

2007 Letters About Literature Winners

Level I (4th-6th grade)

FIRST PLACE

To: Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*

From: Emily Boring, Salem

Dear Madeleine L'Engle,

Tessering, traveling through different dimensions, through different time. It's all so intriguing. Anyone who read your book would be satisfied with just that. Sort of like an artichoke, (I don't like to compare your book to something like that, but it was the best thing that came to my mind) A Wrinkle in Time is good and enriching on the outer layers, but you have to persist through those layers first before finding the best part, the heart, which is different for everyone.

When I read your book, I sensed that there was something underneath the writing, so I kept an eye out. I found myself drawn towards not the main character, Meg, but towards Charles Wallace.

I have a brother named Aaron. He is two years younger than me and he has special needs. He has trouble communicating and can't do simple things like dress himself or tie his shoes. Few people understand him, or even *try* to understand him. That's why I took an interest in Charles Wallace. Though Charles doesn't get along with many people and everyone thinks he's not smart at all, he understands about tessering and everything that's *really* important, not just subjects in school, better than anyone. Maybe Aaron is very bright inside, but he just can't express it.

Also, since Charles Wallace doesn't talk much, he is good at reading feelings. He can always sense when Meg is feeling a powerful emotion, like their minds are connected by an invisible wire. Sometimes it seems as though Aaron can sense the same kind of thing; since he doesn't understand most speech, wouldn't that make his ability to read feelings twice as strong?

Like an artichoke, everything on the outside is good, and most people would leave it at that. But I found the heart of your book; just like Charles Wallace, Aaron is behind in many ways, but far, far ahead in others.

Emily Boring

RUNNER-UP

To: Kevin Kenkes, *Olive's Ocean*

From: Grace Diehl, Salem

Dear Kevin Henkes,

Most books don't make me think beyond the plot. Your book, *Olive's Ocean* was different. It taught me that the world could exist without me. If I were to die, life for all others would continue, completely unknowing that I was dead.

My world changes forever when I got to the part where Martha almost drowned. My eyes were glued to the page. I was unable to look away. It wasn't her I thought of drowning. It was me. My life is much different than Martha's, but for one moment our lives were the same. When I put the book down at the end I was changed. I was grateful to have such a good family and simply to be alive. I felt like I was the one who had almost drowned. Now I know just how much I love my life.

Your book also showed me how much I love my family. When I began to read your book, my parents really annoyed me. They were being overprotective. I wanted to have different parents, any ones but the ones I have. After reading your book I realized family arguments didn't change how much I love my family. Now I wouldn't trade my parents for any others in the world. Every family has its problems, but my families perfect for me.

Your book taught me a lot. I'll never forget any thing I learned!

Sincerely,
Grace Diehl

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HONORALE MENTION

To: Nancy Krulik, *Who's Afraid of Fourth Grade*

From: Diana Mejia, Portland

Dear Nancy Krulik,

I like the character Katie. She is just like me. When it was the first day of school, I was a little nervous because it will be a little hard. But then, one week later, it was not so bad after all! Katie did not have to be mad because she did not get the class she wanted. Maybe the teacher was nice.

When I read the book it made me think of my sister because Susanna bragged a little because she got Miss Sweet. That made me feel bad. My favorite part was when Katie describes what Miss Derman dresses like: the shoes and the hair.

I learned that it doesn't matter which teacher you get because all the teachers are nice and fun.

Sincerely,

Diana Mejia
Portland, Oregon

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HONORABLE MENTION

To: Erin Hunter, *Dawn*
From: Alise Nikitenko, Beaverton

Dear Erin Hunter,

My name is Alise and I recently read your book entitled, “Dawn” from the New Prophecy series. As I was reading I couldn’t help but realize that I too had a long journey that I had to take. As all the Clans had to move from their homes and surroundings that they loved and enjoyed, I too had to move to a new place. The reason is that I originally lived in Russia, but I had to move with my mom to a very dark and mysterious place called Oregon. As Firestar and the Clans didn’t know what to expect, at least they knew the language. I, upon arriving in this new country, didn’t read or write English.

At first, it was really challenging going to American school, not knowing what everyone is talking about, and not having any friends. It seemed like everything was dark and unknown. I would have loved to participate and discuss what everyone was doing but the language seemed impossible to learn. However, after time, as the Clans found their new territory and became comfortable with it, I too became comfortable living in Oregon. Because I went to school every day and all people around me were talking in another language, I started learning English, step by step, and pretty soon I knew the language as good as anyone else and was an expert on spelling.

I really enjoyed reading “Dawn” as the experiences the Clans went through I too went through the same experiences but only on a much different level. I was amazed to see how much I, Firestar, and the Clans had in common.

Thank you for writing a great book. Your book made me understand that any place can be good for a home, after you know how to live in it. I am looking forward to reading more of your books and finding more similarities between me and the Clans.

Sincerely,

Alise Nikitenko
Beaverton, Oregon

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HONORABLE MENTION

To: Alice Kern, *Tapestry of Hope*

From: Keep Nathanson, Portland,

Dear Alice Kern,

Thank you for taking the events that happened to you during World War 2 and writing Tapestry of Hope. It must have been hard for you to write about these terrible events that happened to you that you might not want to talk about.

Before I read your book, when I thought about concentration camps, I would sometimes think, *I probably could survive the concentration camps, how hard could they really be?* Now I know that the chances of that aren't very big. This is probably because what I had read and heard about concentration camps wasn't everything. Many books I've read don't use that much detail, and they don't mention every terrible thing that happens in those awful places. In Tapestry of Hope however, you told a least enough things to make anyone who reads your book realize that surviving a concentration camp wasn't a snap. Like how you mentioned you could be hit or killed for no reason and how little food you got, like sometimes just a piece bread and cup of water. Those and so many other things you talk about make me realize that if you survive the concentration camps, you are a lucky one, and that it took a lot of determination and courage, which leads into the other thing I learned from your book.

The other thing I learned from your book was to never give up. In Tapestry of Hope, every second you spent in those camps you were determined to live. Never once did you say to yourself, "I can't take any longer, I don't want to live!" You figured out that never giving up was one of the keys to surviving the concentration camps. To never give up is also something you can put to use in every day life. If you are always saying, this is too hard, I can't do it, then you are never challenging yourself. Never stop trying, if something's hard, ask for help, but don't give up. You learned that the hard way, but you listened to that life lesson, and you got to keep your life. If everyone in the world was that determined to do everything they try, this you be a much better world.

Thank you for writing a book that taught me and probably hundreds of people what the world sometimes is really like, and how to get through it.

Sincerely,

Keep Nathanson
Portland, Oregon

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HONORABLE MENTION

To: Agatha Christie: *The Mystery of the Blue Train*
From: Sophia Nielsen, Lake Oswego

Dear Agatha Christie,

I have to admit that before I read your book (of which there are many, I've heard) The Mystery of the Blue Train, I thought I had read every version of a mystery (well, not every mystery, but I've read a lot, mostly vintage). I mean that mysteries didn't surprise me anymore. (I'm not quite to the point of my mom, who figures out the answer to any mystery practically before the author even does, but I can usually tell who "did it" before the end of the book or movie or whatever).

The reason I first started your book was for a mystery unit we were starting in class. Originally, I wanted to continue the Trixie Belden series, which I collect, along with other classic mystery novels, but I couldn't find any. Not to sound as though your novel was a second choice or anything, but it's true. We finally just had to head over to the local Borders to find a book for me after I failed to find the next book in the series. I have to say, I am very glad that I did.

I have read ironic books, including O. Henry's, but those books you can always expect to be ironic and unexpected to the point where the twist is nearly obvious to a sharp "eye." But while reading *your* book, I was sure that I had the solution all figured out from about halfway. I was sure that Mirelle had gone against Derek and had a thug murder Ruth Kettering. I was so sure. Everything she did, everything she said, just seemed to tug the trigger more so in her direction when it came to guilt.

You completely and totally humbled me; nearly to the point of embarrassment. I've always been the person to peer around the corner and try to see something from a different view, but your book really got me thinking. Not just to increase empathy, which I *mostly* have in plenty (hey, nobody's perfect).

I have come to the conclusion that any question, any view, any thing anywhere at all, is like a crystal. From every angle you see a different facet; sometimes you see nothing at all; sometimes there is something that obscures your view. So you got me to realize that life, death, or whatever, *is a crystal*. Anything you see, or think you see, you can only understand or know if you look at it from every possible angle. So I've begun applying this to other things in my life, other than reading.

So I suppose, in a way, you, Agatha Christie, with your upside down, unexpected to the point of shocking novel was not quite opened, but widened and added wisdom and color to my eyes and sight.

Sophia Nielsen
Lake Oswego, Oregon

PS From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

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HONORABLE MENTION

To: Jerry Spinelli, *Stargirl*

From: Ali Hentzel, West Linn

Dear Jerry Spinelli;

Stargirl is one of the best books of all time. Every time I read it, I notice something I didn't see before, and I can look at the book with new eyes.

Stargirl was a very interesting character. Imagine naming yourself! Technically, she changes her identity each time she changes her name, but inside she stays the same. I mean, why must we be stuck to a name we were given at birth? Lots of people hate their birthnames.

My town is similar to Stargirl's town. People change themselves to fit what they think is pleasing to the public. People who don't wear "popular" brands and who don't show interest in "popular" things are tossed aside by self proclaimed "popular kids." But the "losers" could be the coolest of them all! They are truly themselves, not caring about popularity and their social status. They are the people who grow up to be somebody. They are like stargirl in that way.

Sometimes the "popular kids" act like themselves, but more times than not, they follow one leader. It seems wonderful to be one of them, but then you waste your childhood making sure you look like the models.

After I read Stargirl, I began to notice every detail of one of the "popular" girls. Every time she moved a muscle it was planned. Her standing positions were more like poses. Even the words that passed her lips were empty and fake. Maybe they meant something inside her head, but once the sounds made contact with the air, they were nothing. They did seem to prove something, however. They seemed to say with a whole new voice, "Look at me. I'm popular. You want to be just like me."

I 'm not prejudiced against popularity or anything. If you be yourself, and people like you, that's cool. What's not cool is pretending to be something you're not, even if it makes you popular. I mean, if writing stories, books, etc. were out, you wouldn't stop, would you?

I think Stargirl had a big impact on lots of other people too, and I hope people never stop learning from it.

Truly,

Ali Hentzel
West Linn, Oregon

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Level II (7th and 8th grade)

FIRST PLACE

To: Joseph Bruchas, *Code Talker*

From: Junior. Jaime, Gresham

Dear Mr. Joseph Bruchas,

Some books are recommended. Some are picked randomly. And other books just jump out at you. I think your book *Code Talker* jumped at me. Somehow your book caught my attention and I'm glad it did. Before I knew it, I read through 230 pages of one of the best books ever.

I was in my school library when the book fair was there. I searched through many books, but none of them seemed to get my attention. I left for the exit. Then, as I was convinced there was nothing to read, your book caught my eye. I didn't know why, but I felt there was something about that book. I looked at it, skimmed through it, then put it down. I thought that it wasn't worth the money I had in my wallet. But the book just kept popping up. So I bought it, not knowing why I was spending money on a book I didn't seem to like. But that all changed after I read the first few chapters. I couldn't put it down. *Code Talker* was a truly good book and your descriptive words made me feel as if I were Ned Begay. But that's not the only thing I felt.

Though I wasn't on Bougainville or Guam, your words led me by the hand to those islands far away from my home. I felt the pain and suffering of the Leathernecks who infiltrated the hostile beaches. I felt the hotness and humidity of the swamps invaded. I felt as if I was in the crossfire of the Japanese. I was Ned Begay. You made sure that I was with you through the journey; from the ranch, to boarding school, and all the way to Iwo Jima and back. You made sure that I was laughing with Smitty and Georgia Boy, yet desperately sending messages through the code invented by the few lucky Navajos. I lived with them, ate with them, breathed with them, and when battle broke out, I was right there, firing weapons and digging foxholes. I learned the way of the Leathernecks. I learned the way of the Japanese. But most of all, I learned the way of the Navajo.

Not only did your book teach me about warfare in World War Two, it reinforced many things that people around me have said. One of the things that stuck out like a sore thumb were your words on page 148. "Never forget, grandchildren, that we must always see all other people as human beings, worth of respect. We must never forget, as the Japanese forgot, that all life is holy." Mr. Bruchas, I think that those two lines can apply to almost every problem that has happened, is happening, and will happen. Those words also make me remember what my parents say about equality. They say that no matter how tall you are, or what color skin you have, or if you're a boy or girl we're all equal. This saying helps me in my everyday life. As was Ned, I too am small for my age. Also, I am a minority. Just as Ned is Native American, I am Mexican. But people really jump on me for my height. I tell my parents about my height, but they say "it doesn't matter, you have a big heart". For years I thought they were just saying that. But my older cousins, friends, and even relatives say that they went through what I am going through. And now

that I am moving on to High School, I see that they have been right. Sometimes short people will be needed, as well as minority.

There was a time when I wanted to change my background. I wanted to be a normal (and tall) American kid. But your book, Mr. Bruchac changed my perspective of looking at things forever. If I had the chance to be tall or change backgrounds, I wouldn't. Why? Because "...we must see all other people as human beings, worthy of respect." Mr. Bruchac, thank you for this book

Jr. Jaime
Gresham, Oregon

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RUNNER-UP

To: Robert Frost, *Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening*
From: Lyric Tucker, Ashland

Dear Robert Frost,

It was 4th grade, and we had an assignment. We had to choose a poem that we thought was interesting, read it over and over, and then memorize it. I explained to my teacher that I had no interest in poetry, and asked if I could do something else. He suggested that I check out a few by a writer named Robert Frost, especially his favorite, "Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening". I went home that day and typed into the Internet; it came up, and I read it. Something happened in that moment. I was there. I became the horse. Standing by the frozen lake, wondering where to go next. I like it so much, that I printed it out and read it, over and over and over until there was so much good writing in my head that I felt like I was sky diving, letting the words surround me as I flew down the page. I memorized it, and was very happy about how interested I was by this writing style. Your work inspired me to pay attention to writing, so I could work on developing different styles and techniques. Something that's really magical about this poem, is that as I read it, pictures come up in my head, painting a place where I can go anytime I want. Past the moon, beyond the stars, into my imagination, where I can do or say or think all to myself.

This poem has taught me two main things: One: don't just assume things. Take time to look over them more than a glance. Like me, I assumed poetry had nothing in it, nothing useful, and was a waste of time, until I found this poem. It changed my mind completely. Two: poetry can be really fun and get you to think out of the box. Before I read this, I always stayed inside a little tiny box in my imagination, and now I can go beyond, into a magical place that can't even be explained. Poetry can help you use your imagination, and make it fly. Even if you're not artistic on paper, your imagination is your whole canvas. It helps you create pictures and thoughts you can't physically do. Thank

you so much for helping me to see these things. My life is truly different with poetry in it, especially yours.

Sincerely,

Lyric Tucker
Ashland, Oregon

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HONORABLE MENTION

To: Jane Austin, *Pride and Prejudice*

From: Elizabeth Harbaugh, Corvallis

Dear Jane Austin,

I can't say that I've ever been in love. As a middle school girl, I hear that word uttered often, from my peers, but I never take it seriously. How are we supposed to know what real love is, when our relationships consist of walking down the hall holding hands? No one around me seems to realize that we have our whole lives to say those three strong words to people when we actually mean it; instead they say it as often as they can to the partner that they have that week.

Pride and Prejudice didn't jump into my arms, or attract me like a magnet; I used my own hands to open it, it didn't present itself to me. As a little girl in a small town, my world consisted of Disney movies, the New Morning Bakery, and books. My little eyes felt as though I was surrounded by them, their pages full with words I didn't understand. I never could get my mind off the books; even as I sat on my fathers lap struggling with colorful 10 page ones about Max and his kite. Each book that I have read since those days has stayed with me, collecting in my brain, creating ideas that turn into sentences, then pages.

The true mind of love came out within the pages of this novel. Being a teenage girl, I saw the love story that I craved within the book, dancing along the pages in words that formed art, this art pleasing the side of my soul that is fixed on becoming a writer. From this book, I didn't find myself hoping to cure world hunger, or wishing for a love like the one that Elizabeth had, but rather longing to write and describe feelings as you had, to touch the heart of a reader.

Each character in this book had true feelings and issues, some that would never get resolved, real issues, real flaws, real lives that can be seen everyday. Through my feelings for my father, who died in the past year, I can see Mr. Bennet, wanting his daughters to grow up happy and in love, but wondering if he will ever see his little girls as his own again before his time for passing comes. The truth that lies within his feelings is that this problem will never have a solution. I have come to know that many forms of hate can be based on love, and visa-versa. Simply saying "I love you," doesn't mean that you do; rather the picture of Elizabeth shows love without words, the words on the page

embodying a girl with tears on the rims of her eyes, unsure of the feelings that her heart holds.

The feelings that are expressed on these pages are the ones that I want to have the ability to write, and by reading this book, I feel that this ability will be open to me. I have collected styles of writing from each book that I have read, and with this one I believe I have collected the most talent, the most inspiration. Although I cannot change how my friends feel about love, I can be sure that as time goes on they may find inspiration like this that shows the true meaning of the words that they use so loosely. In turn, I can assure myself that one day, girls that hold the word love on the tip of their tongue may read a piece of writing from my pen, and discover the same ideas I've found.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Harbaugh
Corvallis, Oregon

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Level III (9th -12th grade)

FIRST PLACE

Book Title: *The BFG*

Author: Roald Dahl

From: Keeley Grace Tillotson, Tualatin

Dear Roald Dahl,

The first book of yours that I read was *The BFG*, when I was 8. The moment I started reading about Sophie and the Big Friendly Giant, I was entranced. Like any other child who read the book, I, too, wanted to catch dreams in jars and visit the Queen of England. I checked the book out from the library countless times; loving it more each time I read it. So, when I saw a tattered but sturdy hardback copy of *The BFG* at my library book sale for ten cents, my mother paid the dime and I hugged the book to my chest the whole car ride home. I read it through myself time after time, and then one day I started reading it to my little sister, McKinna. We sat in the hollow between my headboard and my bed with a flashlight, sitting on pillows. To my delight, she loved *The BFG* as much as I did. Most spare moments we would be in there, reading. I loved reading aloud, loved looking at McKinna's face as she heard the same words I had read a year earlier, succumbing to the magic that children all over the world already had. We looked at Quentin Blake's illustrations, marveling at the BFG's huge ears and studying his queer laced-up shoes, (and noticing with delight that, in your photo in the back, you were wearing the same shoes). WE were almost disappointed when the BFG and Sophie

thwarted the cruel and evil giants, and the book came to an end. We moved on to *Mr. Fox*, *Matilda*, and *The Twits*. But somehow we kept coming back to *The BFG*.

A year later McKinna brought *The BFG* to her school for show-and-tell about her favorite book. She could read it on her own now, but I read it aloud to her again, and the same illustrations and story came back to life. We watched while, just as before, Sophie plunged the brooch into the giant's foot for victory. There was truly nothing more satisfying.

Now, I am fourteen years old and McKinna is twelve. In high school and middle school we have read many books of various literary merits, but we both still agree that your BFG is our favorite. Now why is this? Did we love the story and characters? Definitely. But there is more. As I turn the familiar pages and Sophie is snatched from her bed just as she always was, I remember how McKinna was wiggling her front tooth with anticipation. And, of course, how we laughed together while the BFG and Sophie experienced the most wonderful whizzpoppers. We were both sick when we read about Sophie crawling in the Queen of England's window, and a box of tissues accompanied us into the headboard nook that day. Every sentence is loaded with memories, the illustrations a map to the things we wanted and cared about back then. I can trace my absolute adoration and close bond with my sister back to that book, those times huddled in my headboard learning and growing and laughing, together.

So I suppose that not only is this letter just a letter, but a thank-you note, for so many good minutes and hours and days to treasure over a lifetime. Even though we never caught dreams in jars or rode in a giant's ear, reading about it was a journey, and a fun one at that, for McKinna and me.

We still have that same copy of *The BFG*. And—we definitely still read it.

Sincerely,

Keeley Grace Tillotson
Tualatin, Oregon

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RUNNER-UP

Book Title: *The Silver Kiss*
Author: Annette Curtis Klause
From: Cody Waters, Vale

Dear Annette Curtis Klause,

From the first page of [The Silver Kiss](#) I was bound. Every word spoke ropes and shackles to my heart, connecting, binding me to it. Several events before my reading of it,

I believe, directly instigated my feelings to its poetic, near disheartening, yet emotionally stimulating pages.

I was going through a change, the one that everyone goes through, and no one really knows why them, why at that time. I was alone, surrounded by friends, family, everyone. It was a low point, the tides of life washing me against the jagged rocks, drowning me all the while. Smothering my emotions, molding me, and I had no idea where I would end up. I can see now that in our society, even in my small community, we all strive to be almost the opposite of what we should. “Cool” in no other terms. I have never been, what I would describe as a good looking guy. My features seem to be neutral, not repulsive though not attractive. It was for that reason I was getting desperate. I wanted people to know my name, because most of all I was needing that attention. I have always been intelligent, people only looked up to me in that regard, and I was feeling like giving up.

I was about half way through my freshman year when a friend recommended to me your book, The Silver Kiss. I had never had a problem reading anything before, no matter how “girly” it seemed, but this time something was different. He assured me, and I had no choice, I checked it out. The feelings expressed in the opening chapter only invigorated my newly kindled sense of desire, the desire to uncover every detail of this books pages. I temporarily forgot about my daily problems. I was with Simon and Zoe when they shared the silver kiss. I was walking with Christopher as he lured and devoured. I was Simon as he evaporated into nothing. Every feeling, every emotion welled up inside of me, and when I finally finished I felt whole again. Like somehow I had grown over my obsessions, and finally realized what really mattered. My attention and resolve felt at an apex, I was me again.

My father was, and still is dancing with enough health problems to drain the will out of any lesser man. He experienced a stroke, soon followed by a heart attack. In the back of my mind, though I didn't have any reason to justify such a thought, I knew he wouldn't make it. As I read about Zoe and her mother, my mind experienced everything that had happened before with my father, over and over with every passing word. Each emotion made me feel a connection to her, and I felt Zoe's pain. I feel of course that she, much more than me, felt the effects in drastic terms, being almost pushed away by her father, being along. That was something I never experienced. The aspect I loved, yet despaired over most in reading passage after passage was the unbelievable sense of loneliness, in both Simon's and Zoe's world. Just as it was fate that they met, I feel it was fate that brought me to this book. It told me, through vivid, breathtaking characters, with each new line that I wasn't along. No matter how fictional I tried to imagine the characters, they were beside me as I read, easing my pains, my bottled hate and sorrow, out through my eyes. Their love gave me hope, and the demise of evil, the overcoming of death's desolate grasp; a sense of courage.

A true blessing, when; like a blink of an eye, a story of such caliber can enter someone's life and just as quickly disappear, end so abruptly, yet change that life for the better. The Silver Kiss is definitely a book I will always remember, always praise, and always cherish. It set me on a path paved in love and honor, kept me company when I couldn't go on any longer. It saw me through a painful time, and soothed the sorrow within me. Who would have thought such a composition of words, emotions and thought could do such a thing. Thank you.

With gratitude,

Cody Waters
Vale, Oregon

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HONORABLE MENTION

Book Title: *Girls in Pants, the Third Summer of the Sisterhood*
Author: Ann Brashare
From: Daishel Clark, Vale

Dear Ann Brashares,

The people within the pages of stories have always found their way permanently involved in my life; however, I have never been as bonded to a fictional person, the way I am Tibby, in the novel *Girls in Pants, the Third Summer of the Sisterhood*.

While my eyes scanned the pages of this beloved novel, I materialized the conclusion that Tibby's endeavors with her younger brother and sister were like the ones I was experiencing with my own siblings. My sixth grade year brought many changes into my home, including the addition of a new baby sister, making our small family of four, now four plus one. Those next few years were the most formless my family had ever encountered. Let's just say this kid was no walk in the park. Thoughts raced in my head at high speed without a toe on the brakes. Like Tibby, I felt ignored and cast away. Were my brother and I really being discarded like an old pair of shoes and replaced by a fresh pair of Nikes? My final diagnosis of the situation was that my parents had purposely pushed the reset button on the controller of life. One thing was for sure, my doors were shut to my new sister, and they weren't about to open, until I met Tibby.

More than three years following the hatch of the intruder I picked up the book. My mind was once again in a tornado of thought, without confusion, but with relief. Here is an individual who sympathizes with what I am going through. Tibby undoubtedly loves her younger sibs like I unconsciously loved mine, but as we all know it takes something huge, maybe even tragic to remind yourself just how much.

Misfortune cast its shadow over Tibby's family, when Katherine, her three-year-old sister fell out of a window and fractured her skull, That day my family looked over blankly at a little body on the doctor's table. My body went numb as I watched needles prod my fragile sister. Her broken cry brought tears to my eyes, within this catastrophic scene, there was my mom, heart broken tearful and clutching my sister's tiny hand in her own. My mom truly cherished her the way she deserved. As it usually did my head reached its climax of thought...when was the last time I had reminded her that I really did love her, and she meant the world to me? Big sisters were supposed to be idols; I could

honestly say that I wasn't. As well as Tibby did, I grew into my responsibilities of being a sister.

Initially I want to thank you for a new found friend. Not just for Tibby, but my sister, who is in full health at three and a half. I look forward to watching her grow into her restless and caring personality, and welcoming her through my doors for years to come.

In the end, Tibby reminded me, of the most important things in my life, and although my family isn't perfect it's the only one I have.

Sincerely,
Daishel Clark
Vale, Oregon

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HONORABLE MENTION

Book Title: *The Mozart Season*
Author: Virginia Euwer Wolff
From: Rose Engelfried, Hillsboro

Dear Virginia Euwer Wolff,

I live for contests.

In summer, there's the county fair. I've entered that since I was thirteen; a few poems and more than a few paintings and drawings. Then starting around September I start thinking about another contest – this one.

And then it's January. Duck Stamp time.

I'm obsessed with ducks. Not the yellow and green ducks people around here seem to have on their shirts all the time – I think those ducks are sports-related, don't ask me how or why. No, I mean the birds. Live in wetlands, waterproof feathers, some of the most beautiful animals on earth. You know the ones I mean. Anyway, I love them. And I live to paint them.

There is this contest, see. The Federal Junior Duck Stamp Design contest. Students can enter a painting or drawing or a duck (or goose, or swan, or native waterfowl of Hawaii...) They get judged. First it's by state, then the winners move on to the National. This'll be my third time entering. This year, I'm going to give it all I have.

And the thing is, I probably never would have entered if not for *The Mozart Season*.

And I guess they aren't that connected, your book and my life. Allegra's a musician. I'm a painter. But the world of contests, of giving your best, of being judged -0 of, maybe, winning – opened up to be when I read *The Mozart Season*. I had no idea whether Allegra would win or not; it didn't matter. Just the process of trying so hard for something; that fascinates me. Obviously, since now I do it too.

I first heard about the Duck Stamp contest a few months before I read *The Mozart Season*. My dad brought home a flyer from the library. I looked at the pictures of artwork that had won in the past, thought, *No way could I paint like that*, and set the flyer aside. Then I read your book.

By the time the next year rolled around, there was nothing I wanted more than to enter that contest.

So skip ahead to late March. I'm at the Loyd center building in downtown Portland, and it's time for the open judging of Oregon Duck stamps to take place. Mom and I go into an official room set out with tables. On the tables are pictures. All of birds. Water birds.

There were only a few other viewers there. One was a boy in my age group. He did pastels, I did oils. His was...rather impressive.

Finally, it was time for the judging. I guess my contest is a little different from Allegra's. She had once chance to play her best, then it was done. I had months and months to draw the perfect duck. But it ended in the same way; in a room, with another contestant; watching judges choose, unknowingly, mine or not mine.

Mine made it to Honorable Mention.

Allegra's music teacher had thought she was good enough to stand a chance.

I got to top twelve in my age group.

Allegra had been chosen as one of the final contestants.

I was one of three first places.

Allegra had been chosen as one of the final contestants.

I made it to top five in all age groups.

Allegra had hoped...

And I didn't win.

And she hadn't won.

So you'd think inspiring me to enter a contest – the contest of my life – would be enough of a way for your book to change my life. But there's more coming, I think – even after I go on to win the national contest, which I plan to do this year (yeah, good luck with that). I've gotten an idea for a book, too – a book about the Duck Stamp contest. That's not to say I'll write it; the idea's been fermenting in my brain for a year and a half now. But I might. And this won't be a look about someone like me, I'm going to have people getting to know each other (as opposed to me, who smiles and that's it), and then competing for what they both want most in the world. And maybe it'll be the first book I ever get published. Or maybe it won't. My second year I only go to Honorable Mention in the Duck Stamp. But I'm still glad I entered. It was still a wonderful winter, full of art. And I have you to thank. You, Allegra, and Mozart.

Rose Engelfried
Hillsboro, Oregon

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HONORABLE MENTION

Book Title: *The Piano Shop on the Left Bank*
Author: Thad Carhart
From: Maya Lim, McMinnville

Mr. Carhart,

When I first began taking piano lessons, I absolutely loathed recitals. I hated everything about the regular tortures; the line of sweaty-handed and pale-faced fellow victims, the staring audience, the unfamiliar instruments, and most of all, the magnifying silence that permeates the hall when a finger falls erroneously or a mind clanks.

I always kept a misconception that my music should be for my own enjoyment and if there were judges or even a public audience I could never be comfortable, not to mention happy. For half a year I even stopped taking lessons because of this. Even when I eventually returned to the bench and my years of music study continued (as did the performances), I never truly was aware of how music could touch people's lives so deeply until I forever lost a companion and began to understand your book.

Early on in your memoir, [The Piano Shop on the Left Bank](#), you also remember your childhood recitals, and as your childhood passion rekindled and you began to take lessons as an adult, you never forgot the gawking spectators. As I read on, though, I began to see why the ordeals never became an obstacle for you as it was for me. All around you in the Parisian atelier you witnessed directly how music is the strongest form of communication between an artist and an instrument, and an instrument with the listeners. Your descriptions of Jean-Paul's frustration in a thinly-walled apartment complex and Mathilde and Luc's relationship connected by piano strings sparked me to begin wondering if there was more to playing than just self-satisfaction.

I had been lightly toying with this new idea for some time until the death of a close family friend commanded my attention. My friend had always loved music and had been a constant source of encouragement in my piano studies, so in remembrance of her, I played a simple Mozart piece at the funeral. As I sank my fingers into the finishing notes, I glanced up at the assembled mourners and was shocked. What had been a forcedly controlled group was now splashed with several noses in tissues. Each listener had connected the music to the lady's life in their own way and I felt an inexplicable gladness for sharing a little of what the elderly music lover had always wanted supported. At that moment, I comprehended your determination and why the pianists in the atelier loved the sound, any sound, of music.

Ever since that catalyst, something that my piano teacher once told me when I had pre-performance anxieties has gained a special meaning to me: "It's not about you, it's about the *music*." The more I thought about it, the more sense it made – one shouldn't perform in fear of making errors, or worse, selfishly hoarding music to oneself. With your book, I have come to realize how important a musician's job is in spreading and sharing the powerful gift; one should be proud in contributing to the circulation of the timeless art and deepest and most diverse means of expression – music. Thank you for sharing.

Sincerely,

Maya Lim

McMinnville, OR

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