

Level 3 (9th – 12th grade)

FIRST PLACE:

To: Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*
From: Maya Lim, McMinnville, OR

Dear Anne Lamott,

Since you insist that “good writing is about telling the truth”, I will try to tell it to you the best I can.

Ever since I was five, I thought I wanted to be a doctor. This switched between veterinarian and pediatrician over the years, but I always envisioned myself in a white lab coat with a stethoscope dangling around my neck. Always. That would be me, and I never imagined otherwise. This pristine picture lasted twelve years. Then two things happened. First, I met my high school junior English teacher. Second, I read your book, *Bird by Bird*.

To be honest, I was nervous going into Mr. Witten’s class. It wasn’t that I was particularly bad at writing or reading – no, I loved to read. It was just that I didn’t know him at all. What if he didn’t like my writing? What if he hated my essays and I got a B in his class? What would happen to my chances of medical school with a stained grade point average? For about a month, I combed through all my work as a vet combs a maltese for fleas. Except in a far more panicky fashion – my grade, my future, was at stake here! And then, I got my first essay back.

I scanned it over. Scribblings in green ink between the lines and in the margins. “Expand!” “Good point. What else?” “Strong imagery.” And then, at the end of the paper, “Excellent work! Keep going. A.” I breathed relief. I got my A. But for some reason, this A felt weird. I looked over my essay again. Then I realized, there were no negative comments, no cross-outs. This had never happened to me before. All my English teachers before had covered my papers with red ink and nit-picky criticism. “Well,” I thought, “just because I did well on THIS essay doesn’t mean it will happen again.”

I ended up thinking this after every essay I got back. Mind you, I SLAVED over those essays – I knew there were no easy A’s in advanced English. But every time, supportive, encouraging green ink urged me to “Keep going!”, always probing me along to deeper explorations of literature with comments and questions. Soon, I found myself looking forward to writing essays. And after we finished a poetry unit, I couldn’t stop writing poetry. I had always been a reader, but now, I held the pen and couldn’t let go.

Great, you are thinking. But why are you telling me this? I’m telling you because this was frightening for me – I was turning into a WRITER; this was not in my plans! I’m telling you because it was then, in all my confusion about my future, that your book came into my suddenly unfamiliar life and stood there like the lighthouses you wrote about, just standing there, shining away into the turbulence of an ocean over which traveling ships chance a crossing.

But honestly, I only came to appreciate your book after doubting it and wanting to throw it against the wall. “Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor”? I sniffed. Perfectionism led to A’s! And I shouldn’t plot out my stories? I should concentrate on characters and how they develop? I had my life nicely plotted out, thank you, and I didn’t want to rewrite anything!

For some reason, however, I kept returning to *Bird by Bird*. Looking back, this must have been because I knew, subconsciously, I was reading the truth, good writing telling me the truth. Words I didn’t always want to hear, but when I heard them, I knew they rang true. “Writing,” you wrote, “is so often about making mistakes and feeling lost.” How could I stop reading? You were talking to me! Your book at once shocked and reassured me in its honesty. But I guess that the truth does this – surprise and comfort – because it tells us what we know we most need to hear.

So, I’m telling you my story because your book ended up setting me free – free from all the self-bound ropes I unwittingly left tied for twelve years. Your book came to me at this pivotal point in my life, when I discovered that writing had become part of me, and made me realize that possibly, just possibly, I was entirely wrong about my plans and just plain wrong in the way I planned. Your book made me see that maybe I just need to focus on my character in life, and just work on taking it places to which it feels a calling.

I’ll go step by step. *Bird by Bird*.

Very truly,

Maya Lim

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RUNNER-UP:

To: C.S. Lewis, *Chronicles of Narnia*
From: Erin Kahn, Salem, OR

Dear C. S. Lewis,
I have always thought that if I could visit any one of the places I have read about, I would choose Narnia. Ever since my mother read me your books at age six, I have been enchanted by this magical country where animals talk and fauns dance with dryads. At that time I was too young to take in the full meaning of your books, but I loved them anyway. Just this year, I read your books again to my seven-year-old sister, Leah, who I share a room with. This time, as I read them, I was amazed at all the deeper meanings and hidden truths that I had failed to notice before. I found myself anxiously reading long after my sister had gone to bed, unable to put down your books even though I already knew what was going to happen in them. I thought about them at school, and looked forward to reading with Leah each night. Sometimes I would hear or read

something and think, “hey, that’s like Narnia!” As I pondered the deeper meanings within each chapter, I began to realize that the world of Narnia isn’t so different from our world after all. Of course we can’t go on a voyage to the end of our world and we don’t have talking animals or magical creatures such as unicorns, centaurs, or dryads, but we’re alike in other ways. For example, in our world we are forced to make decisions similar to the ones made by the characters in Narnia. One of my favorite moments from your books is in *The Silver Chair*, when the witch has the children under a spell and tells them that there is no sun, no other world, and no Aslan. As I thought about this, I made a connection. Throughout our lives, people will try to get us to stop believing in what we know to be true. You wrote that the children felt relief as they repeated the witch’s words. Sometimes we may want to give in to pressure because everyone around us is, and it’s easier to just give up than to stand alone. Then comes my favorite part, when Puddleglum puts out the witch’s fire with his foot. He found the courage and strength to withstand pressure, even though everyone around him was giving in. I love what he said about how even if what he believes isn’t true, it seems a lot better than what the witch believes, and he’d rather just keep believing it anyway. I read this chapter during my first year of high school, a time in everyone’s life where they begin to be pressured more and find it more difficult to stand up for their beliefs. I’m glad to have learned this valuable lesson now.

This is only one of the many truths I have learned about from your Narnia books. From *Prince Caspian*, I learned that you should listen to others and do your duty, even when it would be easier not to. From *The Horse and His Boy*, I learned the value of setting aside our differences and working together. In *The Last Battle*, I learned the importance of courage and of fighting for truth to the very end, of never giving up, even when you know it’s hopeless.

One of the really wonderful things about the Narnia series is that you can read them over and over again, and never get tired of them. In fact, each time you read them, they’re different. I heard once that books are like rivers, you can never step into the same one twice. I know this is the case with your books. Every time you read them, you learn something new. It reminds me of what you wrote in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, on the dedication page. You said that, while your goddaughter Lucy was too old now for fairytales, there would come a time in her life when she would be old enough for them again. When I heard your books as a six-year-old they were only fairytales, now they are so much more. I know that in a few years I will read them over, and they will be completely different. I hope that someday, when my sister is older, she will read your books again. And when she does she will come to appreciate and learn from them as I have done.

Sincerely,
Erin Kahn



HONORABLE MENTION:

To: Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*
From: Hayley Anderson, Scappoose, OR

Dear Mitch Albom,

In the first years of my public school education I attended Grant Watts Elementary School. I remember that if you climbed all the way to the top of the jungle gym you could just see the high school students pass from class to class. I used to watch and think that I couldn't wait until I got there, until I could join the ranks of the big kids.

As I progressed through my education it was the same thing, I was always thinking one step ahead. Once I got to fourth grade it was, "I can't wait until Middle School!" Now I am two years away from college and already I can't wait. I look at the catalogues they send to my brother and daydream about the day I get to leave this mundane little town behind. I always feel as though there are bigger and better things to come, and I can hardly wait to get there. Reading your book made me realize that as I journey through life, I need to take time to enjoy the place I am at right now. Wishing for the future only makes the time we have here on Earth go by faster, and that is time we need to cherish. That is time we should spend with our loved ones, and those who mean something to us. That is time we should spend chasing our dreams, because in the end, that is all the time we have.

One of the parts of the story that affected me the most was when Morrie talked about hearing what others had to say. Not just listening to them, but hearing them. I have to admit that I have been guilty of such offenses; I think we all have. But when Morrie talked, I listened, and I think I am a better person for it.

While reading your book, I have to admit that I became a little bit frightened by the thought that even someone so confident in his ideals can lose his way in their life. It made me wonder if I, too, could become corrupted by our society and the expectations it holds for us. I like to think that I don't care about money, but the truth is that we all do. I don't think there is any way to escape it; we just need to learn to take a step back and ask ourselves, "Is this really important? Is this really what I want out of life?" Morrie's words inspired me to take a closer look at our society and see it for what it is. He was right; our culture does not make us feel good about ourselves. In fact it does the opposite. We should be encouraged to be and act like ourselves. Instead, we work hard to become what others say we should be: richer, skinnier, more powerful.

Within the pages of this book, I learned that in the end, none of this superficiality matters. What matters is that we spend our lives doing what is important to us. You have to view life as though everything is impermanent, because as you know, it is. My goal in life is to spend my time giving to those who I care about. I hope to someday be able to look back on my life and see it truly fulfilled, and thanks to your book, I just might get there.

Now in high school, I am able to look across at the students at Grant Watts Elementary School as they play at recess, and sometimes I envy them for their freedom. Then I think about this Morrie's words and I realize that I've had my time there. I've had my fun, and I can look back with certainty knowing that I have no regrets.

Sincerely,
Hayley Anderson

HONORABLE MENTION:

To: Janet S. Anderson, *The Last Treasure*
From: Anna Grabhorn, Scappoose, OR

Dear Janet S. Anderson,

"White Christmas", my mom's favorite Christmas song, was playing softly in the background as my younger sister and I raced to the glowing Christmas tree to see what our grandparents had brought us. Mine was fairly lightweight, small and covered in red wrapping paper. I paused a moment and looked over to check on my sister's progress. There were already shreds of paper all over the floor beneath her. She had that grin every child wears when they receive the number one gift on their wish list. Her number one just happened to be a new skirt made from florid fabric. As I turned back to my gift I began to excitedly tear the paper expecting to see my number one hidden inside as well...

That Christmas morning so many years ago, I didn't find my number one inside the red wrapping paper, but I did find something much more valuable. As a child, I rarely ever (by choice) read books at all, let alone one that is more than a hundred pages or so. On that Christmas morning when I opened that red wrapping paper and found a 257 page book inside, you can just imagine how quickly I put it to the side and kept on going. *The Last Treasure* was definitely not what I expected to find beneath the paper and was promptly banished to the un-read bookcase. This bookcase held around twenty or so other books that all had the same fate.

A year or so later I was having trouble sleeping. In a last ditch effort, I picked up a book – *The Last Treasure*. That night, I lay in bed reading for hours. I couldn't put it down. I loved it. I couldn't believe how naïve I was to assume that this newfound adventure was like the rest of the books on that bookcase. To my surprise, I finished it in a shorter amount of time than I usually would one half its size.

I loved the extraordinary adventure it took me on. To me, my life seemed so ordinary and boring. When I was reading *The Last Treasure*, I was able to be Ellsworth – a treasure hunting kid who helped save the family. I wasn't just my boring old self anymore. I was able to go explore a house with hidden passage ways and traps around every corner and within every page. I loved it so much

that I read it over and over again. It felt new and exciting every time I turned the pages.

The Last Treasure opened my eyes to so many new books that I would have never even glanced at before. It showed me that books can introduce you to a whole new world of wonderful excitements. Although *The Last Treasure* was unable to help me fall asleep that one night years ago, it did help me with a far more important struggle: finding and embracing the power of books. Years later looking back on that Christmas morning, it's ironic that one of my new favorite books used to sit on the un-read bookcase. Without this adventurous tale, I would have missed out on so many life lessons that I have learned through reading. I'm grateful for the night that I discovered *The Last Treasure*.

Thank you.

Anna Grabhorn

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HONORABLE MENTION:

To: J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter* series

From: Shenna Hillsman, Lebanon, OR

Dear Ms. Rowling,

In reading your stories I have found a bit out about myself. I have noticed that I am a brave and strong human being and that I can truly do anything that I put my mind to. I started reading your books when I was in the fourth grade and within the first few chapters of the first book I was already realizing how much your lead character Harry and myself really are. We have both lost people dear to us and been put in to a home situation that we didn't feel comfortable in. He with his aunt and uncle me with my soon to be stepmother.

He found his escape in Hogwarts.

And I have found mine in reading how much alike we are and how much alike our lives actually are. Though I don't myself practice magic. Through the second and third books our lives felt as if they were starting to differ. He was growing older and becoming braver, and with all of the moves I was going through your books were my only escape again. Tragedy strikes our lead once again and he is back to feeling alone. The death of his beloved godfather Sirius and the thought of my own mother's death tied us together again. My mother was involved in a fatal car crash and died at the sight of the accident. The thought that I was not alone that there is someone else out there going through the same thing I was helped me to fight through my bout of depression and realize that life does go on and that there is more for us to do than to wallow in self pity. We feel as if life is getting better that we are going to be ok.

Then when it seems his pain will subside and that his heart will heal another loved one that he looks up to and cares about deeply is ripped away from him and again the same sort of events happened in my life. A dear friend of mine fell asleep at the wheel while driving home and put his car into a ditch and once

again tragedy filled my life along with the lives of many of my friends and the He was loved my not a few but by many and he too will always be remembered but as I read and as Harry moved forward and kept strong and endured through the pain so did I.

Now as I read the closing lines to the last book I am again given the courage to keep moving forward with my life. I am applying to several different colleges to major in literature and minor in psychology. I am hoping to help children much like Harry and myself who have lost a loved one who they are very close to. I am hoping to help them in the same way that you have helped me. Not by pushing and telling them that everything will be all right at the first sign of trouble but by slowly showing that they will make it. That the road will be rough and troublesome and that there will be bumps and that at times their heart will ache and it won't be easy but in the end when we push through they will make it. So through everything I have just stated I just want to say thank you. Thanks so much because in my times of trouble you and Harry have helped me through and helped me to believe that I will be ok. I will survive. So again thank so much. I hope that one day I will be able to help people as you have helped me. Sincerely and strongly,
Shenna Marie Hillsman



HONORABLE MENTION:

To: Leon Uris, *The Haj*
From: Stephen Staszewski, Eugene, OR

Dear Mr. Uris,

Your book *The Haj* has had a profound effect on my life. It showed me the truth and plight about the Palestinians' exodus and betrayal at the hands of their brothers. This book has made me reevaluate my outlook on life and my whole life plan.

When I read your book I was able to identify and sympathize with the main character Ishmael. He was an ambitious child whose dreams were out of his reach due to circumstances out of his control. Ishmael was able to overcome his squalid and isolated upbringing to become a well educated but underappreciated member of society. Despite his ambitions he was unable to overcome his culture and preset destiny that was laid before him as soon as he was born a Palestinian at that time. His strife reminds me of my struggle against my less than perfect preset situation in life. I have experienced first hand what it is like to get a good education while battling less than hospitable surroundings. As a Jew living without a major Jewish community I have experienced discrimination in various forms. "Young Life" Christian groups constantly badger me to join them. This book has helped me cope with the circumstances of my life.

I am a Jewish teen living in a very Christian community. I don't really have any Jewish friends and I am not greatly involved in my synagogue. This book has made me realize that before anything, I am a Jew no matter where I am or where I'm going. It has given me the perseverance to preserve my Jewish identity within my Christian circles of influence. It has also given me a love for the land of my ancestors, Israel.

After I read your book, I started becoming very interested in Israel. I started to learn everything I could about Israel and I also started educating others. In eighth grade I did a project on the history of Israel's conflict with its Arab neighbors. The experience opened my eyes to the harshness of the world to those without influence, whether it is the Israelis in 1948 or the Palestinian refugees spread out across the Arab states.

In the beginning there was Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac. These are my ancestors who pioneered my religion and the land of Israel. Because of this book I have done everything I can do to become closer to Israel with further opportunities to make aliyah, or a pilgrimage to Israel and become an Israeli citizen. I have applied for a program that would allow me to spend the last three years of high school in Israel. Without this book I may not have had the courage to want to leave my friends and family, and move 6,000 miles away to a land that has a language that I do not know, a people I have not met, and a culture that I am not accustomed to. But Israel has it where it counts, identity. Thanks to your book this has been made available to me.

Before I read your book, I didn't have much background on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Now I feel that I have an opportunity to actually make a difference in a world that has watched this problem develop in silence for decades. I feel that by moving to Israel I would have the best opportunity to be part of the solution to this terrible problem. Like the characters in the book, I believe I can make a difference on a global scale despite my start in life. Perhaps I can be a diplomatic presence that is able to negotiate a peace treaty between the Israelis and Palestinians. Even if I am not able to help solve the problem, at least I will know that I tried to do something for the world.

Mr. Uris, your book has given me the strength and courage to go above and beyond what I had previously thought was my limit. It will be hard to find a novel that will change my destiny as much as yours has. My once murky future now is speckled by rays of light and hope thanks in part to your book.

Sincerely,
Stephen J. Staszewski

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Level 2 (7th grade – 8th grade)

FIRST PLACE:

To: Barbara Robinson, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*

From: Jesse Turner, Portland, OR

Dear Barbara Robinson,

Earlier this year, my parents got a divorce. I cried all the time, and almost a year later, I haven't gotten over it. Your book, The Best Christmas Pageant Ever, swept me away. I needed something happy for once. Your book is what saved me.

I first read your book in 3rd grade. My mother would sit with me on a special chair we have in our living room. I snuggled into the warm pink cushions of the chair, and the gentle arms of my mother. Sometimes, to feel like a "big girl" I would ask my mother if I could read it. I could somewhat tell she would get bored, because I couldn't read very well, but she stuck around, so at least I knew she cared. I have been reading those 80 pages over and over again for the past 4 years. Every time I start it, I can't put it down. I read it when I want to feel little again. To remember the time when my family was still whole. The way you wrote about a simple time, and that something as small as a church Christmas pageant can change lives, I feel that there's hope. Hope that everything in my family can be ok. I know not everything can change, I just don't want it to feel weird. I want to be like a normal family.

Just imagining the life of the Herdmans made me grateful, and realize that I should be grateful for what I have. I have a family, and I have friends, even though it doesn't always feel like it. I want to cherish every moment in my life, because I know it's worth everything. I try so hard to seem happy, and put on a show, because I hate for people to worry about me.

This year will be the first Christmas where my parents aren't still together. I know it won't be the same. I know the experience will most likely make me cry.

There's something so simple and so pleasant about the way you write, that it just makes me smile. Writing this letter about your book makes me smile. I can imagine, 7 years ago, waking up early on Christmas day. I can imagine a simpler time, being in a Christmas pageant.

The holidays make me happy, and your book has been my own savior for years. Each word, each sentence, and each paragraph, make me feel as if I'm there. It's my favorite, my own escape to a place where I can't cry. Because everything is perfect.

Its dust pages and bright cover just, well, I don't know. That's the thing about your book. It makes me happy, even when I feel depressed. But I don't know why. I can't pinpoint the sensation, I just know it's there.

Thank you so much,

Jesse Turner



RUNNER-UP:

To: Eleanor Estes, *The Hundred Dresses*
From: Adele Zawada, Lake Oswego, OR 97034

Dear Ms. Estes,

Your book entitled *The Hundred Dresses* is the most influential book I have read. I was first entranced by your story when my mom read it to me as a toddler. I loved the pictures of the beautiful dresses. Then, when I read it again as a first grader, I began to understand the message of peer pressure. In my most recent reading of the story, I see the global message of tolerance and respect for others. I find it amazing that even though you wrote your book in 1944, it still teaches lessons that can be applied to modern times.

In elementary school, I felt most connected to your character, Maddie. At this age, I recall events on the playground and in school that made me feel pressured to go along with the crowd, even though I knew that I should have stood up for what I believed. It is with shame that I remember being unkind to a good friend by going along with another girl's plan to write a letter that contained a hurtful message. I understand how Maddie must have felt. It is so hard to be strong in the face of such pressure. The good news is that I was able to make amends with my friend and apologize for what I did, which is something Maddie did not get a chance to do with Wanda. This experience also gave me a glimpse at how a person who has been bullied feels. My friend told me how hurt she was by my actions. Now I know, like Maddie, that I should stand up for what I believe.

Now that I am 12 years old, and am in middle school, I am just beginning to understand your story from Wanda's viewpoint. In one of my classes, we are studying current events. I see that there are many countries, including the United States, where people are still judged on their appearance and not for who they are. Some recent stories that I have read are about Muslim people who are treated poorly because of the way they dress and their cultural differences. They probably feel like Wanda did in your story. In some ways it is disappointing to think that we are having the same problems that we were having in 1944. Yet, I am hopeful that with stories like yours, young people like me will learn to accept people for who they are, not what they look like.

I plan to reread your book at different stages of my life. I wonder what other lessons I will gather from it in the future? Thank you for writing such beautiful yet simple story that has taught me so much already.

Sincerely,

Adele Zawada

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HONORABLE MENTION:

To: David Levithan, *Boy Meets Boy*
From: Xoren Frazier-Gorby, Eugene, OR

Dear David Levithan,

Knowing exactly who you are and what you want at a young age isn't always easy. That is why I identified with Paul. I am often alone and misunderstood, but while I read your book *Boy Meets Boy* I felt like I was surrounded by people who understood me.

I have known I was gay since I was very little. I told my parents I was gay when I was eight years old. They didn't really care I was still the same person I always had been. People at school were not as understanding. I wish I went to a school where there were an abundance of gays and other diverse people. If I went there, I would not be seen as a spectacle or a freak and I would be accepted.

My whole life my friends have been girls. Girls are more accepting of my femininity, but even they have their limits. My friends (who are girls) always talk about how they are sad and alone, but if I say how I'm alone and want a guy too, they get "weirded out". I know if I went to the school in *Boy Meets Boy* I would have friends who wouldn't cringe when I talked truthfully to them.

I have always been the odd one, but while I was reading your book I felt like I was surrounded by people just like me. When I was done with your book I felt hopeful like maybe one day I'll find someone to love me like Noah, and I might find people who understand me.

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HONORABLE MENTION:

To: Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*
From: Qiddist Hammerly, Portland, OR

Dear Mr. Khaled Hosseini,

In our world today, many people I know live their lives confined in the fantasy of their own world. For me, it is so important to take a step back and examine our earth from a more global point of view. Your book, *The Kite Runner*, was incredibly fascinating. It brought not only a memorable reading experience but a mind altering view of the world in which I live.

As I read the book, I noticed that although the characters lived in a completely different world than I do, the feelings and emotions still remained the same. The sense of betrayal that Amir felt toward his friend, Hassan, is a feeling that is universal. Although I can't say that this story greatly mirrored my life, I can say that I felt a strong connection between the characters. The devotion that Hassan had toward Amir is a relationship that is not often seen. The quote, "For you, a thousand times over" is something that to me reflects a bond greater than

friendship. It is a bond of brotherhood between two children growing up as one. My deep empathy toward the characters in the book surprised me, because I was not expecting to have such a deep connection with the characters that live completely different from me. This affected me because it made me look at the relationships between my friends, and it made me wonder what we would do for the well being of each other.

I personally believe I share some of the qualities and flaws of the characters in the book. I can understand the very quiet protection that Baba had for Amir, yet I can also feel Amir's frustration in seeking his father's appreciation and pride. I think I share some of Amir's yearning for wanting to please others. This is something that interested me throughout the book, because as Amir grew older he had to adapt to becoming more independent. I was moved by the way Hassan and Ali were considered part of the family, and how through Babi's eyes, religion is irrelevant. Throughout the book, I noticed Hassan's somewhat stolid manner was very influential to Amir. While Amir was more playful and not as careful with his words, Hassan had a deep truth within him that he could not betray. The theme of betrayal and forgiveness is what intrigued me, because it reflects on the many decisions everyone has to make in life.

This book has shown me a lot about the world. Although I have learned about different countries, experiences and traditions, the story of Amir has also changed the way I look at my own world. This book has made me more cautious of what I say, and more forgiving toward others. I also learned much more about the society and traditions of Afghanistan, in a way that was not only informative but inspiring. Although I hear on the news the updates of war and suffering in these places, it was never very real to me until I read this book.

In the weeks after reading the book, I was more observant of things around me. This to me is one of the greatest things I can get out of a book. To learn forgiveness, appreciation, and to gain greater wisdom of the world, that is what inspired me through this story. So to you, all I can say is thank you for giving me an experience I will be able to share for a lifetime, and that will help me to do more good for others in the world.

Most Sincerely,
Qiddist Hammerly

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HONORABLE MENTION:

To: Jerry Spinelli, *Stargirl*
From: Micaela Saling, Eagle Point, OR

Dear Mr. Jerry Spinelli,

I read *Stargirl* for the first time two years ago in the fifth grade. Notice I say **first**. On the literature perspective, it was amazingly written. I had read many of

your books and they all were. *Stargirl* was different though, it meant something much more than the words you wrote on the pages. Most likely *Stargirl* had a different meaning to each individual that ever read this book. To me it was about Leo and his difficult (and stupid!) choices, and Stargirl's emotions that she never really showed.

Besides the paragraph on the back of the book I loved this one on page 11. **“We wanted to define her, to wrap her up as we did each other, but we couldn't seem to get past “weird” and “strange” and “goofy.” Her ways knocked us off balance. A single word seemed to hover in the cloudless sky over the school: HUH?”** It basically sums up the first part of the book and how the school feels about her, but to me it didn't. Sure she was different, but in the end, Leo didn't care. (Yes, the keyword is **end**) I admired Stargirl's ability of not caring what people thought about her. I wanted to be like Stargirl, I wanted to start wearing skirts instead of Levi's. Then it was Monday and I went back to school. I realized that I couldn't. I would be too different, I would stand out way too much for my own social good, and that was NOT okay. In this way I was a lot like Leo and that wasn't okay either. I tweaked little things in my life that made me more like her. I have my own happy wagon now, a left-over Oregon Trail project from fourth grade. I express myself more than I used to. I dance and sing more and in front of people though I didn't join choir. I feel sorry for the team that loses the football game, and I don't care if it's my team or not.

Stargirl made me want to be different; the Leo inside still wants me to blend in. I believe that together they make me stronger. Wait! I almost forgot Archie! Wow, is he amazing. I want an Archie. I guess in a way my grandpa is an Archie so that's okay; I just wish he had all those fossils and an ancient Cactus.

When I was in Target and saw there was a sequel I just about screamed. *Stargirl* got me in a place no other book ever has. I don't think any other book ever will either. *Stargirl* deserves a Newbery medal at the least. You have no idea how many times I could call it amazing.

Thank you.
Sincerely,
Micaela Saling

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Level 1 (4th – 6th grade)

FIRST PLACE:

To: Lawrence Taylor, *Taylor*
From: Hunter Sterling Hastings

Dear Lawrence Taylor,

I am writing this letter to thank you for your book Taylor because it has inspired me in a very personal way. Like you, I am a young African American male. I am the youngest of seven kids with five brothers and a sister. I have always been a big kid and at eleven years old I am five foot eleven and weigh 220 pounds. The kids at school would torment me for being overweight so I would avoid playing sports or any outdoor activities. My weight caused me to be slow and clumsy and was the excuse I used to remain indoors on the couch.

My father was recently diagnosed with diabetes which I learned runs in our family. He became very concerned that my weight and inactivity would increase my risk for diabetes. He told me to ignore what other people said about my weight and abilities. He knew that sports would help me to grow into my weight and become more athletic and healthy.

Your father, like mine, played with you, encouraged you and was your biggest fan. I decided to read your book because my father believed I would understand how dedication, confidence and hard work could change my life. When I read your book, I saw that you struggled with many of the same problems I had.

You wrote that you resisted instruction and always felt angry. In time you learned to ignore criticism and rely on yourself with a, "Win at all cost attitude!" I decided that I could be a winner too.

I began playing basketball on YMCA teams and with the kids at school. I would just laugh and work even harder to if someone called me names or made fun of me. This year I played tackle football for the first time and found that I am more athletic than I ever thought I could be. My coaches and teammates praised me for my skills and hard work. No one insults me anymore. I just made the Amateur Athletic Union Quad A basketball team. Over 60 kids tried out but only ten were chosen!

My weight has not increased since I began being more active. The more active I am the easier it is to be more active. I now love sports and cannot ever imagine going back to sitting on the couch and watching other kids have fun outside.

Thank you for sharing your story, which inspired me to change my view of myself and what I can accomplish. I wrote down a sentence from your book and keep it on my desk. You said, "Life, like anything else, can knock you down. You will have problems every day in your life. But sometimes...sometimes you just got to go play. The crime is not being knocked down, the crime is not getting up again."

Thank you,
Hunter Hastings

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RUNNER-UP:

To: Scott Westerfeld, *Uglies*
From: Ali Hentzel, Corvallis, OR

Dear Scott Westerfeld,

“Is it not good to make a society full of beautiful people?” – Yang Yuan

This quote from your book, *Uglies*, was the first thing I saw in the novel that was to change me forever.

At the time, I was confused. The media and my peers had me convinced that beauty meant everything. And according to the magazine with Paris Hilton’s face plastered across the front of it, I was not beautiful.

I had no other definition of pretty, so I believed it. All I ever thought about in regards to myself was “I’m so ugly.” My face was not identical to a model’s. My hair wouldn’t curl like in the Pantene commercials. I didn’t feel comfortable being me.

I was lost when I stumbled across *Uglies*, lost inside my own thoughts and what I assumed to be everyone else’s.

As I turned the pages, I was falling into Tally’s world. The only goal I reached for was for Tally to become pretty. So what if a few people’s lives, their hopes and dreams, got crushed in the process? It was all for the “greater good”. I even felt that everyone was overreacting about the brainwash part.

So when I started reading *Pretties*, I was relieved to find that Tally had become the completely beautiful creature that was shown on the front cover. It all fit so perfectly – Tally was pretty, popular and had everything she could ever want. Except her freedom of individuality, of course. But whatever. After finishing the pair, I reread *Uglies*, and the intended message began to seep through my mind. Slowly, page after page, I realized that it didn’t really matter what Tally’s nose was shaped like, if her eyes were that exact shade of blue. None of that mattered.

I’m not saying that this change happened overnight. No, it was a gradual thing that moved slower than a tortoise, allowing me to slowly be myself again. I saw that beauty was an illusion – to be truly beautiful comes from somewhere deep inside. When you are honestly confident in who you are, you will appear beautiful.

Now I realize that I am happy just being myself. There’s no one else I would rather be – or look like. Beauty is how you think of yourself. If you believe you are beautiful, no one can change that.

And no matter how many times a person says that, they can’t make someone believe it. You have to find it for yourself.

All it takes is a nudge in the right direction. *Uglies* was that for me.

Thanks for everything,
Ali Hentzel

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HONORABLE MENTION:

To: Mike Lupica, *Miracle on 49th Street*

From: Colleen Ellis, Lake Oswego, OR

Dear Mr. Lupica,

Before I read *Miracle on 49th Street*, I always just gave up if I got a bad grade or missed a shot in basketball. Now I don't give up. If I get a bad grade, I study hard. If I miss a shot in basketball, I square up and take the shot again. Molly Parker has given me courage to keep trying no matter what it takes.

When I thought of Boston, Massachusetts I imagined Fenway Park, the Boston Red Sox and baseball. When I finished your book, I only thought of the Boston Celtics. Whenever I thought of basketball I just thought of another sport but now I eat, sleep and breathe basketball and the Boston Celtics.

One day when I had a basketball game, I decided to work on lay-ups on my right side (because I shoot left-handed) just before we left for my game. When we got to my game, my team was warming up and I decided to work on my lay-ups on my right side again because I can't shoot with my right hand and every time I do a lay-up on my right side I miss. I made the right decision. When there was only 5 seconds left in the game and we were down by 1 point I got the ball and made a lay-up on my right side. If I didn't read *Miracle on 49th Street* I wouldn't have made that game winning lay-up.

Thank you, Mr. Lupica for writing *Miracle on 49th Street* because it gave me courage and it motivated me to persevere and reach for my dreams. Maybe someday you will be watching me play for a professional basketball team someday...

Sincerely,
Colleen Ellis

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HONORABLE MENTION:

To: Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*
From: Maria Amanda Flores, Tualatin, OR

Dear Madeleine L'Engle,

I have read your book, *A Wrinkle in Time*, and found it very interesting. I have to admit, though, that I did get frightened when I read about the man with red eyes. I think it was his calmness and the thought that there was something wrong with him and that he seemed suspicious made me frightened. But nonetheless, it was my favorite part!

I then looked at the other characters of the story. Three in particular stand out.

The character I can most relate to is Meg. She can get impatient, but she is very caring, brave, and has a strong will. I can really relate to her because of these traits. Yes, I do get very impatient and people get bothered.

A character that intrigued me a lot was Charles Wallace. He was no ordinary five-year-old, as I found out. He was a great help and was very wise, and calm, but a different kind of calm than that of the man with red eyes. Charles Wallace has indeed been a great help in Meg's journey and I'm glad he was there to help her, otherwise she wouldn't have gotten to rescue her father and it would have been a sad ending for both, no, all of Meg's family.

Aunt Beast was also a character who taught me something. She looked intimidating (according to her description), yet was caring and gently as a mother to Meg. By reading about her, I have learned what it was really like to not depend on our sight but actually dig deeper inside a person to learn more about them.

From reading this book, I was also affected with the concept of "like" and "equal" being different, despite the similarities. I thought of "like" as being the same with no uniqueness, which matches the description of Camazotz. And I thought of "equal" as having individuality and being different in a unique way.

I am very glad for all the lessons I've learned from you. Thanks for affecting me in a way that gave me a new sense of awe and wonder!

Sincerely,

Maria Amanda Flores

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HONORABLE MENTION:

To: Janette Rallison, *All's Fair in Love, War, and High School*

From: Sydney Haggart, Lake Oswego, OR

Dear Mrs. Rallison,

As she rolls her eyes, "Do you see her shoes? They are totally gross!" One of the million insults that I have heard. I'm sure you hear this thousands of times but your book *All's Fair in Love, War and High School* is exactly what school is! The criticizing and the drama that is what school is all about. Not a lot of people know this but a lot of people chastise other people. I do. I didn't understand that until I read this book. I can see that I do though. I don't do it to be mean, I just say it as an observation. That's what I always thought of it as. An observation. Not being mean. Just stating a fact. Just a little while after reading this book I found this bracelet. It's like one of the ones that say Livestrong. It is purple, though, and says 'A Complaint Free World'. When you wear it, you can't criticize, gossip or complain for twenty-eight days straight. If you do, then you have to move the bracelet to the other wrist. It was difficult for me at first. I didn't know I was doing it until my friends told me. After a couple of days I got the hang of it. Once I finished the twenty-eight days, I was better. Then less than a week later, I was putting other people down again! I started wearing the bracelet again. I wanted to stop judging other people. It's like the bracelet gave me a

power. It was a reason for me to keep going. When I didn't have it on my friends could tell me what I was saying but I didn't have anything to help me remember. I just was supposed to remember it. It was frustrating. Once I read this book, I realized that's what most people do. At lunch, and other times but mostly lunch, people look around the room and make unnecessary comments. Now I strive to be better. The book inspired me to try to be nice and not to insult people as much. I don't want to act like Samantha in the beginning of the book. I want to act like her in the end. When the bet is over and she wants to be nice even though there is no reward, I realized that there is a reward though. It's that you are nicer and you get to make more friends. Last year I insulted people as they walked by and only had three friends. This year I have tons of friends and I try to say nice things to people even if they are rude to me. I don't want to stoop down to their level. Thank you so much for writing this book. It made me open my eyes and see what the world really can be. It has changed my life dramatically. I hope this book helps other people see it, too.

Sincerely,
Sydney Haggart

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To: Horatio Alger, *On His Own*
From: Robert Stewart, Tigard, OR

Dear Mr. Alger,

I have read hundreds of interesting books, but your book, *On His Own* has inspired me the most. Quietly getting out of predicaments and staying calm are quality characteristics in this story that I have endeavored to apply to my life. I learned that even though nothing seems to be going your way or if you have been falsely accused as long as you are trying your best, it will turn out alright.

Once while playing baseball, my coach told me to "steal" a base. So, I acted accordingly. Later, he was frustrated with me for having "stolen" that base. I explained to him that he had told me to "steal" and let it go at that. This may seem odd, but while going through this difficulty I remembered the details about Rodney's jewels being stolen. He, in his own quiet way, found the jewels, proved that they were his, and left the thief speechless.

I have learned that getting extremely excited is not the way to get out of a predicament. I should, like Rodney, keep my head cool at all times. Two years ago, while white water rafting with my family, the raft flipped on a highly dangerous Class V rapid. I kept my head as cool as possible, under the circumstances, and came out without receiving any injury whatsoever. When Rodney was riding home to his gold mine, he was kidnapped by outlaws. The whole time he was in captivity he kept his head cool and escaped after finding a valuable gold vein.

This book taught me how to get out of tight spots and how to stay calm. Your masterpiece altered my life to the point where I am now a calmer person, quietly

getting out of fixes. I will always remember the quality characteristics that developed in my life from reading *On His Own*.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Stewart