this is that if you go out and try you will have a chance at winning, even if you go against incredible odds. It takes bravery and courage to do this.

You must also have the persistence that others don't if you want to succeed where others fail. This book is very clear in telling you that you must stand true to yourself and allied, friendship is so strong, strong enough to help you through life when it gets rough. You should thing of others before yourself and never, *ever* be greedy. The greedy people will get lazy. They will get themselves stuck in a position in which they are not safe and they are balanced precariously on the edge of death or injury because they put their greed for power ahead of other priorities. Greed will make you think of yourself. It can turn you in to a Benedict Arnold, a traitor. You will suffer the consequences if you lose your friends. You must fight for what's right! Don't be greedy! You should be a good friend.

The last and possible the most important virtue in this book is trust. In this story, Perloo has a chance to escape and he doesn't. This part of the story me across very strongly, because he was likely to be killed if he stayed. He had promised to stay there to the packmaster and he was trustworthy and kept his promise even though it was risky. Perloo put his honor and the ability to be trusted ahead of his self-interest, even though he had much to lose. The values of trust are incredible. Trust is the key to friendship. when you trust someone, or are trusted by others, you will become a good friend because you are faithful to your friend. You will have less problems and a good relationship with other people. This means you have one less enemy. The things this book told be about, will likely have affects on me later in life. It tells me the true meaning of being a good person. I hope I will be one later. I will be brave, trustworthy, generous, persistent and a hard

worker. I can do it by remembering Perloo. This was an incredibly meaningful book.
Sincerely,
Jason France

Honorable Mention

To Dorothy Sterling
Freedom Train
From Alison Stump
Home School
Beaverton, OR

Dear Dorothy Sterling,

Harriet Tubman was a great woman and I would give anything to meet her in person. I came to know her life story the day my mom came home with the book, *Freedom Train*. *Freedom Train* changed my way of thinking. After I read *Freedom Train* I looked for everything I could find about Harriet Tubman. I have read many books and even did a school project in which I pretended to be Harriet Tubman talking to an interviewer about my life. I even pretended to fall asleep mid-sentence like she did because of her head injury. I could never imagine how hard her life must have been, but through it all she became one of the most famous women of all time.

I have always wanted equality and my mom and I are very interested in women's rights but after I read this book I realized that if I wanted things to change I would have to do it my self like Harriet Tubman did. To me, equality means respect for all living things including people and animals. We Americans have a lot to learn about the feelings and cultures of both people and animals. We have many prejudices against people and animals that keep us from actually trying to understand their way of living and thinking. For example, if I want a better future for animals, I know I have to plan animal preserves that will give them safe places to live without keeping them in cages.

Ms. Sterling, your book made me ask so many questions about what it was like to be Harriet Tubman. What was her life really like? Since she couldn't read or write did she have any experiences that no one knew about and people like you couldn't write down? If I could go back in time, would she even understand that she would be written about in the future and be a great hero? Harriet Tubman was an ordinary woman without many of the benefits I have and still she saved thousands of people so I ask myself why can't I do the same?

Harriet Tubman was a great woman with an even greater heart and someday I will do great things too.

Sincerely,
Alison Stump

Honorable Mention

To Wilson Rawls
Where the Red Fern Grows
From Kelsi Veralrud

Fox Hollow School
Eugene, OR
Ms. Watrous, Teacher

Dear Wilson Rawls,

Where The Red Fern Grows made me love dogs. It is a book that anyone would want to read over and over again. It's as sweet as a piece of candy that I just can't eat enough of. I feel that I'm in the book, coon hunting or watching Reuben falling down from just accidentally injecting himself into an axe.

I don't think anyone could not cry at the end of that book. I is too sad for me to read the ending, when Ann doesn't eat and dies from missing old Dan. The excitement in the book was fantastic! Every time they went coon hunting and Little Ann was caught in cold water, I felt like I saved her, I was in the book, I felt what they felt. I finished reading in daylight, on my bed. My sister came into my room after hearing me sniffing. I cried when I thought about it. My sister said, "It's just a book!" But I knew it wasn't just a book, it was a feeling that I kept inside my body, that made me warm when I was cold, happy when I was sad, and made my heart fill with joy when I felt sorrow. It wasn't because the dogs died that I cried, but because Little Ann couldn't live on this earth without Old Dan, so she died, but they needed to be together. I read the book over again but not the ending, because it fills my eyes with tears to this day. When you explained the setting, I could taste what you tasted, hear the sounds of coons scratching, and see the darkness and faint outlines of coons racing to a safe place.

The book taught me a lesson, even if you're small, it doesn't matter. The dogs worked as a team and they defeated creatures four times their size. Little Ann and Old Dan risked their lives for Billy because they loved him and he loved them back. The two dogs that seemed much weaker, were really the strongest of all, they kept all they had learned in their hearts.

Sincerely,
Kelsi Veralrud
Level I, Honorable Mention

Level II (8th ? 12th Grade)

First Place

To Ray Bradbury
Fahrenheit 451
From Dannah Shuval
Hazelbrook Middle School
Tualatin, OR
Mrs. Rothenberger, Teahcer

Dear Ray Bradburry,

Your book, Fahrenheit 451, made me realize what the future may hold if people were to become robots by abandoning the books that feed our thoughts and create our ideas. If

we were to surrender our minds to the happy mindlessness of entertainment. In many ways I see it happening in our society today, as people slowly look away from literature, in favor of movies, shopping, and the Internet.

In your book I saw how our school system is becoming the sport-centered, video-based one that you described. It's amazing how some of the things you predicted for the future in your novel have come true, and all I can do is hope that all of your predictions won't. I, personally like to read, however I am aware that most my peers do not. In addition to the future, I saw many connections to the past through the symbolism of fire. I relate fire to the Holocaust, and the Nazis began their public brainwashing by first burning books written by Jews. The firemen in your book were brainwashed into believing the burning books was a public service, and was only for society's good, just as society was taught that books were bad for them. Hitler forced the Germans to believe that by killing the Jews, they were ridding themselves of society's vermin. In both cases, people believed that fire was cleansing them of evil.

If the supposed goal of book burning was to make people happy, then it failed miserably. Happy people do not kill themselves, and there is a high rate of suicide in your book. However, if the goal of the book burning was to control people's thoughts, then it was a success. Burning books is not needed today since most kids consider reading work, a task to complete for school. Instead of destroying books by fire, we're ignoring them. Entertainment has replaced books for a lot of kids in my generation. We also have a high rate of suicide, by drunken driving deaths and drug overdose caused deaths.

When I finished your book, I started thinking about the future, and the chaos it may hold. I identified with Montag, and realized that a lot of what happened to him isn't that far-fetched from what could happen to me. We must not let ourselves be tricked into believing commercial ideas, like Millie and her friends. We must stand strong against brainwashing on t.v, which makes us believe that we want what they're selling. For me, it is important to always ask myself if the choices I'm making in my life are bringing me happiness. This is a question that is far too overlooked, especially in America. Money has singularly become the motive of all actions, the answer to all problems. It's as though people no longer have the time for books. It's like there is no longer any time or desire to explore new ideas, or to just stop what you're doing and think. Like in Fahrenheit 451, they do our thinking for us. I plan to always think for myself, and to produce my own ideas.

Dannah Shuval

First Runner Up

To James Herriot
From Taylor Phelps
Wallowa High School
Wallowa, OR
Mrs. Woodward, Teacher

To James Harriet,

Your books have greatly increased my love and understanding of animals. I live on a farm in a small community in the northeast corner of Oregon in the U.S. Your

descriptions of Yorkshire are similar to some of the land around here. Especially your descriptions of snow blocked roads. I greatly enjoy your descriptions of cases, and your ability to make people laugh. Most of all, it was your description of people that I loved. It made me realize that not all the world was as modern as the way of life in the U.S. had led me to believe. I grew up on books of historical times and far off places. They have made me long to visit farming communities where cows are still hand-milked, where wagons are used for haying, and where stone fences are used instead of barbwire or electric ones.

In the U.S. the milking machine degrades the cow, the tractor mocks the draft horse, and modern fencing mars the landscape. I am not saying that the U.S. should give these up, because we have come too far to go back, but whenever possible old ways of life should be reestablished. Your books describe the kind of life I wish I lived. They are my escape when I have had an overload of the modern world.

My parents bought me a jersey when I was about ten. We left her calf on, so I only had to milk when it was needed. However, I grained her every day, put a bell on her, hauled her water and hay in the winter and spent the early days of spring scraping her itchy winter coat off. In return, she provided hours of entertainment and comfort. It takes a special type of person to be truly dedicated in keeping an animal healthy and content. I like to believe that I am one of them. It seems that in your community there is no lack of them. In my school, though often in fun, I am teased for loving my milk cow the way I do. For enjoying working with our small herd of beef cows. For spending hours on my back in the field with the new calves; silently waiting while they gain confidence to come up and sniff, sometimes lick, and occasionally butt me. I guess I am the classic country hick by definition, but if loving animals makes me a hick, then all true vets and farmers should likewise be called hicks. Your books have restored my faith that there are indeed people left who I could share my experiences with and not have them laughed at but understood.

If someone asks me what life in the country is like, I want them to see not just the cow poop, flies, and hard work associated with county life, but the joys, rewards, and the contentment that is part of living on a farm. I tell them to read your book. It creates the special aura around farm life that I cannot put into words. You are able to convey the feelings of the farmers and vets about their work, that others would see only as hard. Your book describes my life, feelings, and love of animals better than I ever could. I have many funny, sad, and serious stories about my home life that I cannot share with my peers because they would not understand the significance of the story. You, however, seem to be able to get just the right angle on the story to make it understandable to those who have never been in a farming community. For instance, I had to sell my beloved jersey. My little cow whom I could sleep next to in the field without fear of being stepped on I cried enough to probably float a board in a stock tank, but if I shared my grief at school, my classmates would probably laugh and say, you are crying over a cow!?

The other thing I love about your books are that they show the special moments that make the whole hard life worth while. Some people can't understand how watching a calf being born can be such a magical event. Can't fathom why I would volunteer to check the first calf heifers at midnight during calving season. They don't experience the joy that walking through a group of silent bovines on a chilly night and coming upon a new pair brings. The calf staggering towards the milk he knows is there, the mother mooing in that

special way. They don't see how on a hard day, the sight of a nursing calf can restore good humor. Or they don't understand how the mooing of a cow who has lost her calf can be so heart-wrenching. You see all these things and take pleasure in them also. I know some vets who don't take the same pleasure you do in your work and they aren't as good. Your descriptions of cases helped to save my cow when she went down with milk fever. I was scared to death, but I remembered your description of the symptoms and called the vet. I also remembered your success rate and stopped worrying.

I have always loved animals and have often considered going into veterinary medicine. Your books accurately described the kind of work I hoped would be involved, and convinced me that I wanted to be a large animal vet. Thank-you for writing such a wonderful book. It was exhilarating to read a book that shared many of the aspects I find so wonderful about animals and life on a farm. It was like finding a kindred sole.

Sincerely

Taylor Phelps

Second Runner Up

To Carl Deuker
Painting the Black
From Nate Baker
Whitford Middle School
Beaverton, OR
Jeff Hicks, Teacher

Dear Mr. Deuker,

I feel that you have written the book, "Painting the Black," just for me. I believe this because at so many different periods in the book, I was able to relate back to a time where I have felt the same excitement, or the same doubt. This year I have read more books total than I have in my whole life. My total this year is six and counting, from kindergarten until now I had read probably four books. Thanks to authors like you I have finally been able to feel the excitement of a good book.

I am a big sports guy, always playing a sport, and if I'm not playing, then I'm watching. The last two years have been a big switch for me; I went from soccer to football. Last year was my first year I played football, starting at tight-end. I felt that I was fairly decent; I enjoyed playing this position as well. Going out for a deep pass or crushing my enemy on a huge clock. I loved it. But deep down inside, I was a quarterback. I could bomb the ball in the tightest spiral and make it look like it was not even spinning. I was a QB. There was only one thing that was keeping me from achieving my goal, that was my best friend Greg. He was like Josh in the story, he was perfect. If he was going to throw deep, it was going deep and right on the mark every time. If I wanted to be QB next year, I was going to have to work, and work hard; work as hard as Ryan did in the story. He wanted to be the starting catcher on the team and he achieved his dream. So why couldn't I? I worked all summer long throwing the football constantly. I threw through a tire that hung from a play set in back yard. I wanted to be a QB, so that's what I was going to be. I told myself that every night.

Now it was finally time, football season; it was finally here, and I was ready. At practice,

I worked at QB hard, and let me tell you I was doing a good job. I was living the life I always wanted and it was only my second year. After that practice, I proved to my self and to my coached that I should be the starting quarterback for the Beaverton Metro Junior Beavers.

During the year I had feelings, just as Josh did the first game he got to play. I felt on fire, with everything going my way, a masterpiece at work, dodging tackles, and diving for first downs. It was great. I worked just as hard as Ryan did, and I was successful, too. There was a time when one of my fellow teammates did something against team rules. I did not choose to tell, and I did this for the same reason as Ryan. He was hesitant to tell on Josh in the story. we needed this player, and we may have lost without him. The same for Ryan and Josh; Josh had a shocking incident with Monica in the story. Ryan did not want to tell at first for the same reason as I, but Ryan ended up doing the right thing. I didn't. It turned out to be not that big of a deal but I still think about it.

"Painting the black," is one of the most extraordinary stories I have ever read. Let me tell you Mr. Deuker, I will never find a book that matched my life in the same way.

Sincerely,
Nate Baker

Honorable Mention

To J.D. Salinger
The Catcher in the Rye
From Orion Hulin
Madison High School
Portland, OR
Susan Green, Teacher

Dear Mr. Salinger,

It is commonly believed by eighth graders nationwide that their freshman year of high school will be nine months of sheer agony. Fear fills them as they walk timidly through the halls on the first day of school. If you listen hard enough, you might actually detect the low rumbling of hundreds of young hearts beating anxiously in unison. My freshman year was entirely different and I never experienced the terror that engulfed many of my fellow peers. In fact, I found my freshman year to be quite an enjoyable experience. I knew my role at the bottom of the food chain and I understood that it was a period everyone must go through. I didn't let it phase me though and ended up cruising straight through the year without a hitch.

My sophomore year, however, was not all fun and games. It all started with my schedule. After the first day of school I had come to one conclusion: I hated my classes. In some I had problems with the teachers and in others I found that I didn't know many people. I tried to convince myself that things would gradually get better, but in fact they had only begun to get worse. My father soon lost his job, putting quite a bit of financial strain on my family. It was at this point that I knew the next few months would be a true test of not only the strength of my family, but of my own as well. It was a test that I ended up failing miserably.

As the year progressed, I began to slip into a bit of a depression. It's something that is

difficult for me to talk about and even more difficult for me to explain. I guess the stress of having unsatisfactory classes coupled with my father's lack of employment was just too much for me to bear. I attempted to tell myself that things weren't really that bad, which they weren't. However, this did not work so for no significant reason, I began to believe that the whole world was against me. I thought that there was nothing I could do but sit around and let fate determine the rest of my existence. I stopped enjoying life altogether and entered a state of mental limbo. I tried not to let it show because I didn't want people to think that I was some kind of head case. It was a rough period of time for me but thanks to a book you wrote I eventually started to change.

In sophomore English, we started reading The Catcher in the Rye. I instantly fell in love with it and knew that it would be a novel that would forever change the course of my life. The main reason I liked it so much was the fact that I identified so much with main character, Holden Caulfield. Like Holden, I thought I was pretty tough and could take on anything the world threw at me. This, of course, was not true as I had already buckled under the pressure of a little adversity and it crushed me like an egg. The sad thing is that at the same time we thought we were invincible, we both knew that we weren't.

I also believed that the world owed me something for all the pain and suffering it had put me through and that it was my turn for a bit of good fortune. In actuality, the world hadn't put Holden or me through any suffering at all. It doesn't owe anyone anything, especially us. I still had a good home and a loving family and here I was whining about never getting treated fairly.

In almost every way, I *was* Holden Caulfield and it felt good to identify so closely with another person, even if it was a fictional character. Then I came to a sudden realization. I started seeing the true Holden. He was a miserable, pathetic human being. Something I surely would have become for the rest of my years if I did not act quickly. In the process of identifying with a sarcastic, snot-nosed, over-exaggerating brat I finally figured out that I wanted nothing to do with Caulfield. It dawned on me that the only thing making me depressed was myself.

Your novel truly changed my perspective of things. Not only did it change the way I viewed myself but it changed the way I viewed life as well. I stopped looking at life negatively and started seeing it more realistically. I began to take things as they came and learned to adjust accordingly. I now know that fate can't take you everywhere and that if you really want to succeed in life you have to work hard to get there. By far the biggest difference between Holden and myself is that I shed the facade and grew up.

Mr. Salinger, I would like to thank you for what you have helped me to do. You inadvertently forced me to take a step back and look at things the way they truly are. You managed to change the course of my entire life just by writing one simple book. For that, sir, I am forever indebted to you.

Sincerely,
Orion Hulin

Honorable Mention

To John Steinbeck
The Pearl
From Jonathan Baldwin

Home School
Sheridan, OR

Dear Mr. Steinbeck,

I am writing to tell you that your short story "The Pearl" is the greatest I have read in my life. Reading has given me a different ideas and opinions of the world around me and what is right and wrong. It has shown me what can come of allowing greed and your own dreams to consume you. Your story has made me realize many things about myself I didn't realize before. Your story stirred up many emotions in me. I felt Kino's anger when the doctor wouldn't see him, his joy when he wound the pearl of the world, and his suspiciousness of the pearl traders. By the end of the book, I wasn't quite certain how I felt. I was a little disappointed and saddened and frustrated that Kino couldn't get out of a life of being poor, but I really don't think that your book should have ended any other way. Kino had to learn how evil and unobtainable wealth can be, had to fling the pearl from his life.

Even though I am not an Indian and my people have never been oppressed, I feel as though Kino and I could be kindred spirits. Like Kino, I always have a song in my mind and it has the songs of the things around me in it. I hear the comforting song of the old grandmother clock in my living room. I listen to the sad song of the last leaves blowing off the trees in fall, or the lulling song of the rain tapping on the roof in the spring. Like both Kino and you, I notice many of the small insignificant things in the world, and look on them with interest. I too find the lives of ants or the movement of the sunlight on water to be fascinating things to watch. Also like Kino, I can be stubborn about certain things and not be willing to compromise even when it is necessary. I dislike having to compromise any of my dreams.

I feel that this entire story is an analogy to my life, to everyone's lives. Kino represents me: seemingly simple but actually a fairly complex person. His wife and baby represent family life and the things that keep my life on track. The baby also represents all that I hold dear to me: my family, my dog, my room and everything else. The doctor represents all of those people who would try to keep me below them, make them think that I am less than they are. The doctor also represents the people who exploit others, preying on whatever weaknesses they have and using those weaknesses to make a profit. The pearl buyers represent the people who would destroy my dreams. Even the Father represents the people who would put others down and keep others below them. The pearl is kind of difficult to draw an analogy to, because it represents unattainable riches. It is an inanimate and malevolent object, yet it become the most evil thing to Kino. Perhaps the pearl represents the dreams I have that will never be realized, the dreams that will never happen.

Your story has showed me how sometimes, even when it is disagreeable, it is important to compromise. When Kino dealt with the cheating pearl traders, he became enraged that they would give him such a low price just because he was an Indian. Later on, however, he learned how much worse it could be actually keeping the pearl. Perhaps if he had known the consequences he wouldn't have kept the pearl, but I believe he would have kept it anyway. He was so entangled in his dreams that he would have never believed that owning the pearl could cause him harm until it actually happened. After reading of Kino's consequences, I realized that even dreams should be sacrificed when

something you hold more dear to you is in danger. Dreams are only what might be, but the things you hold dear are things you already have. Your story has also shown me that, while it is good to possess dreams, it is not good to let dreams possess you. Kino's dreams took control of him so much that they swallowed him up, blinded him to other things going on. Working for his dreams, he cuts himself off from the others in his life. By the time he realizes what has been happening, it is too late. Thank you for writing such a great book.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Baldwin

Honorable Mention

To Han Nolan
If I Should Die Before I Wake
From Jocelyn Noonan
Whitford Middle School
Beaverton, OR
Jeff Hicks, Teacher

Dear Han Nolan,

Your book "If I Should Die Before I Wake" made me look at the people around me in a different way. Chana's strength and perception made me start focusing more on peoples' actions, ideas, and views rather than what they own, who they know, or what their dreams are.

When Chana and her family are in the concentration camp, their thoughts and actions are magnified, because that's all they have left. The Jews are put in a place where they are forced to work without food, to obey commands and given no clothing, to sweat, starve and die under the cold, watchful eyes of the Germans. Chana had to have strength of character and the courage of her convictions to survive. The harsh conditions of the camp brought out the best and worst in people --- character traits that never would have shown up otherwise. The part of the book that really got inside my head was when Chana found herself in a position to kill one of the German guards who had caused her and everyone else in the camp so much pain.

"I was not a girl with dreams of someday becoming a great violinist, or of getting married and having children. I was not a girl with a family, or a house, or fancy clothes. I was not someone to belong to a *shul*, or was known for her brown wavy hair with a strand that always jutted out in the back. I could no longer identify myself by what I owned, or who I knew, or what my dreams were. This---my body, my mind, my soul---was all I was. It is all any of us ever are, and without the camouflage of my dreams and possessions, I realized that everything I did, every thought I had, was all I was. It was all very simple. If I killed the guard, all of who I was would be a murderer, not a murderer and a violinist who lived in a house and had a nice family---just a murderer. If I showed love, all of me would be a lover. Who then did I want to be?"

Separated from their families, stripped of their clothes, and living in tiny, freezing barracks with greasy kitchens, the hearts of the Jews are revealed.

Their thoughts and actions become all they are. It is all we ever are, but we never

learn to see that because we live in disguise, masked by our possessions, our dreams, our position in society.

This got me thinking...without my possessions and dreams, who would I be? I would not be a girl who had a nice family and went to school. I would not be a girl who loved books and art, would not be a girl who had a dog called Tillie and lived on a house on a hill that was best for sledding.

After I thought about this, I began to put more emphasis on my actions, thoughts, and views on things. I started question in the people around me. What if we all wore school uniforms? What if we lived in a world where every thing was invisible, and all that showed was your words? Would people choose the same friends?

People have always told me "It's what on the inside that counts" but the real meaning of that statement never got inside my head until now. When Chana was in the concentration camp, the importance of her thoughts and actions was magnified. I realized that without having to get to that point, I can still look at people through their actions and words, and cherish my own.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jocelyn Noonan

Honorable Mention

To Barbara Kingsolver

Animal Dreams

From Natalie Williams

Madison High School

Portland, OR

Susan Green, Teacher

Dear Barbara Kingsolver,

Your book, [Animal Dreams](#), touched me in a place that I never knew existed. Cosima's mental and emotional transformation made a connection with my heart. I not only felt hurt for her, I felt hurt for surrounding friends and family in my life. I felt hurt for myself, too.

The first thing in the book to bring turmoil to my thoughts was what was happening to her surrounding environment. It got her thinking about things that she, nor I, would not normally touch base with. It struck chords in my heart and began to make the wheels turn in my brain. I began to reflect on the horrible damage being done to the ozone, and the rapid reduction of Earth's natural resources.

While the people in her small town of Grace needed their orchards to survive in everyday life, I understood that we need all the things that are disappearing too quickly: the forests all over the world that are being clear-cut are our oxygen producers; fresh, uncontaminated drinking water is being flushed down a toilet and chemical free vegetation barely exists any more; wild, free animals are being killed for fur and left to rot in the sun. Everything we need to survive, not live comfortably by, but survive is being wasted, and it scares me, like it scared Cosima.

A second thing in Cosima's life that also struck me hard is her losses. She not only lost

a child when she was young, she also lost her sister and mother, all to death. While she felt she lost her father to something else and inevitable. I thought of all the major losses in my life, my sister, brother, grandfather, and my own child. There is the loss of my sister and brother, which saddens me still to this day, because they only live down the street from me. I've lost them to drugs, along with a great many friends. While my sister and brother are two of the most intellectually talented people I know, they are also the most stupid people I've ever met.

Now the loss of my grandfather and my own child hit really close to home with Cosima's losses. My grandfather was a great man who lived through a depression, fought in World War II, and raised three children with my grandmother. He had stories and heart problems. He was my Santa Claus and the male father figure I never had. I loved him and always hoped to follow closely in his foot steps. Now I realize I can't because my grandfather would want me to carve my own path.

The loss of my own child hits me the hardest. A year ago I had a secret that scared me but filled me with a sensation of things only a woman can know. I was pregnant with my boyfriend's child. He and I discussed all the possibilities and alternatives; we thought it over. We couldn't keep the child because among other reasons, financially we weren't able to care for a child. My being scared to tell my family led us to believe that we had only one choice, abortion. I've cried and I've cried over our quick and foolish decision. Too late, I realized I could always go to my family for support, whatever mistakes I might make. That's what family is for. They might have been disappointed and hurt, but they would have accepted the facts for what they were. Now my loss is even greater because I created and destroyed something beautiful and pure.

A third reason for my feeling so connected to Cosima is the heart-felt change that she goes through. This helped me cope and understand my thoughts, feelings, and changes. She changes her interior emotional structure to let new things enter her life. I reconstructed mine everyday, trying to discern which emotional mask fits me best. Cosima finally realized that the mask was unnecessary around the people who loved and cared about her. When she came to that realization in her story, as I did, I felt the bond even more.

I would just like to congratulate you on this wonderful story. Cosima and my very powerful cohesion has helped me life off a great weight that I feel I've been carrying around for years. To my satisfaction and great relief I'm doing better in all aspects of my life, even where I felt that no change needed to be made. Life is beautiful for me now and I treasure what little time I have left. Carpe Diem!

Sincerely
Natalie Williams