

2003 Letters About Literature Winners

Level I: (4th-6th Grade)

First Place To Lemony Snicket, A Series of Unfortunate Events

From Michael Moyer

Pringle Elementary School, Salem

November 22, 2002

Dear Mr. Snicket:

Thank you for writing A Series of Unfortunate Events. They are really great books and changed my life. Here is my story.

I really didn't enjoy reading much until one day my best friend Travis Koon, came over. Travis always brings a fiction book with him when he comes to my house. This time he brought The Wide Window, from the Series of Unfortunate Events. He showed the book to me and told me to read the back cover of the book. So I did. When I got to the phrase that read, "You have made a terrible mistake, Please put the book down." It was a hook, and I took the bait.

I started reading the book, and became excited. It was the adventure that kept me going. This was the best book I had ever read, and I couldn't stop reading it. Usually when I read a book the beginning isn't that great, you have to wait until you get in the middle. But your books are different, the beginning was excellent, and I just wanted to keep reading.

My mom was very happy to see me thrilled about reading. As a reward she went to Borders to buy me the next three books in the series.

Now that I love reading, it makes learning easier. My vocabulary is better, my writing and speaking is getting better, too. My mother says the more I read the better my comprehension will be.

I really relate to the character Klaus. He loves reading, and now because of your books, so do I.

Yours truly,
Michael Moyer

Runner Up To Barbara Park, Junie B. Jones

From: Kelcie E. Whiting

Sunnyslope Intermediate School, Roseburg

November 15, 2002

Dear Barbara Park,

When I start reading your Junie B. Jones books, I just can't stop. When I go to the

library, I check out one of your books and another book. I love how you make your characters; they are so tough, exciting, bold, enthusiastic, and realistic.

Before I started reading your books, which was about third grade, I was super shy and I wanted to be last on everything. Junie B. Jones books helped me to be less shy. I started to realize that it doesn't matter what people think of you; it is what is on the inside that counts. I started always wanting to go first instead of last; it is a great idea. Like when the teacher calls on me, I am not so nervous anymore. Also, Junie B changed me by telling me that if people make fun of you because you don't get your work done, you can stand up for yourself and say, "well, at least I get it done afterwards".

I also want to tell you that I'm in the fifth grade and only 4'3". When I was in first through fourth grade, I wouldn't play any sports because I thought I was too short, but I learned from your books that it isn't your height, it is how you play. This year I have played two sports in 3-months. If anyone I know is really shy, I will tell them to read Junie B. Jones books by Barbara Park. So I guess I just want to say, "thank you" to you and Junie B. Jones.

Sincerely,
Kelcie E. Whiting

Honorable Mention To Ben Mikaelsen, Petey

From: Aubree Castleman
Gilbert Park Elementary School, Portland
Dian Schaffran, Teacher

November 26, 2002

Dear Mr. Ben Mikaelsen,

Before reading Petey, whenever I saw a disabled person, I used to judge them. I admit I was a jerk. I used to think that just because they didn't look like me, that they were mindless zombies that just stared off into never-never land all day. When my teacher said that we were going to be reading about a man with cerebral palsy, I thought to myself, "Oh great, another book about a crippled guy, another good book wasted!" But I was way off. I learned that day, "Never judge a book by its cover."

The second chapter hooked me on every word. Then it made me think, "Disabled people are really stronger than regular people." Then I realized with all my heart how lucky I am. I am healthy, and I don't have to worry about other people judging me.

By the middle of the book I started to appreciate life more. Every single blade of grass, the sunlight on my face, and every raindrop from the dull clouds above was now a special gift. Sometimes it was like I could feel Petey's loves and loses. All of the pain Petey had to go through. I started to appreciate disabled people a lot more, especially Petey. I feel like an idiot the way I felt about the book and disabled people.

At the end of the book, I felt a lump in my throat and a shiver down my spine. No other book had made me feel that way before. It made me think things that I thought weren't possible, a reality. It also made me feel things that I never felt before with all my

heart.

Petey changed my life forever.

With all my hopes and dreams,
Aubree Castleman

Honorable Mention To Ron Jones, The Acorn People

From: Carson Hockley
Whitford Middle School, Beaverton
Sally Greer, Teacher

October 25, 2002

Dear Ron Jones,

For the first many years of my life I had never seen a person with a physical disability except for in the movies. And then when I was 5 or 6, I started Kindergarten at Ainsworth Elementary. There was a 3rd grader there that had no eye site. I felt uncomfortable talking to him or even being in the same room as him. My short years at Ainsworth passed and I never spoke to him once. Then one day when I got home from school my younger brother Ford started to ramble on and about a new girl in his grade. He told me every detail from what she looked like to where she was originally from. Surprisingly he left out one detail, the girl had no legs.

I guess what I am trying to say is you showed me something. You showed me something that my brother had figured out a long time ago. I, on the other hand, needed to use your book as a key. This key would unlock the truth, the truth that handicapped people are normal just like you and me.

After I finished reading about the miraculous adventures of The Acorn People I thought long and hard about the characters. I realized that a lot of them were some of the bravest people. Some of them had to go from surgery to surgery. Most of them had to put up with life in a wheelchair. Some have to stare dying right in the face. They are not afraid of death, they are afraid of the un-lived life.

Thank you for writing this book.

Sincerely,
Carson Hockley

Honorable Mention To Elizabeth Yates, Amos Fortune: Free Man

From Michele Sinclair
North Middle School, Grants Pass
Michael Lonergan, Teacher

Dear Elizabeth,

I clearly remember the cocoa and cozy chair on the cold winter day I picked up Amos Fortune: Free Man. It was worth the weight of gold, but light enough to let me open my new grown wings and fly up into the clouds.

When Amos soared, I soared. When he climbed Mt. Monadnock in search of a sign from God, I was there by his side. My hand was in his and my heart opened to let Amos's dreams come in.

When Amos was trying to survive in his time of hardship, people were not people. Slave traders caused him unspeakable difficulties. Why would anyone have the right to give Amos hardships, when all he was trying to do was help everyone else? He based his whole life on helping others. Amos and I pondered over this.

Together we held our heads up proudly, and standing on the hold of that slave ship, we faced the sunset, letting our shadows fall behind. When I felt like giving up, I would start into my prince's eyes and feel myself growing my wings. His eyes were forgiving and passionate, but most of all, I say his unwavering desire to be free. Amos's determination was the key to the unfolding of my wings. Amos taught me to fly, and showed my that one's wings can not grow to their fullest without a little suffering. Because of him, I will never stop searching for my dreams.

Honorable Mention To Natalie Babbitt, Tuck Everlasting
From Brianna Neufeldt
Myers Elementary School, Salem
Mrs. Lamfers, Teacher

Dear Natalie Babbitt,

I will think about our lives more than ever now that I have read Tuck Ever Lasting. Each of our lives are so important in every way. Sadly, we will all pass away sometime. The Tucks never did. Imagine being in this world forever. I always thought that people should never die ever, ever. My mind has changed. Imagine everyone you know and love gone and never coming back, while you live forever.

It gave me wings because now I know that there is a reason for death, it is not just a punishment. It's the wheel in life and it keeps on going, it never stops. For the Tucks, they were in the wheel no longer. They just continued with life forever and ever. I felt so sad when one of the Tucks had to go to the gallows. If she had been hanged then others would have known about their secret because she wouldn't have died. I knew Winnie would save her, and of course she did. Now I know how awful it would be to live forever and to have everyone go and leave you behind. Thank you for showing me that dying is just part of living.

Sincerely,
Brianna Neufeldt

Level II: (7th and 8th Grades)

First Place

To Professor J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings
Maire Murphy
Leslie Middle School, Salem

December, 2002

Professor J.R.R. Tolkien
20 Northmoor Rd.
Oxford, England
United Kingdom

Dear Professor Tolkien

For the fourth time since I was in fifth grade, I have turned the last dog-eared page of your trilogy The Lord of the Rings with a sense of melancholy at the prospect of leaving the characters you have created, all of whom have become like family to me; but in the vast panorama of your imaginary Middle-Earth, the character that touches my heart in a way that no other fictional character has is the lovable hobbit Sam Gamgee.

Why? Almost the definition of a hobbit, Sam's greatest pleasures are to feel fresh-tilled earth under his furry hobbit feet and to lead a sensible, practical life. In spite of his simplicity, however, in the course of the book, it is Sam's bravery and loyalty to the heavily-burdened and often despairing Ringbearer, Frodo, that ultimately makes the difference in the Fellowship's quest to destroy the evil Ring.

One of my favorite scenes is when Frodo is captured by Orcs and locked up in one of the Dark Lord Sauron's towers. Seeking him apparently in vain and near to despair himself, Sam finds renewed strength in a simple song learned back in the Shire:

In western lands beneath the Sun
The flowers may rise in Spring
The trees may bus, the waters run,
the merry finches sing.
Or there maybe 'tis cloudless night
and swaying beeches bear
the Eleven-stars as jewels white
amid their branching hair.
Through here at journey's end I lie
in darkness buried deep,
beyond all towers strong and high,
beyond all mountains steep
above all shadows rides the Sun
and Stars for ever dwell:
I will not say the Day is done,
Nor bid the Starts farewell.

You wrote in one of your letters, Professor Tolkien, that it was the ordinary and humble but courageous and devoted foot soldiers that you knew in World War I who inspired you to create the character of Sam Gamgee. They, like Sam, knew what they had to do and did it without fuss or complaint, even though they also knew they might have to spend their last drop of blood in the process. More than great deeds of battle, I see that as the pinnacle of heroism. In turn, I am inspired to imitate Sam in his conviction that even the smallest jobs we have to do in life may prove important. For me, a thirteen-year-old, doing chores and homework may be all I am meant to do for now "the path", in your

words, I am to follow for the time being; but, reading and re-reading The Lord of the Rings has given me the resolve to follow that path to the end; to do what needs to be done day-to-day in the hope that I may yet make a difference in my own Middle Earth. For that, Professor Tolkien, I owe you a great debt.

Maire Murphy

Runner Up To S. E. Hinton, The Outsiders

Elizabeth Aldrich

Mt. View Middle School, Beaverton

Mrs. Leon, Teacher

Dear Ms. Hinton,

I became Ponyboy every time I picked up The Outsiders. I read everything as if it was happening right in front of me. I felt like I had moved deeply into the main character. Past all of his layers, I saw into the *real* Ponyboy. The other characters however, were ones I thought I knew, only to find out they were hiding something.

Something I realized while reading this book, is that people everywhere are wearing "masks". They use them to cover up who they really are. It taught me how to look deeper, or take off their masks and see them for who they are. Dally is tough, but later takes off his mask when Johnny dies. When Johnny died, Dally died inside. That taught me that shouldn't take people for granted, because you never know when they might leave you. Also using a mask, was Darry. Ponyboy always thought Darry didn't care about him, but figured out he did. That taught me that my family always loves me, not matter how mad they get. They're just doing their job.

Realizing that people wear masks also showed me that you shouldn't judge people. Everyone judged the Greasers, thinking they were hoodlums, therefore making things unfair. The Greasers also judged the Socs. They figured the Socs had everything, but didn't realize what they were missing. The Greasers had real, genuine friends, and therefore didn't think that the Socs might not have them.

This book showed me that everyone has problems, and the only way to really know, is if they tell you. You can't get inside someone's head. You only know what you see and hear. The Greasers didn't speak to the Socs, and only saw guys with good girlfriends, nice cars, and stable families. Until someone told them otherwise, they figured the Socs had it all. No one is perfect, and that's ok.

Reading this book helped me understand that violence is never the answer. The more violence in the book, the worse thing got. Everything could have been avoided had they solved their problems in a less violent way.

To me, this book was very controversial because I had two opposite emotions at the same. When I was sad, I was happy. When I was anxious to read, I didn't want to know the truth. When everything was solved, nothing was solved. I saw this book from many different angles. That is how it helped me to be more empathetic to other people's point of view.

If I had not read this book, there would have been so many lessons I would not have learned. It moved and changed me in such a unique way that no other book has done. I

got to know myself and what I feel strongly about. This book is truly amazing. It, along with lessons it taught me, will never leave my memory.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Aldrich

Honorable Mention To Mark Crilley, Akiko on the Planet Smoo
From Jillian Toda
The Dalles Middle School, The Dalles
Mrs. Woolsey, Teacher

Dear Mr. Mark Crilley,

A few years ago, I stumbled upon a book titled Akiko on the Planet Smoo. I was in fourth grade at the time and noticing the title of this book, I knew I had to buy it. Like Akiko, I am also Japanese-American. Coincidentally, my sister and I both have Japanese middle names and hers is Akiko. After I purchased and read the adventurous story of Akiko, I fell in love with the book and knew I had to buy more in the series. I felt that I could really relate to Akiko in many aspects, almost as if there was a connection between us. Akiko is a nice girl who likes to spend a lot of her time in her bedroom and is kind of quiet at school. I am like that as well.

Akiko was in her room, one day talking to her friend Melissa about how she didn't want to be in charge of the safety patrol, she just wanted someone else to be the boss and make the important decisions. Akiko reminds Melissa about how their school Christmas program was a disaster because Akiko had gotten terrible stage fright and forgot her lines. I can definitely relate to that because I get horrible stage fright as well. I enjoyed reading about Akiko and her adventures mainly because of how alike Akiko and I are and knowing that she's just a kid, like me.

While reading Akiko on the Planet Smoo, I noticed how Akiko slowly changed. She became more outgoing and probably thought being the leader of the safety patrol wasn't that bad after all the terrors and adventures she went through trying to save Prince Froptoppit from Alia Rellapor. My mother told me when I was little to "expand my horizons." My parents wanted me to be more outgoing and adventurous, so sometimes they would enroll me in sports, even if I didn't want to. In the end, I liked all of the activities that I did and even tried some different ones.

After finishing the first story in the series about Akiko, I felt that it did change me in the ways I think and feel. I don't think I could ever go on a big action-packed mission like Akiko did, but the story helped me believe that I can do anything I set my mind to as long as I have faith in myself. I set my standards and goals higher after reading Akiko because I know if I try it once, it won't seem so scary the next time around. This book was one of the first stories I read that made me think about all of the amazing places our imagination can take us. I always take time to appreciate the world around me now. Just in case strange men appear at my window in a floating convertible car someday.

Sincerely,
Jillian Toda

Honorable Mention To Mr. Juster, The Phantom Tollboth
From Kelsey Ockert
Cumberland Academy, Lake Oswego

Dear Mr. Juster,

There once was a plain child who lived in a bluish-grayish house. Now that spontaneous child lives in a powder blue house with a cherry tree in the front. What happened? I am that child, and ever since I read your book, my point of view has changed. I used to struggle with writing, but now I've learned think outside the box. Whenever I am assigned to write a story, I usually twist around the elements of the assignment and unleash my creative side. This is all something I thank The Phantom Tollbooth for.

I used to cringe when I was asked to read stories or reports aloud, because I knew that my presentations were so painfully boring. Now I volunteer to read work aloud because I've put thought into what I've done and I'm happy to share it.

One thing I really enjoyed in The Phantom Tollbooth was how the ideas were bombarded at the reader. Whenever I write a card, I try to put thought into my work. Instead of taking a simple approach and drawing a card with a cake on the front and writing happy birthday inside, I'll draw something like a box of Frosted Flakes on the front and write inside "Birthdays? They're grrrrrrreat." Thank you for waking up the creative side of my mind.

Isn't it wonderful to play with words? My favorite character in The Phantom Tollbooth is the Word Snatcher. After reading your book, I got into poetry writing. By now, I've written numerous poems of nonsense and word play. Poetry writing is very relaxing and comes in handy if I'm going thorough lots of stress.

The last, but most important thing I learned from The Phantom Tollbooth was to be positive. If I were Milo and knew that his journey was impossible, I probably wouldn't have gone. When Milo was in a tough situation he used logic to get out of it. Now I've learned that instead of moping and not finishing what needs to be done, I need to think positive.

Thank you for transferring me from the bluish-grayish house, to the powder blue house with a cherry tree in the front.

Yours truly,
Kelsey Ockert

Level III: (9th to 12th Grades)

First Place To Steven King, The Running Man
From Jeff Hunt
Hermiston High School, Hermiston

Dear Steven King

I don't think I really understood how much control the media has over my life until I read The Running Man. Your book scared me, and if I said that to most people they wouldn't see the significance in that statement. Your famous name means terror and you are known for creating horror novels, but what most people wouldn't understand is that The Running Man isn't scary in the same way your other books are. The idea that an everyday guy like Ben Richards, who was doing everything for the right reasons, could be made to look like a public enemy and a monster to society seemed very wrong to me. What made that frightening was it seemed like it could happen very easily today.

I always knew the media had a reputation for distorting and skewing the truth, but that fact never set in until I read your book. I always figured everything I heard reported was generally true. In the back of my mind I thought some things I heard could be wrong, but I usually assumed stretching the truth only happened in supermarket tabloids. Then I read your book. What I read didn't give me any direct proof of distortions or manipulations. It didn't say things like "what you heard in the news yesterday was biased" or "what you read in today's morning paper was wrong." Your book didn't show me anything that was incorrect or wrong, but I think it taught me something better. If you pointed out one thing that wasn't true, it would have been just one example and my naivete would have continued. The Running Man taught me that you only find second opinions and second points of view if you look for them; they don't come to you. Amelia Williams would have continued her life knowing Ben Richards was a criminal if she hadn't met him. I never really understood the saying ignorance is bliss until I read what you wrote.

I realized that whenever the news says a suspect of a crime is going to court, I always assume they are guilty. I have heard people say things like "I hope they convict that killer/robber/rapist," and I have said the same thing too, although in America everyone is innocent until proven guilty. It seems in a way my opinions are almost preformed by other people, just by the way news is reported. I also realized most of my opinions about celebrities are based on what I have heard, not what I know. I don't want be like Amelia and judge others unjustly, and since I read about Ben Richards, I have tried to become more objective.

When I read your book, I wondered many times if you realized how similar the game shows you created are to the reality TV shows that are so numerous today. Although no one dies playing Fear Factor or Dog Eat Dog like they did in Treadmill to Bucks or Swim the Crocodiles, their differences seem to be getting less numerous, along with their audience's reactions. When the show Survivor first aired, I watched it and immediately formed opinions about different contestants. The Network made innocent Ben Richards appear ruthless, bloodthirsty, and mean. It was awful, and I realized reality TV networks can do the exact same thing. They can portray anyone on their show in any light that they want. They show an hour of film, not counting commercials, of what happens to all their contestants over many days. Just by showing the bit of footage from a couple situations that make a person look nice or mean, that person is labeled by society as a backstabber, angel or many other things.

The Running Man taught me a great deal. I hope it has made me less judgmental and more objective to things I hear. It caught my attention and I hardly put it down after I picked it up, not only because it was entertaining, but also I felt I was learning at the

same time I read it. I definitely don't think everything I hear is a lie, and I don't consider myself paranoid, but after reading your book and just paying more attention, I have noticed many news reports that are extremely one-sided. Although your book left me feeling empowered, it also left me with questioning how many times in the past I have believed lies, and if I will ever find out they are not fact.

Thank you very much,
Jeff Hunt

Runner Up To Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, and Kimberly Kirberger, Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul
From Stephanie Loving
Riverside High School, Boardman
Kathy Simonis, Teacher

Dear Authors of Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul,
Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, and Kimberly Kirberger

My name is Stephanie Loving. If you were with the Juvenile Justice System in Lincoln County Nebraska you would know my name. In about 7th or 8th grade, I started to mouth off to my mother. As little of a sin as this may seem to be, it got me into a lot of trouble in many different ways. As time progressed I got worse; I no longer cared what my mother thought or even felt. Her feelings really didn't matter to me, and I didn't realize that I was hurting her mentally and emotionally. As a teen, I had to have my "freedom" and force my mom to release her grip. Or so I thought.

Most would say that you get more and more mature as you age, but in some cases, this isn't true. In my case, I did not mature; I only became more and more rebellious. I thought that was the process of maturing. In reality, this is not normal, not at the stage that I was at; I was far too untrustworthy at the tender age of 14. I couldn't be trusted for any reason; I would constantly lie to my mother and call her names that most people wouldn't even call their dogs. At some point, my mother had had enough. I could not and would not see that I had pushed her over what most would call the limit. She was trying to put me on the right path and the only way she thought to do so was to buy me inspirational books such as Chicken Soup for the Soul and Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul. And to some people's disbelief, I read them. Reading them didn't mean that I took them to heart. In fact, I thought my mother was an idiot for trying to show me what I called "tragedy stories", that I thought probably happened to less than 1% of teenagers.

Without realizing I was ruining my teenage life. I continued with my acts of outrage. I partied and lied my way through the next couple of years. Then one evening my mom and I got into an argument about, what else, a boy. That night, I refused to tell my mom that she was right and I knew in my heart that she was, but I had to have my way. In my eyes, being right was the only way I could mature. Needless to say, I lost. I lost this one, big time, and the next afternoon I found myself in a juvenile holdover.

I was in the holdover for 11 days, and to most this wouldn't seem like a long time, but when you don't know what is going to happen to you next, 11 days is a very long wait. In the holdover they had Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul books and I chose to read them

again. In 11 days of nothing, but thought, there is a lot of time to read. This time I came across a story that particularly caught my interest. I was a story of my life. It described the same influences that had pressured me and how that person had dealt with them the same ways that I had. This story is called Unconditional Mom. I remember sitting on the floor in my make-do room, which was really like an uncomfortable cell with a window, and reading for hours on end and finally discovering the perfect story to fit my situation. I sat on the floor bawling for at least 10 minutes thinking about the way that I had treated my mom, and how much I wished that I could just be sitting at home with her arms around me, telling me that I would be alright, while running her fingers through my hair. I thought of the many times that I used the "bulldozer behavior tactics" and even started to call the holdover my "resort". I came to my final decision that I had to do something to change my demanding ways. Manipulating and lying were no longer going to help me weasel my way through everything.

I was only 15 and at the time, I thought I had everything under control. I even had the "getting-an-attitude-because-I'm-15" behavior. Then, life was thrown at me in a harsh way, forcing me to realize I had to change my attitude. I shared this with the other "members" in the holdover; some laughed, but others knew what I was talking about. When my time was up in there, I went home and pulled out all the Chicken Soup books. I read the story to my mom, and told her I had decided to change the way I worked things. Instead of getting my way, I would do what was right, not what people influenced me to think was right. She smiled at me and I knew that it would take some time. I had to build her trust, and I was willing to do whatever it took to do so. After a long talk, mom told me that everything was going to be just fine and ran her fingers through my hair. That was the first time I realized that I was starting to mature, and I wasn't scared anymore. After a few years of being what I thought was a typical teen, I had come to my senses and realized I had nothing to fear.

That was a year ago and to this day, I know that everything worked out for the best. Then, it was all a mess; now I do have everything under control. I may be only 16, but I am more mature than a lot of 21 year olds. I realized early on that life wasn't going to be easy, and I am just going to have to deal with that. But, for now, I am going to be thankful for what I have and know that my mom is here for me. We have a close relationship now and I wouldn't trade that for the world. I thank her for not "releasing her grip" and for being an Unconditional Mom. I think that your books made all the difference and made me truly see the light. Thanks to you and all the people who write the wonderful stories for your books. I hope that you plan to keep the stories coming so more and more teens can relate the stories to their own experiences the same way that I have.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Loving

Honorable Mention To Margaret Wise Brown, Good Night Moon
From Rachel Esser
South Medford High School, Medford
Mary Boyarsky, Teacher

Dear Ms. Margaret Wise Brown,

For most of the years of my childhood, I fell asleep to the familiar sound of my mom's voice reading me asleep to Good Night Moon. I can still recall searching on every page for the little mouse, which darted about on the pages. (To this day, I could never find it on the last page, was there even one?)

I always requested to be read this book before I went to sleep because it had a stillness and serenity about it; the way the words were said, and maybe even how my mom read it. And after having it read to me many times, I actually got to the point where I could say it along with my mom, (long before I could actually read it). And when we were camping or away from the house, I would lie in bed and repeat the book to myself, and look up into the stars, and finally recite the words, "goodnight noises everywhere", and I could bet you anything, I was out like a light before I even finished the "where".

Since then, I had not re-read the book, but I have picked it while going through various yard-sale items, and something in me could not let it be put in the pile selling the next day. So, along with my other favorite childhood books, including Runaway Bunny, I packed it up in a dusty blue patterned box in the far corner of my closet.

It was up there sitting in that box for about 3 or 4 years, and just a couple of weeks ago, something inspired me to take it down, and go through those memories from long ago. I found lots of my old stuff, including Good Night Moon. I took a seat in my bean bag chair, and was bombarded by a rush of memories. Sitting there in that brown bag and looking at the colorful pictures threw me into a world I knew quiet well, and before long, I found myself flipping rapidly through the pages searching desperately for the mouse on every page.

But since those days, my life has taken me somewhere different, and even though I can read now, and I'm not so dedicated to finding the mouse on each sheet, I still look back and bear in mind the impact the book had on my life.

And aside for the frantic search of the "mouse", cows jumping over moons, brushed, and bowls of mush(es) don't excite me that much anymore, but certain things in this book have helped me through my life, even symbolized events that have happened to me. For example, the story talks of a "quiet old lady who was whispering "hush". When I was younger, I pictured this lady as a caring mom, aunt, or even my grandma, who was still alive back then. Recently, she did pass away, and I relate this to later in the story, when it reads "and goodnight to the old lady whispering hush". The author could be saying goodnight, and goodbye, to something that she holds dear in her heart, and whatever the reader holds dear in their hearts. And when you do find, as I did, that your special someone has said a permanent "goodnight", that they will not be gone forever, and they will return to say goodnight to you every night.

Thinking on the subject, once again, of the mouse, I can relate how closely our minds word at the age of 3 or 4, and the older ages. We are always searching for something, and so far, I don't believe I have found my "mouse". I don't even know quiet what my "mouse" is yet, but I'm sure that when I do find it, I will be ready and rearing to go turn the next page of my life and find my next one.

So, again, thank you for teaching me to never give up on my dreams, and the importance of my loved ones in my life. I will never forget how you said this through your simple children's book that has been with me through all my ups and downs in my

life. Thank you!

Sincerely,
Rachel Esser

Honorable Mention To Alice Walker, The Color Purple
From Alexis T Walker
Pacific High School, Port Orford
Mrs. Pritchard, Teacher

Dear Ms. Walker:

Courage.

That one word means so much. The Color Purple is full of courageous women. My English teacher, Mrs. Pritchard, gave it to me for the first assignment in her class. I had talked to her about lots of things and she was well aware of some of my past; but she gave it to me nonetheless. She told me I'd understand once I read it. That night I brought the book home and read the first few pages. It made me cry and then I got angry. Why would she give me such a book when she knew what my father had done? I'm a stubborn person though, so I was determined to read the book. It helped change my life.

The Color Purple shook me considerably because I WAS Celie. I was only four when my father started to sexually, mentally, and physically abuse me. Just like Celie, I didn't understand why. My real mother was gone, not dead, but close enough to be. I now had a step-mother and two older step-sisters. He left me alone for a while; the calm before the storm you could say. When I was six, my little sister was born. My older sisters moved in with their real father when I was nine. Things got much worse. Alcohol reentered the picture. Again, I lived with violence and abuse. But it was also different. Now I had a younger sister who was the only family I had left. She had a way of frustrating him. He would get mad and come at her with things like belts, I knew that I was physically no match so I would break things to divert his attention. This is how I lived until I was 14. Protecting my little sister, as much as I could, from hell, by sacrificing myself.

I received my first glimpse of my own personal courage in April of 2000 when I spoke up and eventually put my father in jail. I had finally put a stop to all of the punishment, or so I thought. Now what was I supposed to do? I felt like I lost myself. There was no need to protect my sister anymore, but I still tried. There was no need to layer myself in clothes, at night, and cocoon myself in my blankets, but I did. The life I had lived for so long was gone, and I didn't have one to replace it. The next couple of years were a mess. I was trying to build a whole new life, but I had nothing to use as an example. I was always depressed. I felt guilty and ashamed. Why did it happen to me? What did I do wrong? That is what kept going through my head. School and relationships were always hard for me, but I had a couple of good friends that were there for me, even though they didn't know everything. I was afraid of everything that was good, I wasn't used to it. I thought that there being nice was pity and I didn't want it, so I kept pushing people away and they kept coming back.

One person in particular comes to mind. My own personal Shug Avery. She showed

me how to live without fear. She also showed me what unconditional love was. Love with no strings attached. This is a second example of finding my own personal courage. I didn't trust anyone before, but I trusted her. When she said things, I believed them. In the school I attend, there was no such thing as a single sex relationship before her and I. As a result, some people told me that the only reason I was involved with her was because I was rebelling. I told them that they were just trying to find an explanation for something they couldn't explain. I don't care what society says, she made me feel like a human being. That feeling gave me enough courage to face whatever they could throw at me.

Last year something happened that I didn't even notice at first. I stopped feeling ashamed of what happened and got angry. Many things helped in getting me out of my depression. My anger will keep that depression away.

By reading The Color Purple, I learned that I'm not alone in my battle. I learned not to be ashamed of what happened, just get mad and get over it. I have A's in classes I was once failing. I'm going to graduate, when I'm supposed to, and even have my future planned out. I don't know if I will ever have a normal relationship with a member of the opposite sex, but I'm not afraid to have a relationship with someone of the same sex. All these things are partially because of The Color Purple. I thank you for everything you have done for me.

Sincerely yours,
Alexis T. Walker