

2006 Letters About Literature Winners

Level I (4th-6th grade)

First Place to Ann Rinaldi, *A Break with Charity*
From Aubrey Means, Portland

Dear Ann Rinaldi,

I have finished reading one of your books: *A Break with Charity*. This book started me thinking about many of the issues America has faced in the past, and many of the issues we still face now. It also made me consider the similarities of the girls in that time the girls in ours.

One of the issues you highlighted in your book was belief and accusation of witchcraft. In the late 1600s, this was happening all over the world, Europe, Russia, but you chose to write about it happening here. My feelings against the judgment of others are very strong. This is why I chose to write about your book, because it gives me a chance to speak of how I feel about these events.

When I read your book, I was infuriated with the girls that accused all the townspeople of being witches. They were very cruel. My feelings were crushed when Susanna's own mother was accused. I wanted to strangle Ann and her group. Lying about being tormented by witches only to get neighbors into trouble was something I was both enraged and fascinated about. I find it amazing for those girls to have such a strong mind, and not break down with their lies.

I think I have a strong connection with Susanna in this book. Ever since third grade, I have wanted desperately to fit in with a certain group of girls. It was just last year that I realized that group I was infatuated with was not all that great. They, like Ann Putnam, pushed around and accused others of things they didn't do. They made others feel bad about themselves, and though their victims didn't get hung, they were often punished for the things they were wrongly accused of.

Another connection I have with the characters in the book is with, believe it or not, Ann Putnam. I think it sounds strange to have a connection with both the good and bad guys, but I do. My connection with Ann is more of an understanding, really. Though I don't believe she should have, I think I understand why she led people to believe others were witches.

In your book, I thought you gave the impression that Ann Putnam was doing this because she wanted attention, as did the other girls in her group. I think that this is an understandable reason for many doings. Many of the girls in the group at my school had the same motive as Ann; they wanted attention.

Ann's main weapon was her tongue. I have been told that the tongue is a dangerous thing, capable of hurting people forever, whether it was on purpose or not. The tongue is considered to be the strongest muscle in our bodies. I think that that is because it has so much power. It can be used to hurt people, or help them. It is the person's choice. Ann's choice was to hurt people.

All in all, *A Break with Charity* allowed me to contemplate the connections I had with the characters, a little bit of the history of our country, and the pain one can inflict by a lie. Without reading your book, I probably never would have thought about these things.

Thanks from a thoughtful reader,
Aubrey Means

Runner Up To Author “Unknown”, Don’t Quit
From Mason Flores
Redwood Elementary School, Grants Pass

Dear Author “Unknown”

I would like to tell you how your poem, “Don’t Quit” has given me a different out look on life.

Being a 4th grader you might think I should have no worries or distractions in life. But that is not true. I think they just get even harder and intense when you become an adult.

“Don’t Quit” has opened my eyes to the reality of the real world. It lets me know that there will be many bumps in the road, and that life is not always going to be fair.

There are many times when I’ve come home from school, and have felt like a total failure. Either because I didn’t pass my spelling test, or maybe even because I didn’t make that goal in soccer.

“Don’t Quit” let’s me know that I am O.K. There will always be someone out there better than me, but, if I try my hardest and never give up I will always come out on top with pride, and knowing I gave it my all.

Sincerely,
Mason Flores

Honorable Mention To Ben Mikaelson, Petey
From Hannah Burke
Inza R Wood Middle School, Wilsonville

Dear Ben Mikaelson,

When I was asked to write about a book that changed my life, I decided to choose a book that you wrote, Petey. Petey helped me see that actions really are stronger than words. Petey can’t talk but he shows that he cares by saving Calvin’s life. He also shows people that he is not an idiot – he shows everybody that he means that there are more important things in life than money and work. He teaches them to care about people and to think about others before you. Petey also made me think of how stupid some people are because they don’t love or care, instead they judge people by their shape, size, or their looks.

This book reminded me of a boy named Jacob who is now in fifth grade. He also has Cerebral Palsy like Petey. After I first read Petey, I started helping in Jacob’s regular class. That was a couple of years ago, and now Jacob can walk using a walker and he has

made lots of friends. Jacob can communicate with people in his words just like Petey. But his progress isn't just because of me – a lot of people helped Jacob, and all of them made friends. Plenty of people don't treat Jacob right, or any of the kids in Special Education. Some people kick Special Ed kids or call them rude names. They get in trouble of course but they still kept on doing it. It soon became a bigger issue and we put the news on our morning message. After that, a lot more people started helping the Special Education class. Now the class has lots of friends and they are treated as normal people, which they are. They're just different, like every person in the world.

In the book, Petey deserved much better care, and a better wheel chair. That is why Petey changed my life. I learned from the book that kids and adults with Cerebral Palsy love and care about other people before themselves. Sometimes they just have a hard time showing it because they can't talk. Now I am motivated to help others – even if they don't have Cerebral Palsy. In fifth grade my class raised \$136 for the tsunami fund, and at my church we do an annual food drive at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Petey didn't only teach me to help, but to care. That is how Petey changed my life. I care, love and understand the world's differences more than ever. So I thank you Ben Mikaelson, but most of all I thank Petey.

Sincerely,
Hannah Burke

Honorable Mention to Temple Grandin, Emergence: Labeled Autistic
From Meagan Gliebe
Lynch Meadows School, Portland

Dear Temple Grandin,

About a month ago, my teacher told everyone in the class to read an autobiography, and my mom suggested your book, Emergence: Labeled Autistic.

I thought your book would be interesting because I already knew a little bit about autism – My three brothers and little sister have autism, and one of my best friends, Shawnee, is also autistic. Once I read your book, I realized that even though I knew *about* autism, I didn't understand what it was to *have* autism.

Every month I have a sleepover at Shawnee's house. Before I started reading your book, I would get confused by her strange behavior: covering her ears and screaming, whispering little stories to herself, and horrible tantrums, where she would yell at me for no good reason at all. Sometimes I felt like she didn't like me and I didn't feel much like being her friend anymore! After reading your book, I now understand about Shawnee's behaviors and what she must be going through, living with her autism.

In your book, you said it was important to have people in your life who believe in you and look past the odd things you do to see your creativity. I want to be that kind of person for Shawnee. By reading your book, I know not to take Shawnee's autistic behavior personally, but to enjoy her for who she really is, because that's what real friends do.

Thank you for changing my life – and Shawnee's too,
Sincerely,
Meagan Gliebe

Honorable Mention To Esme Codell, Sahara Special
From Olivia Hinerfeld, Portland

Dear Esme Codell,

I recently read one of your books, Sahara Special. It helped me see through the eyes of a person who has a very confusing and lonely life.

Sahara and I are practically perfect opposites except that we both love to write. She has a hard time making friends and most people treat her as a special education student. She hides her special gift of writing, whereas I share my love of writing as much as possible.

My favorite character by far is Ms. Pointy. She has such a colorful and spicy personality. When I did my book report on Sahara Special last month, I learned that you modeled the teacher character in the book after you, as the creative and fun teacher you were before you started writing books. I appreciate Ms. Pointy so much for keeping Sahara and Darrel in her class and not making them go back to the special education teacher.

The other special education student, Darrel, really fascinates me. He is loud with his feelings and shunned by his peers. When I finished the book, I wondered if you ever had a student like Darrel, who acts tough to others as a way to cover up for his or her true feelings. Then, I made a connection to my own life.

I have known a kid for two years who is much like Darrel. I have always strongly disliked this person for making me feel horrible. After reading this book, however, I tried to see the world through his eyes. School is very hard for him with no support or friends. His home is uncomfortable with little “TLC”. It must be so hard for him. Lately, I have been thinking more from his point of view and am nicer to him. He is actually being nicer to me, too!

Even though it is not said, I am sure that Darrel and Sahara become close friends. Thank you so much for an amazing read. Walking in the shoes of my fellow classmate has helped me to have more respect and understanding for him.

Sincerely,
Olivia Hinerfeld

LEVEL II (7th & 8th grades)

First Place To Tamora Pierce, Alanna
From Jessie Karlovick
Ashland Middle School, Ashland

Dear Mrs. Tamora Pierce,

“A room without books is like a body without a soul.” -Cicero

Four years ago this quote by Cicero was not true for me. A room without books was just fine for me! Back then I didn't even know who Cicero was! I wouldn't read

unless I absolutely had to. It was like doing housework or having teeth pulled. My whole perspective changed, though, when my mom brought home Alanna. She was worried about me becoming a noodle brain because I would come home from school and sit down and watch TV until she would make me get off. Now I think she was right; back then I thought that she was either mean or crazy. She thought that some interesting books would stop me from watching three hours of TV a day.

Let's just say that I didn't change overnight. Alanna sat on my bookshelf for a year until I became so bored that one day I picked it up and started reading. At first I thought, "This is stupid. I mean, why would a girl want to get beaten up by a bunch of guys in armor?" Then I really got into the plot. My mom actually had to start telling me off because I had been reading during meals!

When I finished that book, I went online and ordered the rest of the series and the just couldn't be delivered fast enough to suit me. That was a huge turning point for me. I started gobbling down books at an ever-quickening rate. I even started taking books out at lunch with me. It was earning me quite an interesting reputation. I became, "The reading person." Now when I go to visit that school that is all my old classmates remember about me.

Other than starting my reading mania, your book, Ms. Pierce, gave me an escape from reality. I was an outcast at school; no matter how hard I tried to fit in. Your books gave me a place where there are no popular girls or jocks from school, well, at least none that I had to deal with.

I thank you for your books and I thank you for everything that came with you books. Now, no matter how along I actually am, I have found a place where I have tons of new friends! Reading about your character's lives seemed to, (and still does), take an edge off any of the problems I am facing. I become some sort of character myself and only wish that I could skip ahead to find out how my story ends but, then again, I guess we can't have everything we want!

I don't know if this makes sense to you but I put my thoughts out as best I could and only hope that you can get some idea of what I am trying to say.

Now, four years later, I total understand Cicero. I always have a book with me now. I can't thank you enough for this gift your books gave me.

All my gratitude,
Jessie Karlovich

Runner Up To J. K. Rowling, Harry Potter Series

From Lucien Broeckel
Corbett Middle School, Corbett

Dear J. K. Rowling,

This is not a letter from a die-hard fan, but a thankful human being. You see, I have been fighting a problem with depression for a year or two and your books have helped me along the way. When your second or third book came out is when I first learned of Harry and his burdens, but did not read them because I was still seven or eight.

For the next few years more issues would settle in to my life and life would become less and less worthwhile. At age ten, I finally decided to read the Chamber of

Secrets (my mother had read the Sorcerer's Stone to me the year before). In sixth grade I finally realized I was suffering from depression. I would read your books as an escape from my life. By reading your books I could vanquish all my troubles and be standing there with Harry, Ron, and Hermione as we face the adventures and enchantments of the wizarding world. I have recently learned that you have had a problem with depression and some of the things in your books are symbolic such as the dementors for depression.

The character in your books I think I'm most like is probably Harry because we both have a significant amount of problems but there are also numerous amounts of joyous times in our lives. I very much anticipate the arrival of the seventh installment of Harry Potter and I hope you will continue writing because your literature has deeply inspired me to become a writer for a career. If I become a writer I want to write fantasies or science fiction. You have an incredible gift of storytelling and I'm glad you share it with the world.

Sincerely,
Lucien Broeckel

Honorable Mention To Anne Frank, Anne Frank: Diary of A Young Girl
From Emily Bevan, Phoenix

Dear Anne Frank,

While reading Anne Frank: Diary of A Young Girl, I realized how blessed I am to live in a country where there is so much freedom. When I think about the lives so many Jews were living before they went into hiding, it already sounds pretty terrible to me. I thought about all the rules there were and how there was very little freedom to do what one wanted to do. It is so sad that so many people then and today are still persecuted because of their faith or background.

My mom is a Guatemalan immigrant and she and her mom moved to America when my mom was ten. She was excited to live in America. Though, at school, she was teased because of her skin color and that she didn't know the language. It is terrible that people are made fun of just because of their skin color or what language they speak.

I have learned that it doesn't really matter how much you have, but how you can live your life. I can't imagine having a normal life with my family and friends and then, because of the hatred someone has for me, be forced to live in hiding.

I loved reading your diary because, even though your family didn't have all the luxuries that some people were having outside, you were always reminding yourselves that you were lucky to have the chance to live in hiding. One of my favorite lines in your diary was, "My work, my hope, my love, my courage, all these things keep my head above water and keep me from complaining". I think we should all think like that. Why talk about the bad side of something when there is a good side that we could be talking about instead?

I am so glad I read your diary. It taught me a lot about thankfulness, and I am thankful for that.

Sincerely,
Emily Bevan

Honorable Mention To Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird

From Elise G. Chow

Ashland Middle School, Ashland

Dear Ms. Harper Lee,

I have known from a very young age that conflict in life in anything but trivial. We as humans denounce it vociferously, while in truth we crave it so much as to see it our and even create it. Authors have an amazing power to quench our thirst for human drama. You, Ms. Lee, took multiple threads of conflict in To Kill a Mockingbird and spun them into a thought-provoking, timeless story that stirred my soul. The conflicts between rich and poor, black and white, and choosing what is right versus what is safe all boil down to one of life's oldest sources of conflict, prejudice.

I first entered fictional life in Maycomb County as a nine year old. I was visiting relatives and had spent a long day learning to meticulously fold wontons. I was ready for some quiet time, when my Grandmother sat me down on her big cloudlike bed and handed me your book. The title aroused my curiosity and as I began to read, I experienced a strong connection to the characters that had me simultaneously thinking about prejudice and its many forms and life in small town America.

Boo Radley's introspective struggle with a town's fear and condemnation of his character and Tom's fight to exonerate him from the accusations of those who felt that color and social class automatically deemed him guilty of rape, struck a chord with me. I learned that prejudice takes many forms and, unfortunately, is timeless. As an Asian American living in a small ethnically homogeneous valley, I have discovered that prejudice most often stems from people's lack of knowledge and fear of that which is different. Are we really that different though? I believe that the story's main characters argued against this and instead ultimately confirmed my belief in the universality of the human experience.

I have reread your book several times since and each time I gain new insights. One tenet however remains constant. Prejudice in all of its forms is demeaning and destructive. To Kill a Mockingbird has forever inspired me to stand up for what I believe in and to preserve each person's uniqueness regardless of their color, socio-economic status or level of education.

Thank you for encouraging me to question and seek answers about universal human rights.

Sincerely,

Elise G. Chow

Honorable Mention To Beverly Cleary, Dear Mr. Henshaw

From Emily Fuller, Grants Pass

Dear Beverly Cleary,

Have you ever been in a grove of butterfly trees? I have. It was a few years ago in Monterey, California. Both of my parents were with me, so it was just the three of us. That's the way I like it. It had been a hot day, and we were all glad to get out of the sun.

As the butterflies started to flutter around us, I was amazed and awed by the sight. We walked all the way through the park and by the time we were leaving, even my parents were laughing and swinging their arms. It's not as if my parents never have any fun together, it's just that they argue a lot, especially on roadtrips. My mom told me once, that all couples argue, but your book, Dear Mr. Henshaw, helped me to realize that two people who love each other can still disagree.

Leigh Botts, from Dear Mr. Henshaw, seems like a fun kid. At first it didn't seem like we had much in common, but we do. Firstly, we both hate to see our parents fight (who doesn't). By reading your story I got the feeling that Leigh is much closer to his mom than to his dad. I think that I am probably closer to my mom than to my dad, but I spend an equal amount of time with both. Another similarity is that at times, we have both felt like the disagreements are always about us. My parents fight about lots of things, but they sometimes have arguments about how to raise me. They fight about the way I should do my homework and which shampoo I should use.

When I was reading your book for the first time (I have read it more than once) I started to cry when Leigh's parents were hugging. It was after they had been divorced for a few months. This part of the book surprised me because I thought that if you got a divorce it meant that you never spoke to your husband or wife again. I think I scared myself a little by crying because my parents are not divorced and I don't usually get emotional when I am reading. I think it was the fact that Leigh's parents had come to an understanding that they were just not meant for each other. I guess I was hoping that my parents could come to a similar agreement, but I figured out something even better. My problems probably sound like nothing compared to what Leigh went through, but I discovered something by writing this letter. Leigh and I might not have any of the more visible things in common, but we do share a lot of the same feelings.

After reading your book, I realized that both my parents want the best for me. They want me to get good grades in school and to take care of myself. The most important thing that I learned though, is that your spouse, either man or woman, should be your equal. In Leigh's case, his mom thought that Leigh's father would never grow up (meaning that his father would always be content to play arcade games on Friday nights in noisy truck stops). By reading Leigh's story, I realized that my parents are equals. They argue because they both think they know the best way to do things. I am so glad that I realized this because I started thinking about how different my life would be if one of my parents was the superior. It would be a real bummer if one of them had all the control over the decisions we make as a family. I also realized that because they stand up to each other, it allows them to be who they really are. Isn't that what they always tell me – be yourself. Anyway, thank you for reading my letter and I want you to know that your book helped me in more ways than you could ever imagine.

Yours truly,
Emily Fuller

Honorable Mention To J. K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince
From Emily Harvey
Linus Pauling Middle School, Corvallis

Dear J. K. Rowling,

I felt lost, lonely, and afraid. Afraid of what each day would bring. There wasn't anything I could do right. Nothing I could say without upsetting someone else. I was lonely, but not alone; I had Harry.

Your book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, was a light in an altogether dark time. My parents had just gotten a divorce and everyone in my house was upset all the time. There were a lot of tears. There was a lot of anger. I think that in a desperate attempt to bring some joy back, we all decided not to talk about it even though we probably should have. I was upset with my parents, they were upset with each other and every relationship in the house was crumbling. I didn't have anyone to talk to; everything I said just seemed to make others more upset. So I read.

Reading this book, seeing the characters face their hardships, seeing how they all worked out in the end, how it gave them strength, gave me new hope for my own troubles. I started to think about the hardships of others, how some have trouble getting through each day. Thinking of these people made my own worries seem petty, I started to figure out that given time, the tension between us all would fade, we would work it out, and we would be happy again. I wasn't the only one with problems to be solved.

Seeing all the troubles the characters were faced with, made me really begin to appreciate what I had and to focus on the positive parts of life instead of the negative parts. I began to feel better about the situation and I was able to smile again.

What I came away with from your book was that even in the worst of times, things will always get better, every cloud has a silver lining, sometimes you just have to look for it and in the meantime hang on to what you do have.

Now I face each day with hope. No longer afraid to speak. No longer afraid of what each day will bring. Knowing that whatever comes next I will face, and I will conquer. Thank you for helping me find the light in this time of turmoil.

Sincerely,

Emily Harvey

Honorable Mention To Elizabeth Starr, [Broadway Chances](#)

From Clemmie vonRadics

Ashland Middle School, Ashland

Dear Elizabeth,

When I was four my mom put me in Twinkle Toes ballet because I liked tutus. Ever since then I've loved everything to do with performing. I never did stop dancing, and I started acting as well. My Parents, always supportive of my passion, gave me *Broadway Chances* for Christmas last year. It quickly became my favorite book. I read it over and over, never tiring of the story. In the true fashion of theatre, your book is now my lucky charm. Whenever I audition, I know that it's resting underneath my ballet slippers, sending me good fortune.

You understand it's not just a hobby; it's something I work hard at and am dedicated to. I just know that if I told you I wanted to be a star when I grew up, you would smile with encouragement.

Perhaps it's because *Broadway Chances* felt familiar from the first time I picked it up. Conversations of "So-and-so is auditioning *where*? I hadn't heard they were auditioning! Is it an open audition?" are regular parts of my world. So is going up against a friend, feverishly learning lines and blocking, and not really being able to explain why I love it, just knowing that I do. I related to Tiffany most – outgoing and running after every role I can take. I always work hard and try and stay focused, and also do my fair share of complaining. In every audition, every play that I do, I try to capture Tiffany's spirit.

What made this book so important to me was that it wasn't just about a person on Broadway; it was about a seventh-grade girl on Broadway. It was about a girl my age who, like me, was growing up both emotionally and physically. She had friends and worries and homework just like I do. You made Fitz real enough that I still feel as though she is one of my closest friends.

And the moment at the end when Fitz is dancing down the steps...wow. That's the only time I gotten from a book those all-over goosebumps theatre gives me. How long did it take you to write that? I've been trying since I was nine; I haven't yet gotten the rush down on paper. Maybe one day I will, but until then, I'll just enjoy the feeling.

In true gratitude,
Clemmic vonRadies

LEVEL III (9th – 12th Grade)

First Place To Janet Tasjian, *The Gospel According to Larry* and *Vote for Larry*
From Nick Engelfried, Hillsboro

Dear Janet Tashjian

Last spring, I decided to try to change the world – or part of it, anyway. I'm still working on it, and it's been an interesting experience, but I don't know if I could have kept going if I hadn't been able to tell myself, whenever things became difficult, to just think of Josh Swenson, or "Larry."

Larry's attempt to change the world started when he set up a website. Mine began when I wrote a class paper about how to convince a city to join the Cities for Climate Protection campaign, a group of local governments that try to cut back on greenhouse gas emissions. Larry would approve of that – he always stuck up for the environment. When I finished the paper, I thought "This really doesn't sound too hard. I think I'll give it a try." I decided to see if I really could get the city of Hillsboro to join cities for Climate Protection. I wasn't exactly challenging consumerism across America like in *The Gospel According to Larry*. But hey, you have to start somewhere.

To cut a long story short, it was amazingly easy to arrange a meeting with the mayor. What wasn't so easy was convincing myself to walk into the City Center building for the conference. It was about the time that my mother, my sister, and I pulled up in the parking lot that I began to feel really nervous. Who did I think I was, anyway? Wasn't I the kid who always did all in his power to avoid potentially awkward social situations?

Who would rather just not be noticed by anyone? Yes, that was me. I was not the sort of person who has meetings with the mayor.

On the other hand, I thought, Larry never waited for other people to get things done for him. If you want the world changed, you've got to change it yourself. Besides, Larry wasn't the social type either, and he had a public debate with the *president*. He must do mayors just to warm up.

Suddenly, I felt a lot better. I emerged from my meeting feeling pretty good; watch out, Mr. President.

However, as Larry learned many times, one victory doesn't mean you're finished. A few weeks after the meeting, I began wondering when exactly the mayor would be getting back to me. I'd have to find a tactful way of reminding him that I was waiting to hear what became of Cities for Climate Protection. "*Dear Mayor*," I wrote, beginning an extremely tactful letter in which I didn't even mention the fact that I was still waiting to find out what happened to my idea. In that letter, I simply thanked him for meeting with me, in the hopes that this would trigger the memory.

Well, running a city is hard work, and there's a lot to keep you busy; I never got a reply. "*Dear Mayor*," I wrote in an e-mail in which I inquired very politely about the fate of City for Climate Protection on the City Council agenda. No answer.

"*This is the student who contacted you last May*," I wrote in my next e-mail, and tried to get across that I would really like to know the outcome of our meeting. Larry was right not to give up when his presidential campaign was moving slowly; persistence pays off. This time I got a response.

When I read the answering e-mail, I wondered if I'd been a bit *too* persistent. The mayor wanted me to give a presentation to the City Council at a public meeting. This made my private talk with the mayor look like nothing. For a minute, I thought I couldn't do it. But this would hardly stop Larry, I told myself. And what did Larry do when the stress got to be a bit too much? He calmed down by practicing some yoga. That's what I did too, until I could think more clearly.

It was October by the time I gave my presentation. Now over a month later, I still don't know whether Hillsboro will join Cities for Climate Protection or not. I am now researching the experiences other Oregon cities have had with the campaign. Maybe the whole thing will come to nothing, but I keep hoping. Besides, I can't help thinking of what you said at the end of *Vote for Larry*. I hope it's true that when you're determined to change the world, you really do end up making a difference.

Nick Engelfried

Runner Up To Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*

From Rose Engelfried, Hillsboro

Dear Margaret Mitchell:

People like to think they're right. I know it's true for me, certainly. It's true for the President of this country. And it was true for the plantation owners just before the Civil War. People like to think they're right. It's just the way we are.

And that's why we need books like *Gone with the Wind*.

Seem a little unconnected? Well alright, I'll elaborate. If I must.

Everyone thinks the North was in the right. And they were. I'm not saying slavery was good – far from it. I'm not black and I don't know anyone who is (not that I know many people at all. I'm no belle of the party like Scarlet was.) So I'm hardly qualified to talk. But it seems pretty obvious to me that slavery was wrong – about as wrong a thing as people can do, short of destroying their own planet with greenhouse emissions. But.

That's why we need books like *Gone with the Wind*.

Because in a way, the South was right. Enveloped in the world of Scarlet O'Hara and Rhet Butler, I lived as people of the South did, in a place where vast plantations were a way of life, with villas as old and stately as the families who lived in them; fine horses; magnolias filling the air with blossoms. And I could see why Scarlet didn't want all that to be destroyed, just because of the Northerner's fine ideals. Who would want to give up everything, even if the lifestyle they were living was not quite morally correct? C'mon, I do enough things in my everyday life that someone from the outside, someone uninfluenced by our current lives, would think were wrong. I ride in cars. I turn on lights. I flush the toilet after I go to the bathroom. All that's draining the resources of the world – resources we're going to rely on for the rest of our lives. It isn't right, one could say. How can you do that when you're destroying your own planet. It goes against everything you've ever said you believe in, you vegetarian, you environmentalist. But I do it, because to drop everything and live in a self-sustaining cabin in the woods would be too difficult, too different from the life I've always led.

Well, that's how it was with Scarlet O'Hara. She kept slaves, and maybe she even knew it was wrong, but she couldn't question it, couldn't imagine living her life any other way. I'm not saying that made it alright. Slavery was one of the biggest mistakes in the history of the United States. I'm just saying that Scarlet had a point, and it's harder to define right and wrong than you might think.

It's something I have to keep in mind in my day to day life. I get caught up in the environmental issues of the world. Gas guzzling cars are wrong. Drilling in the Arctic is wrong. Driving Amur leopards to the brink of extinction is definitely, irrevocably wrong. I have to force myself to stop, to think of Scarlet O'Hara, and the life she led. Think of right, think of wrong. Think of the other side – people who need SUV's to explore remote forests and see beauty that could be found no other way. The many Americans who find jobs with the oil industry (but come on, there must be another way). The people of eastern Russia for whom logging a few more trees might mean enough food for their family to be by for another week. I have to remind myself, *There's always another side. No one is right or wrong.*

I have to tell myself, *Just think of Scarlet.*

Rose Engelfried

Honorable Mention To Elie Wiesel, [Night](#)
From Maya Lim, McMinnville

Dear Mr. Elie Wiesel:

When my English class filed down to the book depository to check out our next reading assignment, my thoughts consisted of a solitary, and, in retrospect, rather bigoted, notion- yet another plot-less, depressing unending story about the Holocaust. Although I

loved to read historical fiction books with characters fighting bravely in suits of shiny armor for a King and Queen, history had never truly come alive for me. My family's past was no exception to me, and I usually "zoned out" when relatives talked about old times and friends I had no idea of how your memoir, Night, would change not only my narrow-minded misperceptions, but also my views about history.

With each page you articulately illustrate the grayness of a real war, in shades that I had never before been exposed to in my happily-ever-after novels about distressed princess and determined steeds. In each page I could clearly hear your voice crying out of the concentration camps, as plainly as your campmates wailed out of suffering before finally reaching Buchenwald. Nightmarish images of groups of infants burning in roadside pits, children dangling from a gallows and sons killing their fathers over scraps of bread were vividly etched before my eyes, and the word "Holocaust" gained a new meaning to me- in all aspects was the event a death by fire- the death of humanity, personality, a future.

I had nearly reached the point in your book when your father dies, when I began wondering about my own family legacy. I knew that my grandmother had survived a war, but the details were dark to me. I soon learned that, after having fled China's communism way by immigrating into South Korea, my grandmother with her father and stepmother, were soon swept up in the chaos of the Korean War. After futilely attempting to squeeze into an already packed air raid shelter, her father, my great-grandfather, tried to cover my grandmother with his body to protect his only daughter from the exploding bombs around them. Moments later he was struck by a large piece of shrapnel. The wound never healed; after several days of pain the man died, leaving behind a bitter widow and a fourteen year old daughter.

Just like my grandmother and great-grandfather, you and your father had stood for each other through the challenges of the Holocaust, until the end. When I read your recount of your father's last moments, I could only marvel at how every war, in a blind race to control, rips apart thousands of people's lives and families. Nevertheless, you and my grandmother held onto something that any amount of bombs or Nazi could never destroy- dignity. You never stopped your battle after your father lay in the red snow among other corpses; you never surrendered to the perfunctory SS officers. By surviving, and maintaining your poise and faith, you used your strongest weapon against the enemy. You remained undefeated, identical to my grandmother, who still lives in South Korea today.

Thank you, Mr. Wiesel, for sharing a piece of your life with me. You are Moshe the Beadle now; the torch is in your hands to spread the word of war's terrors and ugly truths. You've already lit my candle. Thank you for enlightening me.

Sincerely yours,

Maya Lim

Honorable Mention To Franciwsco Jimenez, The Circuit

From Jesus Vazquez

Woodburn High School, Woodburn

Why is it life harder for a person that is just learning to speak? English is not my native language, it is my second one. I cannot even remember how many times people made fun of me whenever I opened my mouth to speak. It is hard to study on an environment where your own schoolmates make you feel small, miserable or worthless. There are times I felt so frustrated that I just wanted to run out of the classroom and hide somewhere else. People made me feel like an idiot; they do not say it to my face though, but I can see their thoughts through their eyes.

Why is it life as twice as hard for an English learner like me? This is the question I ask myself every time I heard an English native person speaking without any trouble.

When I first came to this country I had no idea of what laid ahead. I knew there was a reason why my parents brought me here; to have a “better future.” That is what every body says and thinks, isn’t it? But do people really know how it is like to work for a better future? Yes, it is really easy to say it and is not that easy when people are actually going through the process of a better future. It is even harder when that person working for the American Dream had to do double work.

At the beginning of my first year of high school my confidence was lower than ever because I had no idea of what school was like. I had no friends, no way to communicate with people. But it was not until two years later in a class Called Ethnic and Immigrant Literature that my classmates and I had to read a book called The Circuit by Francisco Jimenez. The principal character had to deal with the same problem I used and still have nowadays’ the low language skills. When I read it, it was almost like looking at me in the mirror. The guy on the mirror did not looked exactly like me but I could see the fears and understand the issues he had. It was then I realized I was not the only one going trough this. I met a friend who shared a lot of experiences I had experienced before. “Panchito” was the character’s nickname. He was afraid to participate in class, to talk with school mates and to translate his parents. That is exactly how I felt during my first years in High School; like a weird person, like someone who came from another planet.

Of course not every body in the school made fun of my English. There were also friendly people who did not cared if you had an Asian, Hispanic, Russian, British, Italian or whatever accent you could imagine. These people are the ones that need to be called Real Friends. Most of my classes at that time were basically special classes to learn English, the rest of my schedule had classes in Spanish and the rest were shelter classes where both languages are spoken. My school world was small just like a bubble that floated around a huge one which was the English speaking world. Me, and my little world in the bubble wanted to enter into the big world to explore meeting new people, and to make friends. But in my situation as a non-English speaker would not let me in because of it. In the book Francisco Jimenez compared himself with a caterpillar. That caterpillar turned itself into a cocoon later on, and at the end a butterfly came out of it.

It was not an easy job for Panchito to transform himself into someone new. It took a lot of time, patience and most of all COURAGE to take a step forward and change. Like him, I read books and books, I wrote down words I did not understand and looked them in the dictionary. I practiced writing journals, stories, and poems. It took me the last three years and it will take the rest of this year as well to do the same process because I am not done yet. I barely started. It was not easy. Without dedication and long hours of work I would not be able to be where I am at the moment; I would not be able to write what I am writing now.

The circuit inspired me more than any other book I have ever read because it is different. It motivates me and gives me hopes to continue learning English. I learned that I can be as successful or even more successful than Panchito is. I have goals and dreams like any other teenager but I am sure that those dreams will no longer be dreams some day. Nothing is impossible, it is a lesson I have learned.

Jesus Vazquez