

2002 Letters About Literature Winners

Each year Weekly Reader Corporation and the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress co-sponsor this national essay contest which asks students in 4th -12th grade to write an essay to an author telling how that author's changed their way of thinking about themselves or the world around them. For Letters about Literature 2002, Oregon students submitted 655 essays for national judging. 14 of those students were honored as state winners at a ceremony during National Library Week 2002 at the Oregon State Library. Judging was based on honesty and originality of expression. Each of the award winners expressed a sincere tie to the chosen book either because of a personal link to characters or events or because of experiencing growth through reading the book. Local sponsors for the essay contest included the Oregon Center for the Book at the State Library, the Oregon Library Association Children's Services Division and Young Adult Network, the Oregon Educational Media Association, and the Oregon Reading Association. Each of the two First Place winners received \$ 50 provided by Weekly Reader Corporation and the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. All fourteen honorees received a certificate, a gift certificate for a local bookstore, and were invited to a ceremony at the Oregon State Library during National Library Week, 2002. Below are the First Place, Runner-Up, and Honorable Mention essays for each level (Level I 4th-7th grade, Level II 8th-12th grade).

Level I (4th-7th Grade)

First Place

To Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet On the Western Front
From John Petroff
Whitford Middle School, Beaverton
Sally Greer, Teacher

Dear Erich Maria Remarque,

Due to you, I now know how hard World War I was, and how hard the war that is just beginning for us now will be. Before I had read your book, All Quiet On the Western Front, I only thought about the few that died in the military and how safe it was to be a military soldier since they carried guns. I now know that guns don't help soldiers a whole lot. Now I think about how many died, how scarce food was, and how lonely and frightened a soldier could get. I had never realized what good condition soldiers had to be in to be able to fight without being killed, and not only did they have to be in tip top condition, but they also had to be smart and constantly alert. It amazes me how anyone could survive a day on the front. It astonishes me that any grown man could dodge all of the shells, bullets and gas that there was to deal with at the front.

I don't think there is any way I could ever stand constantly looking at the deceased and wounded victims of war. The way you describe the gas corpses paints a highly detailed, gruesome, picture in my mind. Even more, I don't think I could withstand seeing a friend or even a foe lying on the ground with a bullet in his chest. You have shown me

how hard not only the physical part of war is hard, but the visual too.

Yet I think the hardest part of being in a war is being mentally tough. I think being mentally tough enough would be the hardest part of being in a war because almost all of your senses contribute toward it. You would have to stand the constant shells dropping from overhead, the sound of machine guns and rifles consistently cracking, a person in higher command howling orders in your ear, seeing a decent or a good friend laying dead on the ground, not ever getting any sleep, never having a good meal and more. What I just listed wasn't even half of the hardships of the front. Your book has totally changed the way I look at war. The biggest lesson I learned from this book is that even if a soldier escapes the shells of the front, he is still destroyed.

Sincerely,
John Petroff

Runner Up

To Laurie Halse Anderson, *Manatee Blues*
From Maya Lim
Patton Middle School, McMinnville

Dear Laurie Halse Anderson,

After reading your book *Manatee Blues*, I realized that people need to be more careful about their actions. We share this world with animals, so it's necessary for us to look after them.

In the chapter you wrote about the girl, Brenna, jumping from the boat into the water to save the baby manatee, you described the water as *oily* and *nasty*. Boats shouldn't pollute so much in a place where animals - especially endangered ones like manatees live. Manufacturing industries and vehicles make the air dirty for plants, animals, and people everyday. People litter, too.

One day, our family took a vacation to the beach. I decided to make a sand castle, so I went down to the shore to get some water. It was then I saw the seagull. It was tangled in a plastic bag. The bag had been tied in a knot at the top, and the bird had caught its legs in the handles. It was dead. I ran back to where my family was relaxing.

"There's a dead seagull over there! It was trapped in a plastic bag. I feel so sorry for it!" I panted.

So my sister and I took our shovels and went and dug a hole for it. We had to pay the bird back for the harm people did. Then we gently pushed the dead bird into the hole with our shovels and covered it with sand.

After that, I went around the beach picking up garbage. I was astonished with how much was there. I realized our planet was going to turn into a dump if people didn't do something about it.

On the way back home, I wished that people wouldn't be so careless. It reminded me of your book - how people sailed their boats too close to the shore, killing manatees with their propellers.

If people continue to pollute, this is what will happen. First the plants will die, from

lack of clean air and water. Then animals will die, because there would be no more plants for them to eat. Then people will die, because *we* wouldn't have any food. Ever since I read your book, Manatee Blues, it has really changed the way I saw the world. It is a planet in need of help. I think if people are always working to improve it, we need to start improving ourselves first. I hope more people will read your book, so they can see the pollution problem we put ourselves into.

Sincerely,
Maya Lim

Honorable Mentions

To Laura Ingalls Wilder, Little Town on the Prairie

From Angelica Juengel
Indian Hills Elementary, Aloha
Ms. Spitzer, Teacher

November 5, 2001

Dear Mrs. Wilder:

Little Town in the Prairie helped me in a lot of ways. It mostly helped in the parts about Nellie Olson. Your writing about her helped me because there is a girl I know just like Nellie; she also is stuck up and thinks she is better than everyone is. You helped me because you helped me to control what I say to her. Like don't be mean and don't be nice just ignore her. The parts about her also helped me to know how to act around her. You told me to not give up and just stand my ground. Like when Ms. Wilder was your teacher and Nellie came to school. She wanted your seat but you just sat there and wouldn't let her have it. If you are hard headed and don't give up she will start to soften up towards others. Your books also made me think about how I look at the world. I mean, how I would look at it without all the houses and telephone wires and stuff like that. This is a great world and it has been destroyed since you were little. I think the earth has changed a lot since the 19th century. Back then the world was wide prairies with barely a big city anywhere. Now you have to search until you die for even two acres of real born prairie. You also made me think about the wild life. It's been almost extinct since you wrote this book. Back then you could go outside two yards and you would find dinner that week. You have really helped me care for the wild life. While reading your books I realized how lucky my family is. I mean now we can stay healthier because we have refrigerators and stuff. I also noticed how different families are now. People take too much stuff for granted now and don't appreciate anything. You also told me to do work and don't complain. I have barely any work to do compared to you. All I have to do is feed my dogs. You had to clean, cook and feed all your animals. If I had not read your books I would never have realized any of that.

Sincerely,
Angelica M Juengel

To Judy Blume, Deenie
From Molly Cougill
Forest Hills Elementary, Lake Oswego
Dana Smith, Teacher

Dear Judy Blume,

You are the reason I signed up for cheerleading camp. My favorite book that you wrote was titled Deenie. The main reason I wanted to read Deenie was because I knew it was about a girl who had the same disease as me. I have scoliosis. It totally relates to my life. I got so excited about reading a book about a girl with the same problem. After I started reading about Deenie I did not want to put the book down. I can totally understand how Deenie felt when she got her brace and didn't want to go to school because she felt different than her friends. I felt sorry for Deenie because it would be much harder to start wearing a brace when you are a teenager. I started wearing my brace when I was 2 1/2 years old and everyone was just used to me with it on. I remember people always staring at me and sometimes saying rude comments. I didn't want to go to school with my brace on because it looked totally like a turtle shell with a thing sticking all the way up to my head. I can remember the first day of kindergarten when I went to school. I was scared because I knew no one else would be wearing a brace and I thought people wouldn't want to play with me. I am very lucky because I don't have to wear a brace anymore.

Deenie was always in a grumpy and snotty mood when she was going to the doctor. She was in a grumpy mood because she knew they are going to tell her something bad like "you have to get surgery" or something like that. I could totally relate to those feelings. I gave gone to so many different hospitals and doctors that you would think I was used to it but I am not at all. I get nervous, my stomach aches and I get scared about what the doctor will say. Just like Deenie, I get in a really bad mood and become very quiet. I never know what might happen or what bad news they have so I don't feel happy until we are driving home. Deenie was always in a much better mood going home from her visits too.

My favorite part of the book was when Deenie became a cheerleader! I liked it because you wouldn't ever think that someone with a bad back wearing a brace would be able to move around enough to become a cheerleader. I had never thought about being a cheerleader before I read Deenie but now I really want to become a cheerleader. It is fun to read about characters in a book that have the same interests as me.

This book made a difference because it was positive and had a main character that believed she could try anything she wanted to. Most books about people with a disability are sad but this book was happy. I wish everyone would read Deenie so they would learn more about scoliosis. I know I can try everything even though I have this disease. My mom and dad let me do anything I want except carry stuff on my back. I still can't believe that Deenie is so much like me. If Deenie were a real person, I would definitely want to e-mail her and let her know I admired her courage! The book really made a difference in my life.

Sincerely,
Molly Cougill

To Gary Paulson, My Life in Dog Years
From Krista DiMaggio
Indian Hills Elementary, Aloha
Mr. Harklerode, Teacher

Dear Mr. Gary Paulson,

I read your book called My Life in Dog Years. Your books are the best! I could read your books all day! I love the way you wrote about your own pets it made me sad when your pets died, but you just kept getting new ones. I like the way you made yourself the main character in the stories. It also made me want to read more about dogs and now I love them. I also love the plot in the story it is very neat!

Your book is a good book, it brought me closer to my dog. It also made me read more books on animals. Now I love to read.

The character in the book is very brave he also is friendly. He takes a lot of care for all his dogs. In the beginning he always wanted a dog just like me. I have always wanted a beagle.

The plot in this story is very exciting because you never know what is going to happen. It also is very sad because he loses all of his pets. I almost cried. Also in the story some kids made fun of him and he got very mad.

I really hope you make more books on animals. You make feel like I'm actually there. I read most of your stories with my dogs right before bed, I think they liked them. Do you thing you will ever get any more pets and write more books?

Sincerely,
Krista DiMaggio

Level II (8th - 12th Grade)

First Place

To J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings
From Claire Richmond
Philomath Middle School, Philomath
Becki Goslow, Teacher

Dear Mr. J. R. R. Tolkien

Even after having read The Lord of the Rings series almost continuously over the past three years I still don't feel qualified to trouble you with anything I could possible say. Please forgive me for doing so anyway.

It was your books that caused me to fall in love with fantasy, dragons, and all things

Elfin. Before reading your books, I was a boring child, who only read about boring children and their boring lives. Now, please observe, I am a boring child who reads interesting books. After I read The Hobbit, I found that I much preferred books with a plot, and your books fit the bill. As a want-to-be writer, all of my plots seem to be sadly lacking. I am very much in awe of your ability to start off with an interesting story, continue with an interesting story, and end with a clever twist. My stories leave readers confused, bored, or asleep. I do have one complaint about your endings; the fact that they exist at all. I wish you had written enough books so that I could keep reading and never reach the end of the story. On the other hand, maybe it's better that you didn't. I have to sleep sometimes, and I've developed a distressing tendency to forget about certain bedtime rules (such as going to sleep) when I am reading about more important things. How did you come up with such a wonderful world? I couldn't dream up something half as creative, if my life depended on it. You must have been a fascinating person. I imagine that you are like Bilbo: Good natured, peace loving, and only wanting solitude in which to write your book. In fact, sometimes I wonder if you weren't actually imaging Bilbo as yourself when you were writing your stories. There are some similarities you know. Bilbo wanted to write down all the adventures that he and Frodo had, and quite obviously, you *did* write them down.

Aside from the mere fact that I love everything about the plot, characters, setting, etc. of your books, I also like them for the fact that they have a moral. It's not so obvious that it's revolting, but if someone decides that they absolutely must have a moral, one can be found. Not only that, but you can find just the sort of moral that suits your beliefs. If, for some reason, someone wanted to make a study of this concept, the results would be hysterical. Every person I have talked to about this has had a different opinion, and on occasion, I find that I even disagree with myself. Every time I read them, I get a different idea of what you were trying to get across in your books. Then again, maybe you didn't write your books so that they could be discussed by masses of people. I certainly know how that feels, because I don't like being given a topic to write about. Being made to write a letter to an author, for example, would bother me. I much prefer to come up with my own ideas. Maybe that's the real moral of your story after all. To do things for yourself, and not worry about it. Or maybe I'm just a crazy Lord of the Rings fanatic, trying hard to derive meaning out of something meaningless. Then again, maybe *that* is the real moral of your story? I'm kidding, but it does make an interesting idea. Seriously, almost anything written in your books could be re-made to fit the classic standards of a moral. I think that's awesome.

I regret to say that there is only one thing that troubles me. It's very disappointing that you had to go and die, before I could have the chance to meet you. It was very selfish of you, and it's very unfortunate for me. It's upsetting that you didn't have the good sense to stay alive, especially considering that your main characters survived all the trials they had to face. Still, I forgive you, seeing as you are my absolutely favorite author in the whole wide world. If I could, I would praise you endlessly, but have to write this letter in fewer than 750 words. So instead of continuing, I will just say that I adore, love, esteem, respect, admire, revere, and totally worship all of your writing.

Very sincerely,
Claire Richmond

Runner Up

To Emily Dickinson, "The Soul's Storm"

From Tiffany McLay

Vale High School, Vale

Linda Fuller, Teacher

Dear Emily Dickinson,

In hard times I turn to poetry, and more often than not, it happens to be one of your pieces. Your work is inspiring and reviving. The words speak to a soul and give it comfort, hope, or a sense of realization. Whether one enjoys or dislikes one of your poems, they will still be moved in one way or another. Your work is magnificent and original, thus you've earned your due praise.

One of your poems I hold special to my heart. It has helped me through many trials and it's almost like it was written to reassure that bad things always pass. I am speaking of "The Soul's Storm," a poem that explains a torturous, trying time that seems to be unbearable and unending. The words can almost scar, leaving a blister on your heart. "It burned me in the night, it blistered my dream; it sickened fresh upon my sight with every morning beam" is a passage that leaves me with the thought that when a somewhat of a crisis happens, it haunts you and leaves you in pain. The thought of the unfortunate and painful event is with you every moment, even as you sleep. Will the torture ever cease and leave you be?

In the resolution it states, "But nature lost the date of this and left it in the sky" which assures me that this too shall pass; everything passes. Whether the trial was long and hard, or short and piercing, it shall be gone with time as the remedy.

There are times in my life that I think the trials are too much to bear and that people strike me down like lightning from the fierce sky as if I am nothing of importance in my simple existence. It's almost like I am being "beat up" mentally and spiritually, battered to almost death of my soul. This poem depicts such a feeling and expresses the excruciating anguish these times can cause.

Just as you think that these moments of heartache will never end, the resolution comes, just like in the poem. A sense of hope will hopefully be with any person who reads this piece, just like it gives me hope and reassurance. It is difficult to stay positive in a time of negativity and despair, but poems or this nature can open the mind and show the light. More writing such as this needs to be evident in the world to help those through the times that are of discomfort.

Thanking you is primarily what I am doing. Your work has helped me in times that seemed to have no end. When you wrote this, it was about yourself. Did you ever imagine that it would help another soul through a time of despair? Maybe that was your intent in publishing your works, but it might have just solely been based on the fact that you are extremely talented and that you could make a great living from them. All I can say is that I thank you for producing this poem. It has helped my life more than you will know!

Sincerely

Tiffany L. McLay

Honorable Mentions

To J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
From Kelly Kuppenbender
Mt. Angel Middle School, Mt. Angel
Mr. Keebler, Teacher

Dear JK Rowling,

I have read many books in my life, but none stand out as much as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. It really made an impact on my sense of reality and the way I live my life.

As I was growing up, I would always pretend that I had some sort of magical power. I would parade around the house in my witch hat and "wand", casting spells on my sister, my kitten, and little bugs I would find while outside playing in the yard. I pretended not to notice or care when nothing seemed to happen. I was convinced I was magical, No one could tell me anything different.

As the years passed, I finally outgrew the witch's hat and my wand had been broken too many times and was beyond repair. I was growing up, and it was time to start thinking about *real* things. I began to think magic was stupid and for the younger kids, and I had no business in believing any of it. I was ashamed that I had actually believed in magic and tried to practice it. I thought I had outgrown my love for magic and spells, until I read *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.

I had no idea or interest in what the book would be about. I had gotten it for my twelfth birthday and for months it had sat on the shelf, waiting to be opened and explored. Finally I decided to pick it up.

As I opened the first page, my eyes widened as I began to read. I was absorbed into the careful detail of each and every paragraph. I read hungrily on and on. My eyes could not move fast enough to keep my satisfaction alive. I devoured page after page, engrossed in Harry's cruel and exciting world.

I felt I knew Harry, I felt I was part of him. I knew the wizarding world front to back. Every detail was left behind in my memory. I could not stop reading.

I would feel reluctant when I had to close the book to sleep or eat, not wanting to stop or miss out on anything. I couldn't wait to get back into the book and the world inside. I would rush over to it and open it with excitement and anticipation.

As I began to read more, believing in magic was a part of me again. I hoped that somewhere, wizarding was going on, exactly or similar to the world of Harry Potter. I hoped that someday, somehow, I could be a part of it.

As I drew nearer and nearer to the end of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, not wanting it to end, dreading every page I turned as they started to run out. I did not want this one to end, yet I could not wait to read the next one.

I finished the book and completely loved it. I had a hollow feeling in my body, as Harry Potter was not a part of me anymore.

When I purchased the second book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, excitement rushed throughout my body as I began to open it.

I had some doubts. I didn't think any book could possibly match the greatness of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. But as I began to read, I slipped back into the familiar world, this time with new and exciting adventures and privileges.

I read on and on through the series, loving each book more and more, my eagerness ever increasing. Never had I experienced books so full of life and detail.

Your writing stands out and it has inspired me to become an author. I love to write, but I hope someday to write with the power you portray in your writing. I hope that some day to have millions of people read my work and praise over it. It must be such an overwhelming feeling to have. I want to experience that feeling.

Two years have passed since I first picked up *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, and I found my witch hat and magic wand again. I don't pretend to have powers or cast spells, but deep down inside I believe that somewhere in this world we live in, magic is real.

Your books have changed my life. They have given me new hope and helped bring out the mischievous child I once was. No longer will I have to be ashamed of my beliefs.

I don't wish or expect to receive any reply in return. What I wish and expect is for you to keep writing with your enthusiasm and cleverness, and to inspire many others like me to become an author. Thank you.

Sincerely
Kelly Ann Kuppenbender

To Toni Morrison, *Sula*
From Lauren Cusick
South Salem High School, Salem
Shauna Lee Hansen, Teacher

Dear Toni Morrison,

Before I read *Sula*, my views and ideas about the lives of black people after the termination of slavery were very sheltered and naive. The hardships of discrimination and survival in a hateful world seemed so distant and fantasy-like to me merely because those events occurred long before my lifetime. I never had any reason to believe that something that happened in the past could be so vividly brought back to life and make such an incredible impact upon someone; especially me. As I read a very difficult portion of America's history through the eyes of a small black community, I came to understand and feel touched by the difficulties and struggles that the black people fought against with an unrelenting vigor.

As I come to know *Sula* and the other characters, I obtain new opinions and levels of respect for each one. Every character in this story leads a difficult and trying life, all of them attempting to make a start after the war and the end of slavery. The one character who continually draws my attention is Nel, the lifelong friend of *Sula*. Nel is the laid back half of the *Sula* and Nel duo simply because she sails through life with an aura of tranquility that enables her to solve problems for both herself and *Sula*, calmly and rationally. In contrast to *Sula*, Nel has the ability to be compassionate to other people and to offer sympathy and support to those who are in need.. As I continue to learn more

about her, I discover the similarities between Nel and myself. Both Nel and I can be classified as "self-sacrificers"; people who put other people's need before their own. In the story, Sula causes Nel a great deal of stress and heartache when Sula sleeps with Jude, Nel's husband of ten years. Even though Nel is crushed by the cruel act against her by her husband and best friend, she still thinks only of Sula and how to maintain their friendship. It isn't until a little later that Nel is finally able to accept the fact that she is terribly wronged by the people she loves. I can relate to Nel here because there have been many situations where I have been utterly disregarded by my friends and have been hurt, yet for some unknown reason I always seem to choose to struggle to keep them with me. In one instance I caught my very closest friend dissembling one of my deepest and darkest secrets to an acquaintance for which I had a very strong dislike. Through my tears and anguish, I still found myself searching for ways to rekindle our friendship. It wasn't until I read about Nel's struggles with the people she loves and her ability to protect herself from them that I came to realize the social struggles in my own life.

Throughout Sula I learned many lessons from Nel that have helped greatly in my own life. I have learned that it's all right to walk away from a depressing situation that could cause me pain, and that I should be careful how I act with certain people; especially ones who never learned the values of the kindness, respect, and the ability to overcome adversity. This story has broadened my perspective of the history of black people in America after the end of slavery. Toni, your story of Sula and the people who lived in the Bottom has touched me greatly because I have learned how to try to resolve any social problems that I may encounter.

Sincerely,
Lauren Cusick

To Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*
From Meriwether Falk
Arts & Communication High School, Beaverton
Orestes Yambouranis, Teacher

Dear Edwidge Danticat:

A friend let me borrow "*Breath, Eyes, Memory*," thinking it would motivate me to finish my own first novel, which is also semi-autobio graphical. After looking it over and seeing that it was about a young Haitian girl, I let it sit on my bookshelf for a few weeks before picking it up again. I thought since you've lived half your life in Haiti and I've always lived in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon, it would be too difficult for me to grasp or relate to your life experiences as related in your novel. I thought there would be no connection between the lives of Sophie, your main character, and Teagan, my heroine.

Also, I confess, I held an irrational prejudice against young writers. I thought a novel written by a 25-year-old woman would have less to tell me than a novel written by a more mature writer.

The moment I started reading your novel, I was struck by your descriptive writing style. The pages are filled with life's little details that a lot of people take for granted and don't notice. "*Breath, Eyes, Memory*" honed my appreciation for each breath I take, the sights I see and memories that I cherish.

Sophie, was more like me than I had expected. I could relate to her at every stage of her life in some way or another. As a child it was her shy manner, her difficulty in expressing her emotional needs and the way she tried to please others by molding herself to fit their pictures of her. For instance, she desperately wanted to join the other children playing in a pile of leaves across the street, but she stoically remained at the side of her aunt, just so her aunt would think well of her.

I got to know Sophie's character so well I could always understand what she was going through. When she was twelve and was reunited with her mother after her move from Haiti to Brooklyn, I could understand her reluctance and fear of leaving her old life behind. In my own younger years, I sometimes had no choice in matters and could only hope the adults who controlled my life knew what they were doing, because I certainly didn't.

After learning about you and how closely linked your own life is to Sophie's, I have an even deeper respect for you as a writer. You're able to write from your heart and get what's inside of you down on paper. I know from experience that is a great accomplishment.

I think people are more alike on the inside, whatever our appearances, languages and cultural differences may be. It's when our similar qualities are brought to the surface that we feel more united with one another and part of the global community. Hopefully, someday after my first book comes out, a girl in another country, with a different culture, will read it and be able to relate to Teagan like I could to Sophie.

As for the fact that this was your first novel and you were only 25 when you wrote it, I have changed my mind about the contribution young writers can make to literature and to increased understanding among people. I can only hope that when I am 25, I will be as skilled a writer as you were then.

Sincerely,
Meriwether Falk

To Julia Butterfly Hill, *The Legacy of Luna*
From Anita Tipton
South Medford High School, Medford

Dear Ms. Julia Butterfly Hill,

Your book, *The Legacy of Luna*, was by far one of the most inspirational books that I have ever come across. It left a lasting impression on me, and helped give me more courage to speak out about what is being done to our environment. Your book was extremely emotional, and I admit at times I cried my eyes out about what people are doing to our forests. But it's a very wonderful thing to know that there are people like you out there who are committed to making a difference. When I first heard about you living in Luna, I was very impressed and interested. Then one afternoon, I heard you talking on JPR (Jefferson Public Radio) about your experiences and your book, and it left a lasting impression on me. I feel what you did was extremely strong, and if it hadn't been for sticking up for our beautiful trees, then where would we be in the struggle right now?

"The Legacy of Luna" made me realize that I too, can help make a positive difference in the struggle to help save our environment and world. And it has given me the courage to speak up about recycling, something that I feel very strongly about. I never really felt that strongly about recycling until about a year ago. For as long as I can remember, my family has always recycled everything we could. After my sister got a job working at ECOS, an environmental group at her university, she was home visiting one day, and made a bag for white paper to be recycled, since that's one thing that we didn't really recycle. When I threw a whole bundle of paper away, she got really mad at me, and dug it out of the trash and put it in the recycle bag. I couldn't understand why it mattered since we don't have that great of a market for recycled products anyway, and a lot of it gets thrown away, But my sister helped instill in me the knowledge that every little bit counts and adds up. And today, you can't really tell the difference between recycled paper and bleached paper, because the quality has become so much better. Then I discovered tree free paper, and it has helped fuel my passion about recycling and using alternatives. Kenaf is a plant that can be grown on land where nothing else will grow. It takes about a year to grow and be harvested, compared to 40 to 50 years for mature trees. It has the potential to be successful economically. So my mission is to try and convince schools and businesses to use tree free paper. Also, when I see people throwing away white paper, I stop them, and I recycle it for them. My friends give me paper to recycle all the time. For my senior project I want to start a school wide recycling program, because I truly believe it can and will make a difference. Your book helped me to stand up for nature's sake, because if you could make a difference through perseverance, maybe I can too. If we can completely eliminate the use of trees for paper, then we are on the way to slowing down the cutting of trees. Your book left a lasting effect on me, because it came from the heart of an amazing woman. I hope some day to be as strong an individual as you are, and to help make a difference in the world. Thank you friend, we stand like trees. I greatly appreciated you printing your book on recycled paper, it's one small step in the right direction.

Sincerely
Anita Tipton

To Yu Watase, Fushigi Yuugi
From Megan Garbayo
Stoller Middle School, Portland
Ms. Langdon, Teacher

Dear Yuu Watase,

I am writing this letter in response to your graphic novel, *Fushigi Yuugi*. This may sound corny, but after reading your work, I was inspired to make a career out of manga writing. While reading your chat space in every section, I rendered the idea that you didn't have to be perfect to be a good manga author, (I am not hinting at anything, you just seem a lot like me!) but a person who can dedicate themselves to the craft. I could see your growth as an artist from beginning to end.

It wasn't just your commentary that affected me but your highly developed characters that had profound impact on my personal and social life. One of these people was Nuriko. Although he was mainly used as a tool for comic relief, the cynical, jealous, homosexual cross-dresser with super strength had many layers. At first Nuriko was introduced as the prospective bride of Hotohori that hated Miaka. My first impression was, "She is a vicious, mean women." When Nuriko reveals that he/she was a man, I thought, "OK, maybe a vicious guy?" But although Nuriko is temperamental and very selfish, Nuriko cares a lot about his friends. When the plot revealed that he was a cross dresser because he had a twin sister that was killed and he wanted her to live on as him, I was touched. He gave up his identity for someone he loved, and that was deep. To see a character I thought I understood go and defy his own image was eye-opening. When he dies to save the others, I cried. I was actually moved to tears because of some pictures and words, and for someone like me who didn't even choke up watching Titanic. (I just thought it was morbid) It was incredible.

Another character that impacted my judgment was Yui. I really felt bad for her. All that suffering she went through was pretty heavy stuff. She dealt with real teen issues that I can say most comic books don't address. I sympathized with her but at the same time recognized that she brought a lot of it upon her self. She treated her former best friend like dirt, understandably, but it wasn't Miaka's fault the bad things that happened to her happened. She was pretty ruthless, even though she was mostly Nakago's puppet. She had to work really hard to hate Miaka like that. But even under the jealousy and pain, Yui was a truly good person. She showed compassion to Suboshi, and that proved to me she wasn't all-bad.

That changed my judgment toward people a lot. Yui's experience's shaped her character, in this case, in a negative way. But even so, it was her actions that shaped her image. Her image that I thought she gave off was that of someone who felt betrayed and wanted to avenge her pride. But I had to delve into her to retrieve a conclusion like that. The same goes for everyone I guess. You need to investigate one's personality before you deem them mean or cruel.

The person I could relate to the most had to be Miaka. The goofy, ditzzy, chipper and gluttonous heroine of the story was a lot like me. Even my friends noticed the scary resemblance, Miaka is innocent and naive, but is thrown out off her saddle when she finds her self in the Universe of the Four Gods. Warfare, hatred, love, death, life, pain, truth, lies, struggle, sacrifice, revenge, envy, corruption, sorrow. The imperfect heroine fought and conquered them all.

I once heard a saying that went something like, "Can an moral man maintain his moral code in an immoral world?" Miaka proved to me that if you stay positive, devoted, caring, loyal, honest and true to yourself, you have what it takes to fight for your beliefs and come out triumphant. Her struggles to live, to accomplish her duties, and to win back Yui's friendship were inspiring.

Thank you Ms. Watase because your novel taught me a lot. It taught me to persevere, stay cool-headed, and give it my all when I hit rock bottom. It gave me a fresh perspective on life, and how fragile it truly is. But most of all, Miaka's experiences taught me to love myself and others, because no person is without flaws, and sometimes it is how a person deals with such flaws that makes them beautiful.

Keep writing,
Megan Gargayo