

2005 Letters About Literature Winners

Level I (4th-6th grade)

First Place to David Pelzer, The Child Called It
From Latricia Hampton
Oaklea Middle School, Junction City

Dear Mr. David Pelzer,

One year ago, I read your book, The Child Called It. I am an eleven year old foster child living in Junction City, Oregon. I remember the day my foster mom, Cheryl, gave me your book. She told me that she wanted me to take a look at this book because I was always complaining how hopeless and grim I thought my life was.

When I moved to my foster home on August 10, 2001, I thought my life was going to continue being sad and unpredictable. When I lived with my biological parents, I didn't know whether I'd have to call the paramedics for my abused mom OR whether I'd have to save myself from my abusive step-dad. My step-dad would slap me across the face, and I'd go flying across the room. I was living in fear of him. Everyday I would have a new bruise or scratch on me. Sometimes my teachers would get suspicious and start asking questions, but I always covered up what was happening to me at home; I didn't want to be taken away because I was scared that he would come after me. My step-dad told me that I was worthless and stupid and that I would never amount to anything. He said that I'd end up just like my mother. I believed him after awhile.

Even though I moved to a new home, at first, I still felt like I was out of place with my foster family. I continued to feel totally alone in the world. My foster mom gave me The Child Called It to read after I had moved in. I had no idea what the book was going to be about. I predicted that it was just going to be about a little boy who was bullied at school and called "IT." As I got into your book, I soon realized that this book was going to be a book that would change my life. As I was about half way through your book, especially the part about your mom treating you like a speck of dirt, I realized that I was lucky to have Cheryl and John (my foster parents) in my life. My perspective on life was changing as I read your words. Suddenly, I realized that I now had more love and support than other children and that I needed to treasure what I currently had and not focus on the painful times of my past. I felt like each sentence of yours was searing into my heart and triggering something inside of me that I had never felt. It's hard to explain what I was feeling when I read certain passages of your story. I felt like the images you were creating for me paralyzed me for a nanosecond; it shocked me that someone could survive the abuse you described. Towards the end of your book, I felt like the hopelessness and distress I was feeling was falling away.

Slowly, as the hopelessness and distress went away, I had more room to open up and listen to my foster parents. They told me the truth about my biological family. I had been lied to all my life, even my biological mom, whom I trusted and protected, had been deceiving me.

After I read your book, I knew that none of the abuse was my fault. You showed me that I had a voice that I never knew I had. It was the voice of my thoughts. Your story continues to help me today when I feel irritated and a bit down on myself. I know that people can be what they want to be and achieve what they want to if they are determined. Mr. Pelzer, you have inspired me to try my best to be what I want to be. I am going to have the best life I can. You have truly helped me with my perspective on life. For this, I thank you!

Love,
Latricia Hampton

Runner Up to Vera and Bill Cleaver, Where The Lilies Bloom
From Ashley Burns
Lourdes Public Charter School, Scio

Dear Vera and Bill Cleaver.

Although I can't imagine what it would be like without a family or having to care for yourself and your family on your own, your book *Where The Lilies Bloom* helped me more clearly understand that desperate situation and helped me better understand what my brother and sister went through early in their lives.

You see, my brother and little sister are adopted, and for many years, they had to survive on their own because their parents did not take care of them. Just like Mary Call, my then seven-year-old brother would get himself up at 6:00 am in the morning and fix my little sister and himself breakfast, if there was something to eat. If not, they made do. And just like Mary, he would make sure they were dressed and the chores were done before he went off to school. Like the Call family, they had no money, no help and no place else to go. But no matter how hard it was, keeping him family together was the most important thing in the world to my brother – just as it was to Mary.

Through the book, Mary showed me great determination, strength, caring, and most of all, love. I see those same qualities in my brother and both he and my sister have taught me what true courage is.

Thank you so much for such a wonderful story with such a strong character as Mary Call, whose struggle to keep her family alive and together were real in the book as they were for my brother and sister.

Sincerely,
Ashley Burns

Honorable Mention to Brian Jacques, Redwall
From Bobby Ohman
Cedar Mill School, Portland

Dear Brian Jacques,

For the past three years I have been reading your wonderful Redwall novels. Over these years I have found something interesting about your books,

Since these were the first books I have ever read that warriors were involved, I found it extraordinary how much courage the characters had. I was never a very courageous person, but after I saw how courageous you person, but after I saw how courageous your characters were, I got to thinking.

If I could be more courageous, then people would admire me. But I was stuck with a problem. I can't save an abbey from being taken over by evil verments. But when I thought about it, I came up with a solution. I can show courage by doing everyday things most kids wouldn't do. Like try new foods, or go off the high dive at the swimming pool.

The fourteen novels of yours that I have read have changed my life for the better.
Sincerely,
Bobby Ohman

Level II (7th & 8th grades)

First Place to Cornelia Funke, *Inkheart*
From Erica Berry
Catlin Gabel School, Portland

Dear Cornelia Funke,

I always wanted to meet my favorite characters from books. I imagined visiting Narnia with Peter, Susan, Edmond and Lucy, flying on my broomstick during a quidditch game with Harry Potter, or sipping dandelion tea in the Shire with Bilbo. They all seemed like such wonderful – if impossible – things, bewitching because they were so out of my reach. That was until I began reading *Inkheart* this fall. Meggie's character instantly appeared in front of my eyes, so real I felt as if I was in her story with her. We were the same age, we both loved reading, and it seemed like we were real friends.

Every afternoon after school I'd race through soccer practice, hurry through homework, and gobble down dinner. Only after I was finally under the striped covers of my bed did I pick up the library book with its red cover decorated with lizards and gold coins, jewels and spiders, all souvenirs from Mo and Meggie's reading. I'd lie in bed way past when my parents thought I was asleep, following Capricorn's evil plans with a shudder, and rooting for Meggie, Mo, and the strong-willed Eleanor all along.

By the time I had turned the last page, I knew that never again would I want a character to visit me out of a book. I could feel Dustfinger's loneliness at being in a new world, and I felt guilty for wishing all those characters out of books. As much as I hated it, I understood that they belonged in their own stories, with their own endings, just as we have our own stories, with our own endings. We can influence how our own story goes, to a point, unlike the characters in books, whose fates are left to the author. But then, who chooses our fate?

Meggie's book box inspired me to start building my own, and I have a half-finished pine box sitting in the basement. To me books are life guides; you learn from characters' mistakes and ponder their successes. *Inkheart* puzzled me and left me deep in thought about many questions. What if we could read characters out of books? How would our society be different? Would everything be better or worse? Are books really

that different from life? *Are* books our life? Do authors have more power than the rest of us?

A couple weeks ago my family and I visited some friends at their vineyard. My sister and I stayed up really late running among the grapevines, scaring each other in the night. At one point I didn't know where she was, and that's when I remembered the scene in the vineyards from *Inkheart*. I was terrified. Every shadow of a branch looked like a looming Basta with his knife. I was sure I could hear dogs howling in the night. The scent of fresh grapes was suddenly very threatening, and the full moon macabre. I took a gulp of the early fall air and closed my eyes. As scenes from the story flashed through my mind, I melted into the moment. I felt like the adventurer in my own story, the Meggie of my own life.

Thank you for that moment, and thank you for *Inkheart*.
Erica Berry

Runner Up to Lois Lowry, [Gathering Blue](#)
From Kate Thurber
Leslie Middle School, Salem

Dear Ms. Lowry,

Injuries affect life and the way you live it. I was diagnosed with a spinal cord disease at the age of only twelve. I was unable to attend school for three months. During a large percentage of that time I was in a wheelchair. Permanent paralysis crossed my mind. Had my condition gone longer without a solution, or if the surgeon had cut a nerve instead of the fillium, I would have been paralyzed. Although my hopes were to do more than sleep and watch movies, debilitating pain and decreased mobility stood in my way. As I read your book, [Gathering Blue](#), I was uplifted by the courage and strength Kira showed. Though her disability was permanent and the world you created for her was unforgiving, she coped with all the struggles and kept striving to move on.

Sadness swept over me knowing that Kira might be sent out into the field just because her leg was not normal. It frightens me to think that if I lived in Kira's world and had not gotten better, I could have been killed, because "the weak are cast aside."

With the turn of each page, I was inspired by the way Kira lived her life. She didn't complain much, and even with a crippled leg became friends with a boy her age. I kept waiting for the part when she would find her place in society. My wait was over when she showed her courage and she began the job as the Singer's Robe mender. Through Kira I realized that our life is short, and in that precious time, I must be patient and stay in the moment.

After reading your book, Ms. Lowry, my eyes were open to the seemingly endless possibilities of any situation, including physical disability. Pain is not something you can imagine, it is something you must experience. I am so grateful that the outcome of my surgery was so positive. Yet, I now see that if the results had been any different, my life would not have ended.

With gratitude for your perseverance in writing this book,
Kate Thurber

Honorable Mention to Gary Paulsen, Hatchet

From Miles Sorce

Athey Creek Middle School, West Linn

Dear Gary Paulsen,

Three years ago, I was looking around in my school library and just couldn't find any books that caught my interest. Frustrated, I asked my librarian if she recommended any books. "Touching Spirit Bear?" "No." "Bud Not Buddy?" "No." "Hatchet?" I looked at the cover and was sold. That week, I read the whole book cover to cover twice.

Your book, Hatchet, was very interesting because of the creativity Brian used for his survival. He barely knew anything about surviving in the outdoors. But the way he put together his shelter, the bow and arrow, the spear, and the raft was amazing. I thought it was cool how Brian showed that man and nature actually can coexist peacefully. After staying in the wilderness for weeks, he left it how he found it and didn't destroy anything.

I also liked how Brian had such an intense mind set. He was always thinking about what he had to do to survive. Like gathering food, or gathering wood for fire. He was also thinking about his life. With his parent's recent divorce, and then being in a plane crash and getting left stranded, not to mention "the secret", I empathized with him and understood his emotions.

Before I read Hatchet, I took everything in my life for granted. I thought everything would always be there, but after I read it, I realized that a situation like Brian's is possible, and that my life could change in a minute. It makes me wonder how I would act in Brian's situation. Would I just lie there on the shore of the lake hopelessly and cry? Or would I do what Brian did and fight for my life?

What I took from Hatchet was that it's possible to do anything. You just have to keep trying and stay calm. Brian tried to survive. At times, he lost all hope, but he knew what he had to do and survived.

Thank you for writing such a great book. I could read Hatchet again and again and it will never get boring. Thanks again!

Sincerely,

Miles Sorce

Honorable Mention to Gary Paulsen, Harris and Me

From Hayley Shafer

Athey Creek Middle School, West Linn

Dear Gary Paulsen,

From wrestling with pigs to urinating on fences, your book, Harris and Me, has really taught me to fill my life with fun and adventure. At the time when I first read this book, Harris and his cousin had more fun just in that one summer than I had had in my whole life! I used to be, and still am a little, a "prissy" little girl who was afraid to get dirty or to look silly. But after reading your book I realized that we could get so much more out of life by living each day like it's our last than by sitting inside trying to look pretty!

Being outside and creating my own adventures with my friends or by myself has become one of my favorite hobbies, I can truly be myself or anyone I want to be by just using my imagination and letting go of all of the stressful things in my life. There is no point of wasting my time worrying about everything that gets me down, I can have so much more fun with my life by being outgoing and wild. Sitting inside in front of the television does nothing but rot my brain, although my “adventures” can sometimes leave me with scrapes and bruises, at least I had a great time while getting them. And it didn’t damage my head in any way!

At school during lunch all of my friends only want to sit around and talk or go watch the boys play basketball, I now find this very boring. Instead of watching the boys showoff to all of the girls watching them have fun, I go out and play with them and usually end up whipping their butts, which as you can imagine is hard for them to admit.

As I said before I didn’t used to want to look silly, and even though my friends teased me for playing with the boys, I now realize that I don’t look silly. Because I am having a great time playing the game of life, it’s the people like my friends, sitting on the sidelines looking like bored loners who look silly!

Sincerely,
Hayley Shafer

Honorable Mention to Mark Bowden, Black Hawk Down

From Ryan Beam

Athey Creek Middle School, West Linn

Dear Mark Bowden,

Your book, Black Hawk down, lifted the wool on my opinion on combat and wars. I was mot for war before I read your book but I thought that if it was only killing bad people for the freedom of our country and it was totally and completely necessary that it was ok. But after your book enlightened me I saw that war is killing hundreds of innocent people, animals, and destroying towns.

After reading about the gruesome events of this forgotten battle I was astonished that the slaughtering of thousands of people could be caused by an inkling of information telling that one man was in a building. And I was even more perplexed as to how these peoples deaths could just fade into the woodwork of the media. Don’t they deserve some recognition? Don’t all of the people who have fought and perished deserve it, American or not?

As horrible as Aidid was and how much he needed to be captured, nothing is worth more than the families and memories who were erased in this fight. This fight was an unnecessary use of force and not to mention the money that went into this devilish act of war. Not only was it not completely necessary, it killed innocent people, animals, and turned the better half of a city into Swiss cheese.

When you described the deaths and injuries of these people it made me think if war is necessary or ethical. And when I started to take five minutes to read a page because I had to stop many time because of phrases like, “Blood poured out of his leg like it was being dumped out of a jug.” And that that this actually happened. This led me

to draw up the conclusion that no one's suffering is worth the capture of one man much less the pain of thousands of people.

I loved your book and I thought that you captured the essence of combat well. With your book you changed my view, and others I hope, on war. Also I think that you are a respectful person for honoring the Rangers who fought for us and were forgotten.

Ryan Beam

Athey Creek Middle School

West Linn, Oregon

Honorable Mention to J. R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings

From Laura Krull, Bend

Dear Mr. Tolkien:

Before reading your fabulous trilogy, The Lord of the Rings, I dreamed of becoming a professional tennis player. I worked hard toward my goal. Your books helped me see my progress in a new light: the journey along the way can be as important as the ultimate goal.

When the Company of the Nine Walkers began their journey, I looked at it as one mission that they were all working together to accomplish. As they continued on their way, I began to see they all faced challenges together, but they also encountered individual challenges as well. It is similar for the group of tennis players I am competing against. We are all working toward the same goal, but we each have different challenges.

While reading about their journey, I also saw that although you are not the star or best player, you are still helping the team win. Many people played significant roles that came about unexpectedly. Even Pippin, for instance, helped. He didn't carry the burden of the Ring, but his brave actions helped to save Faramir, and in part, Gondor. I saw the common phrase "everybody helps the team to win" in a new way. Although perhaps we tennis players are not always wanting to help each other, we are. As each one of us works hard to become the best, we are forcing the others around us to raise their level of play.

Although Frodo may have been the 'star player,' so to speak, everybody proved themselves as valuable members and let their actions speak for themselves. Aragorn was the heir of Gondor, but he did not say so right away. Instead, he allowed his actions to show he was the King. The same is true for some of the budding tennis players of today. They do not strut around and say, "I'm the best player here." Instead, they allow their playing to say they are talented players.

The last lesson I learned, but certainly not the least, was the idea of not judging people by your first impression. People at first did not believe that a hobbit from the Shire would possibly save Middle Earth when, in fact, he could. The same is true for tennis players. Upon seeing a smaller player, you might feel inclined to think she is not capable of winning against a bigger, stronger player. The first impression is not always correct. You should wait until you've watched her play to judge her capabilities.

Reading your books has helped me to appreciate the journey people make in life. It also helped me realize I need to confront challenges that arise in order to progress. In your books, you created a wonderful story that showed little people can indeed do big things. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Laura Krull

Honorable Mention to Shel Silverstein, Where The Sidewalk Ends

From Julius Gomez, Amity

Dear Shel Silverstein,

Ickle me pickle me tickle me too. These are the words that dragged me into you're inspiring, creative, humorous books. Hello my name is Juliis Gomez I am a student from amity middle school, and no im not only writing this story because my teacher told me I had to. In fact it's just the opposite I wrote to you because I felt a connection between me and your books from day one. Why? You ask well because you see its because the way you seem to put poems together the way you put them together and it seems you've read an entire story.

Ever since I read Ickle Me Pickle Me Tickle Me Too, I've always thought well maybe I should put my creativeness that I have gained from ADHD. That I should also start writing and ever since I haven't been getting in trouble as much because when im done with school and my favorite sport football I just go home and start writing, when I write it seems as if I loose all stress and drift into a world where is carefree to express your feelings in a positive creative way.

All my friends and teachers even parents have been giving me complements telling me an excellent writer. Giving me even more of a confident boost. And I give all the credit to you and your excellent books 100% so thank you Mr. Silverstein for being a good friend and a roll model!

Your biggest fan,
Julius Gomez

Honorable Mention to Zlata Filipovic, Zlata's Diary

From Jaclyn Polich,

Oak Tree School, Forest Grove

Dear Zlata,

I cried myself to sleep the night I read your diary.

Your diary made me realize how good my life is. When I finished your book I was awe struck, I had never thought about someone living through these conditions. I was terribly upset by the number of people who died. Just the thought of my pets dying is upsetting and makes me very sad, but the people that lived through this war had their friends and family dying. It made me grateful that I don't have to endure death every day, especially the death of people close to me.

When studying wars I never really thought of the people that were dying, but now I remember your book and find myself caring more about war victims and seeing them as real human beings. You managed to live through his war and stay strong, even when your mother started to break down emotionally. You stayed strong for your family and supported them. If I had to live through a war I don't think I could be as courageous as you were.

As I read this book I came to realize that many people had to spend most of their time indoors and in basements. That would make me feel so lonely and shut off from the world. I could not believe that you actually managed to live through this and not give up hope, even when your mother started to break down emotionally. You stayed strong for your family and supported them. If I had to live through a war I don't think I could be as courageous as you were.

As I read this book I came to realize that many people had to spend most of their time indoors and in basements. That would make me feel so lonely and shut off from the world. I could not believe that you actually managed to live through this and not give up hope, even while surrounded by the sound of gunfire and bombs.

When I read your diary I felt myself being sucked into all of the realities of war and I felt twinges of fear in my heart. I wondered all the time how scared you were and if you truly wanted to go and live somewhere else.

Zlata, your book really opened my heart to the realities and fears of war. You are now one of my role models and I will always look up to you.

Sincerely,
Jaclyn Polich

Level III (9th – 12th grade)

First Place to Lee Hammond, Draw Horses
From Rosemary Engelfried, Hillsboro

Dear Lee Hammond;

Two years ago. It's night, and I'm in bed with a notebook on my lap, trying to draw a horse.

What it looks like is a blob.

Straight lines, bulging curves – one eye higher than the other, neck bent at an impossible angle. It's hopeless. Anyone can see that. I look at the beautiful pencil drawing of five horses that our realtor's wife gave to us. That's what I'd like to be able to draw. Hah. In a million years.

Now skip ahead a few months. It's Christmas morning, and I've just opened a present from my mom and dad. A book, call *Draw Horses*. I think, skimming through it, looking at the things that in theory I'll be able to draw by the end of it, *Wow. If I can draw half as good as this person I'll be happy. If I can draw that – and that – and that – I'll be happy.*

If I'd just learned about drawing horses, that would have been great. But you showed me even more. I thought I knew how to use a pencil – you made it obvious I didn't have a clue. I lived by outlines and colors. If I'd looked around, I could have seen that the world has no outlines, and every color is a shadow or a light. But I never made that connection – until you pointed it out.

The first thing you had me draw was a sphere. A simple sphere. Simple – except that spheres are three dimensional. Simple, if you knew how to use a pencil, make it

smooth as light, subtle as shadow. That first sphere might have been the most three-dimensional thing I'd ever drawn. But it still wasn't very good, and it wasn't a horse.

A few weeks go by, and I've drawn my first horse that actually looks like a horse. The blending is a little blotchy, the form slightly lumpy at times, but it's a lot better than I could ever have done without your book.

Then it's almost two years later. I've entered my drawing of a shire horse in the county fair. I finished the exercises in your book long ago, but this drawing still has some of the elements you taught me. The smooth shading I learned from you combined with hours upon hours of time, practice, experimenting – and now I've got this drawing, and it just won a blue ribbon. It's a very different picture from that horse you showed me how to draw, even less like the stiff outline in that long-ago note book. That still doesn't mean it deserved to win. It doesn't mean *I* should have won – I couldn't have done it without your book. You're the one who helped me bring that shire to life.

But now it's nearing on Christmas again – I've been drawing horses for over two years. I look at the realtor's wife's drawing of five horses that I still have on my wall, and yeah, it's pretty perfect. I'm not there yet. Maybe someday...

I've still got your book – it's great to refer to from time to time, and one of these days I keep meaning to go back to it, start at the beginning and see what I could do with your exercises now, with two years of horses behind me. But right now I've got my hands full – I'm almost done with *Draw Real People*, and that's a whole other story.

Rosemary Engelfried

Runner Up to Le Ly Hayslip, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*

From Kate Alexander

Tualatin High School, Tualatin

Le Ly Hayslip,

Who is the enemy? Before I read your book, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*, the answer to this question used to be whoever was in opposition to me or my country. I was a Democrat so everything the Republicans said or did was bad and wrong. In World War II, our "enemies" were the Germans, Italians, and most of all, the heinous "Japs," who, of course started it all in the first place by attacking us. Never mind that we caused them to attack us by being one of the "spheres of influence" in China and that we impacted their economy (especially oil). In swimming and cross-country meets I have always been friendly to the competition, the enemy, but I used to have an inner hatred when they won and inner triumphant gloat when my team won. Reading your book caused me to discover my truth. There is no enemy. There is no side that is all bad and wrong, as no side is all good and right.

What I love about your book is that it shows both sides of the Vietnam War. Since we alienate our enemies, we never get to know them, so we don't realize that they can be fighting for a cause as noble as ours. Seeing both sided, it seems to me that everybody was fighting for the same reason: to free Vietnam of a tyrannical rule. The Americans came to free the Vietnamese from the "evil" communists, while through your descriptions, the Viet Cong fought for their independence against a foreign power, the United States. Your transactions with both the Viet Cong and the Americans, I realized

that men on each side aren't so different. They are all humans after all. They have values and a sense of right and wrong. Well, if neither the Americans nor the Viet Cong are the enemy, who is? In my ignorance, I blamed the leaders, Ho Chi Minh or "Uncle Ho" for his thirst for power and our Democracy which insisted on fighting the spread of communism. About half way through the book, I was still searching for an enemy.

As I read on, however, I discovered that I can't blame the leaders. They, behaving as humans do followed their instincts and fought against invasion; the United States against Communism, and the Viet Cong against the foreign powers (who, as you taught me have been inflicting Vietnam for centuries). This brings me back to the same question that I tried to answer with simply finding someone to blame. Why? Why all this pain? Why all this death? Why do we fight, kill, send people to fight and kill when we don't want to? Why? Why? Why? Could it be in the hands of "God, or fate, or luck" as you would say? I could blame the leaders, or the soldiers, or the civilians, or the Americans, or the Viet Cong, or luck, or fate, or God. I could make any one of these into my "enemy" and say that it's their fault; that would answer my question and my mind would be at ease. In your book, you make it impossible for me to choose one of these easy solutions to such a complex problem. I think that the real why is everybody else, like me, searches for simple answer the same question. They will all choose a different answer and create "enemies" for themselves to hide their faults behind. We turn the other side into enemies and they turn us into enemies. A war is born.

Le Ly Hayslip, you have opened my mind. I don't know if it's for better or for worse. I no longer know which candidate for the Presidency I would vote for if I were old enough to vote. At the end of swimming and cross-country races, I am happy for the other competitors if they beat me; don't they deserve to win as much as I do? Now I see everybody as just like me. Since I love to meet new people and see different view points, I assume that everyone else would want to meet me and hear my opinions. Your book showed me that an enemy is what we make them. All I have to do is accept the legitimacy of those who oppose me, and I will lose my fear of "the enemy."

Kate Alexander
Tualatin High School
Tualatin, Oregon

Honorable Mention to The Bathroom Readers' Institute, Uncle John's Bathroom Reader
From Olesya Savenkova
Tualatin High School, Tualatin

Dear Uncle John's and the Bathroom Readers' Institute,

Did you know that Malaysians wash their babies in beer to protect them from disease? Of course you do, considering that it is one of many useless facts found in your wonderful books. Thanks to you, I know, too. You have flushed me with many hours of entertainment and left a trail of knowledge I would have otherwise never learned in school. You literally make me run to the bathroom. For this, I want to write my thanks.

I'd like to begin by expressing my sincerest gratitude for providing me with a source of amusement in an otherwise barren land (also known as the lavatory). You create an enjoyable experience from simple things. My day is improved as a result of

your reading material. Your works are ideal for satisfying the trivia buffs like me. I have read and reread your books, which are perfect for those with a short memory span like mine. Did I tell you how they are perfect for my short memory span?

On top of that, your work provides me with more facts and figures than the eleven years of schooling I have had. Needless to say, it's accomplished in a much shorter amount of time; I learn something new every day. This is a useful supplement for classes that aren't offered from which we can learn things such as superstitions, public lives, and pop science. Now I come up to friends and teachers and cite random information to appear smart, for once. This strategy is particularly useful when trying to impress others.

Finally, you never cease to amaze me with your appreciation of literature, something we both have in common. I especially enjoy reading about word phrases and origins. This is what I believe contributed to my excellent PSAT scores. Not only did you increase my vocabulary, you helped me learn the history of words as well. Further more, you include various literary features, such as oxymorons and poems. I find these to be somewhat addictive. Additionally, I feel enlightened after reading limericks and haikus from different countries. They give me insight into people of other backgrounds and cultures. On top of that, I notice that you include works and quotes from an assortment of famous authors, such as Shakespeare and Mark Twain. This is truly an amazing contribution to your books because at last, I have found reading materials that applies to our everyday lives and transcends time and culture in its application to people around the world.

As you can see, I find your books remarkable absorbing; I can immediately plunge into the material from the first sentence. You have impacted me in ways that are incomprehensible. Your efforts for standing, er, sitting firmly in what you believe in are deeply commended. I thus look forward to your next installment. Until then, I'll be sitting on the edge of my seat and going with the flow of things.

Sincerely,
Olesya Savenkova

P.S. Perhaps you could include a section on algebra in your next edition to help me on the mathematics part of the SATs.

Honorable Mention to Cynthia Voigt, Dacey's Song

From Nghia Truong
Valley Catholic High School, Beaverton

Dear Cynthia,

"And they lived happily ever after." I remember reading this first sentence in your novel, Dacey's Song. I was surprised to see an author begin a novel with this line, usually placed at the end of fairy tales. Pressed to read on out of curiosity, I began a novel that impacted me like no other.

To explain the novel's significance to me, I must first introduce myself. I was born in Vietnam and immigrated to the United States when I was eight years old. In order to learn English grammar and vocabulary, I used to read many books, ranging from simple picture books to short novels. Dacey's Song is the first "advanced" novel I read. I

read this novel for the first time in the summer before fifth grade. At that time, I recall liking the novel because I learned many useful words and grammar conventions from the book. Not fully understanding the story and its plot, I did not consider the novel worthy of remembrance. Three years later, I picked up the book again and read it with the purpose of reviewing how much I had improved. I was in for quite a surprise.

I was captivated and enthralled by Dacey's Song. I simply could not stop reading and finished the novel quickly. The simple and direct language impressed me as I read the novel for the second time. I was especially enchanted by Dacey Tillerman's character. Her spirit, determination, innocence, and love for those around her inspired me to set higher expectations for myself. Amid struggles and destitution, Dacey never loses hope and continues to fight for happiness, for life. I felt a special bond between the protagonist and myself.

I began to think profoundly and identify my strange connection with this individual. I first connected with Dacey because like Dacey, I am the oldest in my family and feel an inherent responsibility for my two younger siblings. One of the unique aspects of Dacey's personality is her responsibility and care for her three brothers and sisters. Confronted with her parents' abandonment of their children, Dacey almost assumes the role of a motherly figure. I was greatly impressed by this characteristic and strove to follow Dacey's model. In addition, although she is poor and orphaned, Dacey resolves to find happiness in the simple things in life. I did not feel much energy and bliss in life at the period in which I read Dacey's Song. This book greatly changed my attitude towards life.

After reading the book, I sensed a new feeling in my heart. This feeling is a mixture of understanding, joy, and hope. I began to see a way to a more meaningful life. I began to appreciate the things in life that I have always taken for granted, like my parents, siblings, friends, material needs, and health. Before that summer, I had forgotten the poverty and unfortunate circumstances that many people find themselves in. I had forgotten how to make the best of life and live for happiness. I found a role model, a hero in Dacey's character. I recognized my petty complaints, dismissive treatment of others, pessimistic attitude, and unfriendliness increased the breach between myself and others. I began to understand that people need me, and I had a responsibility to help them. My thoughts and attitudes towards other things changed, I gained friends and lost enemies. I tried my best in school and got the results I wanted. I began to be successful in almost everything I did. And all this occurred because of Dacey's Song, a book I initially read in order to learn English.

Dacey's Song opened up my eyes to a new life and raised me up from the lowest point in my life. Because of Dacey's story, I truly believed in myself and others. Reading this novel has shaped me to be the person I am today, a person I can be proud of. During the next few years, I read the book again and again. Whenever in the need of inspiration and insight, I turn to your novel. I remember someone once told me that the best novels are the ones that impact you so much that you still remember them twenty years from now. I think Dacey's Song is definitely the one.

Thank you,
Nghia Truong

Honorable Mention to L. M. Montgomery, The Emily Series
From Nick Engelfried, Hillsboro

Dear L. M. Montgomery

In a world that's not exactly easy on writers, it's nice to know you aren't struggling alone. Sometimes, when the rejection slips are piling up, and publication seems a distant memory, I start to feel discouraged. This doesn't last long, though; I soon tell myself that being a writer isn't supposed to be easy. Emily had a hard time, too.

That's not to say it's all bad – far from it! Writing is just about my favorite thing to do, except maybe reading. When it comes to reading about writing, well, you can't get much better than that. That's why I wanted to thank you for the Emily books.

I was amazed by how well I could relate to Emily's experiences in the writing world. I know well what it is like to be consumed by a story, to be compelled to write and write and write until you reach the end, and to have a short period of satisfaction, until the next idea seized you, and you write and write and write...

I also know what it's like to look back on the stories, poems, or whatever, that you wrote a year ago and think *Oh please; tell me I didn't write that*. Unlike Emily, I've never actually thrown my work from months past into the fire, but that's not for want of wishing I could.

And then comes the day that my story is all done – as perfect as I can make it. I've written it, revised it, made changes, read it over, and made a few more changes. I've been excited by it, thrilled by it, and maybe wanted to tear it to shreds a time or two. But all that's done with, now. It's time to write up a hopeful letter of introduction to the publisher, and send my manuscript off in the mail. And then to wait. And wait. And work on something else. And gradually forget about it...

And the Self Addressed Stamped Envelope comes in the mail. OhwowIhavetoseewhatitis. I break the envelope's seal. I take out the letter. "Dear Writer Friend: We have reviewed your manuscript and regret needing to return it because..." And after that is a list of reasons why they reject people's work. The box marked "We currently have a surplus of similar material," is checked off. Drat.

Still, that's no reason to stop writing. I would continue to write if I knew I'd never get a sentence published again. I'm sure Emily would too. Like Emily (and like you, too) I am a writer for life, whether I like it or not. The ideas come, and they must be written about. They must be fed with every ounce of imagination and personal experience that I can collect until at last, they are done.

I have gone through bleak months void of ideas and inspiration; also some times when ideas seemed to appear from all directions, hundreds of times faster than I could write about them all. I have felt my heart beat faster and mind reel as I take in the fact that, yes, these people really, truly, want to publish my work. I have wondered again and again: *How long will it be before I get something published that's more than five pages long?*

By now, after more than two years of sending things to the publishers, I have had some success. I've had several poems published, as well as one short story, one essay, and one "opinion." And as for earning my way in the world – well, so far all my publishers pay in author's copies, but there's still time.

There's also time, I remind myself, for one of my longer pieces of work to be accepted – for an actual *book* with my name on the cover to appear on the shelves of bookstores. Emily had to wait quite a while to see her *Moral of the Rose* in print.

That's what I tell myself. It's not easy for me. It wasn't easy for Emily. It's not easy for any of us. So thanks for giving me someone to relate my struggles to, even if she only exists in a book. After all, don't I know that fictional characters can seem as solid as human beings? You can be sure I'll think of Emily again. And again, and again. Even as I try and smile at the rejection slips.

Nick Engelfried