

LEVEL 1

Winner: Ammas Tanveer

Title: *Hoot*

Author: Carl Hiaasen

Dear Carl Hiaasen,

Your book *Hoot* is one of my favorites because it taught me that you should fight for what you believe in and never give up. While I read your book, I felt like I was in the story experiencing everything with Roy, Beatrice, and Mullet Fingers.

In your story Roy Eberheart was the new kid and I know how that feels because I've moved from Islamabad, Pakistan to Portland, Oregon and then to Lake Oswego, Oregon. Everyone made fun of Roy because he came from Montana, the Cattle Country. I've been called some pretty hurtful names, but I'm OK. Another reason I can relate to Roy is because he loves animals and so do I.

Your book helped me have more respect for our fellow animals who share the world with us. Animals are creatures just like us and deserve to be treated as equals. Humans treat animals wrongly and unfairly just because they're different. People should respect animals and their space.

At first your book made me angry at the injustice the Mother Paula's Pancake House was committing. But then I felt excited as Roy and his friends tried to stop them from hurting the owls. Your book made me think about what is happening to animals every day in the world. Just like Mullet Fingers said, "I've been watchin' this place disappear – the piney woods, the scrub, the creeks, the glades. Even the beaches, man – they put up all these giant hotels and only goober tourists are allowed. It really sucks."

No matter where you're from, what color of skin you have, or what species you are, all people and animals should be treated with kindness.

Yours Truly,

Ammas Tanveer

LEVEL 1

Runner-up: Siena Shepard

Title: *The Giver*

Author: Lois Lowry

Dear Lois Lowry,

My name is Siena Shepard and I am an avid reader who has a love for books. I have my favorites like the *Warriors* series by Erin Hunter, and *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer, but the one book that really moved me was *The Giver*.

The Giver is a story that for me, talks about the future, what could be, what could be lost, the need to have freedom, and the importance of memories. In *The Giver*, the people of the community Jonas lives in, all have shut out feelings of pain and happiness. They are no longer able to see in color, and they do not know the meaning of true freedom, to be and do what they choose as a human being.

Whenever I read *The Giver*, it reminds me how lucky we are as humans to be alive. Humans can do amazing things if we want, and humans are able to feel compassion for people and animals we haven't even met. If I had a choice, I wouldn't trade my memories (good or bad) for anything in the whole world, because my memories are unique and are part of what makes me, me.

I believe the characters in *The Giver*, other than Jonas and the Giver, are not truly human. I believe this because humans have emotions and humans feel. In *The Giver*, the people of the community shut out all emotions and feelings, and do not allow memories of happiness to form, or for the people to feel pain.

The Giver has an uncertain ending, which allows people to decide for themselves. I believe at the end of the book, Jonas arrives in a place where there are humans who have memories, freedom, and feel true happiness and pain. For me it was a happy ending.

Thank you so much for writing *The Giver*; it really changed my perspective on life.

Sincerely,
Siena Shepard

LEVEL 1

Honorable Mention: Cara Cecilia Flores

Title: *The Lightning Thief*

Author: Rick Riordan

Dear Rick Riordan,

Thank you for giving me another topic to share with my older sister. Now our late-night talks (when our parents think we're fast asleep) involve not only school, boys, and vacation, but also Greek mythology. My parents are also getting random Greek mythology trivia, so I'm happy to say they know the difference between Aphrodite and Athena and Pan and Poseidon.

I'm referring to your awesome book, *The Lightning Thief*. I first saw my sister reading it (a friend of hers lent it to her) so when I saw the book in my school library, I decided to read it myself.

Once I started reading the book, I couldn't stop reading it. When I went on outings with my family, I made sure the book was in my bag. One time we were in fast food restaurant, we were waiting for our order and I just happened to be reading the part where Percy was also in a fast food restaurant. For a moment I was imagining myself in the restaurant with him.

Poseidon is my favorite god because he is the god of the sea and I like to play in the sea! I used to live in the Philippines (a tropical country) where the beach was five minutes away. Reading about Poseidon reminded me of home, where the sea is, and I can't wait to go on vacation.

I always like a cute bad boy too!!! Like Luke, a guy from the Hermes cabin. I like the way he acts. I'm actually sort of intrigued by him. At first, he acts really nice, but in the end he turns out to be a bad person. I wonder, were he a real person, about the choices he would have to make. In fact, I compared him to another character from one of my favorite fictional stories, *Star Wars*. This character is Darth Sidious.

My sister's telling me about learning Greek mythology in 7th grade language arts so I can't wait to get to middle school! I used to be a bit nervous to go to middle school, but now I'm actually excited! She tells me all of these stories about this awesome student teacher who is really good at teaching the Greek mythology unit. Then there's also the time when they got into groups to perform skits of Greek myths! She and her partner did Pandora's box, and she got to take a box home and wrap it in gold wrappings. And guess what she and her partner used for all the evils residing in the box: adorable stuffed animals! I thought it was a really good idea.

I can't wait to read the rest of the books in the series!

Sincerely,

Cara Cecilia Flores

LEVEL 1

Honorable Mention: Chelsea Lin

Title: *Hoot*

Author: Carl Hiaasen

Dear Carl Hiaasen,

I am writing to thank (you) for inspiring me with your book, *Hoot*. Like the main character Roy, I am constantly a loner and can't socialize very well.

Sometimes, I would waste things. I would use up toilet paper so fast; you could see a pile right inside the wastebasket. Q-Tips and paper were literally consumed, all by me. I never really cared that I was wasting the planet away, little by little.

I only realized, after I read your book *Hoot* that I discovered what a big mistake I was making. I was like Chuck Muckle, the president of Mother Paula's Famous Pancakes, not caring that the planet was being "killed" by humans.

After my discovery, I began to try to help the planet by reducing the amount of trash I produce every day. When I saw bottles or cans lying on the ground, I would pick them up and throw them into the nearest trash can or recycling bin. All of the paper that I have used always ends up in the recycling bin.

Now, I have joined a group that collects litter and trash on the playground to throw away. I have learned how to socialize with people.

I thank you for writing this story and inspiring me. When you wrote, 'Look, said Roy, "every day we've been reading about ordinary Americans who made history 'cause they got fed up and fought for something they believed in" I considered it a very important quote and I hope it would help me in the near future.

Thank you very much,

Chelsea Lin

LEVEL 2

Winner and national Honor Award recipient: Erikka Potts

Title: *A Child Called It*

Author: Dave Pelzer

Dear Dave Pelzer,

Like you, my mom would “punish” my older sister and me. At a wedding in a hotel, she gave me a bloody nose for pushing my sister. She told me to clean up my mess and that if there was any blood she would hit me again. Another time she pulled out a chunk of my sister’s hair. Growing up, our life was almost like yours – but all that changed one night.

As a child, I always had really bad self-esteem. My mom was a heavy alcoholic. She blamed my sister and me for all her life problems. I was a very hateful person inside and out because of her and from hearing how “worthless” I was and how I would end up to be like my dad, a “junkie who lived on the street”. After a while, I began thinking that I was only here to be her slave and servant, much like you did.

Like you, my mom would be better when my dad came around. He was my hero and savior. But eventually my mom started hitting us in front of him and he wouldn’t say anything. After a while I didn’t even care if he did come around.

One day my sister got her hands on *A Child Called It*. She hid the book under her mattress so my mom would not find out about it (in her eyes we were always trying to deceive her), and we would read it at night after she passed out. As we got further on, we realized that there are other kids who have lives like us. With that book underneath us, we worked up the courage to seek help and tell someone about it.

The one thing that has stuck with me to this day and that I say in my prayers every night is when you say “Before I open the car door, I bowed my head and with peace in my heart I whispered ‘And deliver me from evil. Amen.’” Something about this quote resonated with me and now when I am scared or nervous, I say this in my head. In this quote I felt like God was trying to talk with me. And I do feel that He answered my prayers.

My sister and I ended up telling my auntie about my mom’s abuse. Today I am in foster care alone, without my siblings, but I get to see them all the time. My mother is in rehab and has kicked aside her addiction. She is taking classes and I get to see her all the time. My foster home is my heaven.

Thank you for sharing your experience with me.

Sincerely,

Erikka Potts

LEVEL 2

Runner-up: Molly McGuckin

Title: *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*

Author: Madeleine L'Engle

Dear Madeleine L'Engle,

It was misfortune that led me to your book, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*. For a fifth grade book report I was assigned to read and invent fluff about the “important parts” of your book. When I read it I was so caught up in the way the assignment wanted me to read it instead of the way you wanted me to read. I turned the report in and got a meaningless A, but I see now that I missed out on that opportunity to really understand the characters and the genuine heart of the book.

Sixth grade was a critical time in my life when I felt I was falling apart, and no one seemed to notice. No one seemed to care. School and life was monotonous. I felt that whether I lived or not would make no difference in the world around me, but then I stumbled upon your book, again. For the second time, but truly the first time, I read *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*. It took me only a few days to devour the book. I knew that when I had finished, my view of myself in the world changed. I was given an important treasure of knowledge – anything that you do in the world can affect what the future holds. Merely killing a butterfly out of pleasure can alter what you become. The world is not written out for us.

The characters you sculpted from nothing also sculpted me. The way Charles Wallace was given the task to change his world gave me the drive to think about how I can change my world. However, I do not plan to save the country from a mushroom cloud anytime soon, and I do not have a time/space traveling unicorn companion. What I do understand now is that every slight change we make rewrites the song of the universe.

Now that I am in my second, and final year in middle school everything is different. I am handed new opportunities and there are choices, good and bad, that I have to make. As I watch people shove their way, carelessly, down the halls, I stop and ponder whether they understand that the choices they make now determines what happens when they are 40. I remember how miniscule I felt when I was younger. Do all people, young and old, feel this way as I do? That drove me back to *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*. This time I was focused on the way Charles Wallace was sent within individuals to look through their eyes and think their thoughts. I wonder what I have to offer other people. Will it be a simple rune like the one Mrs. O'Keefe gave to Charles, or the mental comfort and steadiness that transferred from Ananda to Meg? I will not know till it is my shining moment.

Your book gave me a new understanding. To see myself a different way. You showed me that I will offer the world something great even if the world isn't conscious of it. Through your book I realized that looking from another's point of view will definitely

affect my actions. Most importantly, you have shown me that the world is always turning and together we can change the direction it tilts. I am deeply gratified to you for leading me to grasp that the planet is always moving and always swiftly tilting.

My dearest thanks to you,

Molly McGuckin

LEVEL 2

Honorable Mention: Molly Hood

Title: *Tuesdays with Morrie*

Author: Mitch Albom

Dear Mitch Albom,

After reading *Tuesdays with Morrie*, I am a changed person. Your book forced me to look at life from a whole new perspective. I now know that I am very blessed to have a body that functions correctly and a family that cares. Sometimes it may seem like there is nobody that understands what life is really about. After reading your book, I realized there are people out there who know and are willing to share their knowledge.

Being a young girl, I have dealt with death once or twice before. My father died two years ago, he was 42 years old, and I was in the fifth grade. Sometimes it seems like I hide how I really feel about my dad's death, and no one is there to help me with the pain I am going through. It's never good to hide my emotions, yet sometimes it's the only thing I can do. *Tuesdays with Morrie* made me wonder how someone could know they are going to die yet be so...unafraid. After losing my dad, the fear continues to consume me.

As I read your amazing book, my emotions came rushing to the surface. When Morrie first found out about his disease I was angry because there wasn't anything anyone could do to help Morrie. I wanted to crawl into the books and find a cure for the disease. Happiness was another emotion I went through. Just to know that Morrie was comfortable with his body, and was still living life to the fullest gave me hope. One of the strongest emotions I felt was sympathy for Mitch losing someone so close to him. Worst of all, gloominess. When Morrie passed this is what I felt, because I had somehow become very close to him while reading. Throughout the book, I was feeling more educated about life. Morrie was teaching me facts I didn't know before, and quite honestly I wasn't expecting half of what he said to be true.

While reading your book, I made more connections than I can list. First, Mitch was my father's name, I thought about that a ton while reading *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Morrie reminded me of my grandfather. Always thinking positive and having a positive outlook on life and being content within himself. The strongest connection was probably to

Mitch, because I know how it feels to lose someone to cancer. My family was in grief when my great-grandmother passed away from cancer, I think that is probably how Mitch felt, along with Morrie's family.

Tuesdays with Morrie taught me about the disease ALS and how it effects your body and life. I learned that ALS is a progressive disease that eventually takes over a person's muscles leaving a person paralyzed, unable to move. One of my all-time favorite baseball players died from this disease. His name was Lou Gehrig, and he was awesome. Lastly, when you have ALS you generally have to have someone with you at all times, taking care of you. After a period of time, you can't even go to the bathroom without help. The worst part in my opinion would be not being able to eat food that isn't liquid. You would have to live off soup and Gatorade.

Tuesdays with Morrie honestly changed me as a person. I will never forget the special bond that Morrie and Mitch shared. This is very much like the bond I shared with my dad. This book also taught me about life and its great lessons. You have to give love to get love. You should always show compassion toward others, especially if they are going through a rough time. I will never be able to thank you enough for writing this wonderful story and changing my life.

Sincerely,

Molly Hood

LEVEL 2

Honorable Mention: Laura Sanchez

Title: *The Skin I'm In*

Author: Sharon G. Flake

Dear Sharon G. Flake,

I found your book *The Skin I'm In* at a store. When I looked at the cover it just captured my eyes. I thought the book was going to be boring like all the other books there are, but your book related to my friendships in some way. I had a friend whose mom did not like me – well so I thought. But Makeela's life was worse than mine. Kids at her school made fun of her weight, ripped clothes, and how dark of skin color she had. My aunt would always say *It doesn't matter what skin color you have, it doesn't matter how you appear to look like, and most important it doesn't matter what race you are.* It was easy for my aunt to say – she was half American.

I had a best friend in 6th grade but then our friendship almost came to an end because her mom did not like me. It felt different when I went to my friend's house like if I was an alien. I really didn't know if her mom was racist or not until I started playing with her

daughter. Every time I would go to her house my friend's mom would tell me to go home and let my friend's white friends stay. Later, I started to be ashamed to be Mexican. I told my mom about my friend's mom and my mom said most American women and men don't like Mexicans because we're brown and immigrants.

Your book then gave me courage to stand up for myself. I bought an extra book of *The Skin I'm In* and tried giving it to my friend's mom, but she didn't accept it from me. So when I left from my friend's house after her mom told me to go home, I left the book on their front porch, rang the bell and ran. I hadn't gone to my friend's house for three weeks. When I finally got the guts to go back to my friend's house her mom received me like if I were American and it felt so great because now my friend and I could be best friends again.

Your book gave me courage to take life as it goes, no matter what. Don't give up – give it all you've got. Thank you, Sharon Flake, for your wonderful and amazing book *The Skin I'm In*.

Your dedicated reader,

Laura Sanchez

LEVEL 2

Honorable Mention: Ruby Schultz

Title: *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*

Author: Dr. Seuss

Dear Dr. Seuss,

I'm not a reader. It's hard for me to find the message an author intends. However, when I read *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* I understood the point right away. Even the smallest children's book can mean so much more than people think. When I read this book I thought about independence. I thought about the day I leave home, the day I'm out on my own. Where will I go? There are so many places to go, so many sights to see, so many things to do. It's an exciting world.

There will be times when I have to make decisions, decisions I may not want to make, but I'll know what's right. As you said in the book, "You'll look up and down streets. Look them over with care. About some you'll say 'I don't choose to go there'. With your head full of brains, and your shoes full of feet, you're too smart to go down any not-so-good street. You may not find any that you want to go down. In that case, of course, you'll head straight out of town."

To me this meant in your life time you will come across challenging obstacles. You will meet people you aren't sure are the right friends for you. You will be asked to do things you don't want to do, and you will be put in many situations you aren't exactly comfortable with. If you can find it in you to do the right thing, life will continue. You will find other paths to go down, leading you far away from everything you've left behind, beginning a new journey.

Life is all about decisions. You control your own life. You choose where you go. There could be times when you are at what seems like the highest point of life. It's everything you've ever wanted it to be, but then in a matter of a moment everything could change. Life lets you rise up then brings you down again. I'm sure this had happened to everyone in their life time. When you feel the best you've ever then suddenly one small thing can happen and your whole world has changed. It happened to me but I had to push my hardest to stand back up again.

We will all have unfortunate events thrown at us in this lifetime. There's no doubt about that, but the question is, what are we going to do about it? When you're on a bumpy road or you're not sure where you're going, you could stop where you are, or move on. You only live once, why put your life on hold while you wait for it to get better? Why wait for the moment to pass instead of living in the moment? Why spend so much time shutting out the world because *you're* unhappy that the rest of the world begins to shut *you* out?

I realized so many things from reading this short children's book. I received more knowledge and understanding than I could remember from any chapter book I've ever read. Thank you for helping me look at life and the concept of growing up from a new perspective. Every second, I get older and closer to turning the lines in your book into my reality. I am already noticing myself being faced with these issues in everyday life. Decision making, responsibility, challenging obstacles, change, it's all part of growing up. You taught me to help myself change the way I look at the world.

Ruby Schultz

LEVEL 2

Honorable Mention: Adele Zawada

Title: *Where the Red Fern Grows*

Author: Wilson Rawls

Dear Mr. Rawls,

Your story, *Where the Red Fern Grows* is one of the most influential books I have read. This inspiring book has changed the way I act and has made me consider how I would respond to events that have not yet occurred. Your heart-warming yet tragic tale has

taught me that hard work and family support leads to success, but there are also emotional risks when you share a strong bond.

Throughout your story I noticed the theme that with hard work you can accomplish anything. I observed that Billy would work hard for his dogs. The fact that he was willing to walk many miles in the wilderness just to retrieve them seemed amazing to me. Then, when Billy cut down the huge tree in the woods just so that his dogs could catch their first big coon, I realized the extreme level of sacrifice Billy was willing to make for his dogs. I, too, have encountered something that I wanted so badly that I was willing to persevere until I succeeded. A couple of years ago, one of my friends bought three gerbils that I soon fell in love with. I enjoyed letting them walk around on my arms and legs and holding them close to me. Soon, I decided I wanted gerbils of my own. However, my parents aren't the pet-loving kind and for this reason our family has never owned an animal. So, when I first approached my mom about buying gerbils, she firmly said no, just like Billy's mom. Nonetheless, I kept asking for them and giving arguments for why I should be able to get them and convincing them that I was responsible enough to take care of a pet. Finally, after months of persuading and convincing, I finally got my wish. I now own my first pets, two baby gerbils! My experience is on a much smaller scale than Billy's, for I did not risk getting lost or kidnapped on my way to receive my pets like he did, however, I was able to feel the strong emotion of wanting something so badly that I was willing to spend much of my time and effort in making my dream come true.

The next lesson your book taught me was how you need family support to help you succeed. In your story, Billy had a plethora of family support and as a result of this his dogs and him were able to succeed in many areas. One example in the story was when Billy won the coon hunting competition that his family urged him to enter. After reading this, I realized that without his supportive family Billy might not have competed at all nor done as well in the competition. Shortly after finishing your book I decided to try out for a volleyball club. It was a competitive team and none of my friends planned to try out for it. Like Billy, I was reluctant to join, but for a different reason. I didn't want to play in the club unless my friends did too. However, my parents and siblings encouraged me to try out and supported me through my period of indecision. At tryouts, I played my hardest and made it onto a team. I am proud of myself and excited to learn and be part of a team. I am extremely appreciative of my family. I think this must have been how Billy felt when his family supported him.

Finally, your story has influenced my thoughts on how I would deal with the death of a loved one. I have been fortunate so far in my life that I have not had to experience the death of a close family member. Because of this, I have never thought about what I would do when someone close to me passed away. Then when I read about how Billy had to overcome the sorrow of losing his two prized dogs that had died saving him, I began to think about how I would deal with the sadness of a loved ones death. I have thought about ways of coping with such a heartbreaking event, yet I am still not sure of what I would do. I wonder if I would mourn for a couple of weeks and then years later look back and think how much I loved that person. Maybe I would constantly think of the deceased family member and still be heartbroken years and years later. I wonder how Billy dealt with the death of his dogs, as his loss seemed so profound? Although I am

still not positive of how I would overcome such a heart-wrenching event, I am glad your book provoked my thoughts on this difficult subject.

Thank you for writing the beautiful and thought inspiring story, *Where the Red Fern Grows*. It has had an enormous impact on how I think about family values and sharing strong bonds with others.

Sincerely,

Adele Zawada

LEVEL 3

Winner and national Honor Award recipient: Y Thien Hoang

Title: *Across the Plains in 1844*

Author: Catherine Sager Pringle

Dear Catherine Sager Pringle,

I'm writing this letter to you with great gratitude for your book *Across the Plains in 1844*, which has lifted my soul and helped me survive through very difficult times in my life.

My family and I arrived to Oregon as new immigrants from a far land, Vietnam, almost two years ago. We came here with empty hands because our house had been confiscated by the government. My parents had to sell almost everything for the airline tickets. The only possessions we brought with us were some pictures holding memories of the past and hopes: hope for freedom, hope for a new beginning, and hope for a better life. It is always hard to start new things and you would understand, Catherine, how hard it was for us to start life all over again from nothing.

There was the language barrier for my parents to overcome, a new culture for my brother and me to learn. None of these was easy for me at the beginning. One night, I was awakened by the talking of my parents, and I heard my mom crying. Many questions rose up in me: "Did we make the right decision when we came here? Was it worth it to leave everything and start a new life?" There were moments when I wanted to give up, when I thought I could not face such challenges, but your book has changed my perspective and helped me to keep going.

The moment I read your story, I stopped feeling so lonely. You and I have so much in common: both of us come from afar; you are from Missouri and I am from Vietnam. Both of us have had difficulties adapting to a new situation, and both of us have many questions and doubts about our journey. However, I think your situation was much harder than mine. I could not imagine going on this new journey without the support from my parents, and you had to go through it without yours. It must have been heart-breaking when your parents passed away during the journey and when your adopted parents were killed by the Indians. I admire you so much for your strength and bravery. You have survived it all. Thanks to your book I have new strength and more determination to keep going. Of course life is hard, but if you could go through great hazards, I believe I can too. You are my inspiration.

My heart jumped a beat when I read these lines: “There were several musical instruments among the emigrants, and these sounded clearly on the evening air when camp was made and merry talk and laughter resounded from almost every campfire.” What a beautiful scene! I thought I had to give up my passion for piano and music when I came here, but thanks to the help of many generous people I could keep on playing and learning. I think music truly has the power to relieve and connect human beings.

The beauty of this land melted my heart. One of my favorite experiences since I arrived in Oregon was going hiking around Multnomah Falls. It was a beautiful summer afternoon when I looked at the majestic view surrounding me and realized that what I was looking at is priceless, and many people had to pay for it with their hard work, and even their blood. You are the pioneer and I am the recipient of all the hard work you did. The sharing of your journey helped me gain more and more appreciation for life.

Things have settled down for my family and me now. I cannot help but love the scenes when you talked about your siblings, when you were taking care of the younger children along the trip. Although I have adapted myself to the new life journey, I can never take anything I’m receiving in this wonderful land for granted. Indeed, I always feel the urge to give back to my community. I am using all the talents that I have accompanying choirs, churches, and volunteering at schools and senior centers. I am using my English skills to help the new immigrants who are having a hard time, just like you and me, starting a new life. All my thanks to you and your book for giving me strength to keep going, helping me gain more appreciation, and showing me the bright side of a difficult journey. Thank you very much for traveling with me through my own “Oregon Trail.”

Truly yours,

Y Thien Hoang

LEVEL 3

Runner-up: Flora Winters

Title: *Wild Magic*

Author: Tamora Pierce

Dear Tamora Pierce,

Your books never got a chance to gather dust on my shelves, unlike many others. As soon as I thought I was finished with them, my younger sister grew into them. I found a new way to connect with her through the battered volumes. We had spirited swordfights, scholarly discussions on the finer points of sorcery, and shared laughter and tears. Thank you.

It’s very hard to pick a favorite from your works, but I’ve always favored the Tortall books over the Circle books. Perhaps next time I read them my opinion will change. *Wild Magic* is my current favorite (*The Will of the Empress* is my sister’s, however your books usually bring more agreements than disagreements between us).

Daine is my favorite of your protagonists. Not only does she have the most enviable magical ability, talking to animals and turning into them, but she is the only commoner heroine aside from your recent Beka. This is part of why I feel an affinity between her and me. I also admire her for her actions in *Wild Magic*. I have a flaw similar to her initial one: I don't trust easily. Giving up my secrets and my feelings is difficult for me. In theory, people don't bite, but they can be cruel in other ways.

I received your Song of the Lioness series for a thirteenth birthday present during a blissful period in my life: the era of my ex-best friend, Emily. We shared these books, took them on camping trips, and even planned to make movies of them. Then, after being like sisters for a year and a half, Emily switched schools. I felt abandoned, like Daine, and I didn't know how to talk about what I felt. I took it out on the ones closest to me by being unfriendly and closed, the same way Daine pushed away her new acquaintances.

To cope with my loneliness, I became addicted to your books. When I read Wild Magic, I couldn't ignore the parallels. By seeing a twin problem through Daine's eyes, I was able to view mine objectively and in doing so find the cure. Reading your books had inspired me to try my hand at writing fantasy, and I connected with a new crowd through my freshly discovered forte. When I talked about Emily, I found that it didn't hurt anymore because I was no longer alone. I will never forget, but, bombarded with new voices and ideas, I have opened my ears and my lips.

I have so much to thank you for that it hardly fits in one letter. For my friends, for my closeness with my sister, for helping me to discover my passions for writing' the only way I can fitly thank you is to emulate you by bringing down-to-earth fantasy heroines to life as role models for girls like me. I hope you and they will one day meet Eveleen, the heroine of a novel I've been working on for some time now. She doesn't sit around waiting to be rescued!

Before I close, I have one question. Who's your role model?

Many thanks.

Flora Winters

LEVEL 3

Honorable Mention: name and letter not released

Title: *Private*

Author: Kate Brian

LEVEL 3

Honorable Mention: Kelsi Gammon

Title: *Rent*

Author: Jonathan Larson

Jonathan Larson,

I do not exaggerate when I say that your play, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Broadway musical *Rent*, has changed my life.

I am a teenage girl living in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon, in my freshman year of high school at Tigard High. I can't tell you how many times I've been told that I am not your typical *Rent*-head: I go over my texting limit every month; my current biggest worry is whether or not my boyfriend will be able to go to the winter formal. I have never been exposed directly to any of the issues featured in *Rent*: poverty, disease, homosexuality, homelessness. I make A's and B's in school. In a nutshell, I am your typical teenager.

Then again, I am not. I love to learn. I want to be a screenwriter and a filmmaker. I am avidly involved in the theatre department at school and in the community. I listen to the Beatles and musical soundtracks and watch old films that no one my age has heard of instead of Hannah Montana and High School Musical. I am considered unpopular, a "nerd", and I take those terms as a compliment.

When I first read *Rent*, nearly a year after I first saw the film and listened to the music, I was again touched by the poignant message to live life to the fullest. I cannot pinpoint exactly why I love *Rent* so much. Maybe because it *is* so different from my own life, and therefore has helped me to be more open to different lifestyles and ways of living. One definite factor is that I think the music and lyrics are beautiful, and tell the story so wonderfully. But I think the biggest reason is that *Rent* showed me a world in which people were using their talents and art, be it music, theatre, dance, film, to change the people around them and their part of the world. That is my goal in life – to somehow affect people with the film and scripts that I create. Before I had been doubtful about the power of art of any kind to change the world. Needless to say, *Rent* changed me in that way. Now I believe that art is one of the most powerful forces on earth, and I will never again doubt it, or my own ability to create some piece that affects someone or something on this planet.

Because *Rent* so moved me, I have tried my best to pay homage to it in what little ways I can and try to expose others to it. I have gotten friends, and my parents (and grandparents!) in to *Rent*. This past spring, for my school's annual talent showcase, my two good friends and I agreed to sing "Seasons of Love", one of our favorite songs from *Rent*. We worked very hard, and got through the performance well, if not without a horrendous technical malfunction. It was a very important song that my friends and I felt we needed to sing because one of the girls that sang with me, a fellow *Rent*-head and my best friend was set to move to Hawaii, and it seemed that "Seasons of Love" would be a good memorial for everything – her leaving the summer before high school, the end of middle school at last, and the social changes we were all going through. She did move, almost two months later, and we were very glad that we did that performance while we could – it was fitting. Thank you for providing music and words that can so perfectly express the emotions of losing friends and then going on without them into what seems to be an empty world. *Rent* helped me through times when I have felt completely friendless and alone.

This summer, I visited the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris, France. Inside the cathedral, visitors can light a small tea candle for an offering of two euros. I chose to light a candle

for you, because your writing has so changed my outlook on life, and I am thankful for that, and I hope this it will continue on to change others in my generation and in the generations to follow in the way that it has changed me. A small candle seemed the least that I could do to say “thank you”. I did not realize until after that I had, unintentionally, referenced *Rent* in another form as well, by way of the “Light My Candle” scene.

In conclusion, I say again, thank you. *Rent* completely changed my outlook on life. I now believe that I can change the world with my art, and that others around me can do the same. I never waste a change to tell someone that I love them. I am even happier being the quirky, offbeat individual that I am. Just like it was in the 1990’s when *Rent* first appeared, *Rent* is a way of dealing with and talking about society’s troubles that were formerly considered “taboo”. Every generation needs something like *Rent* – an open, accepting environment where all are respected and cherished. An environment in which art flourishes. More than anything, an environment of love.

Thank you,

Kelsi Gammon

LEVEL 3

Honorable Mention: Carli Schall

Title: *Comeback*

Author: Mia and Claire Fontaine

Dear Mrs. Claire and Miss Mia Fontaine,

It’s hard for me to begin this letter, to be completely honest. I find myself sitting at this desk wanting desperately to be able to explain to you what your book has meant to me. But I feel that our mutual journey will connect my thoughts to this page in a way that only you two could understand.

I first came across your book one year ago when my mother was reading like it was some new high fashion drug. At the time my thoughts were on everything but some *lame* book she was trying to push me to read. It was my first Christmas in my new home, a therapeutic boarding school much like the one your lives have been touched by as well, I was angry and self-serving, trying to con my way through the levels in order to get out as soon as possible. Two months later that plan totally exploded in my face. Before I really knew it, I was running out the door to the tune of sounding alarms and screaming night staff. When I finally returned three days later, fresh from juvie and still angry, my eyes were only focused on my failure at escaping this “prison”.

It took several months for my attention to broaden and for me to realize my actions were not only affecting myself. Once I had finally earned my parents’ trust back and the privilege to have them come visit, my mother passed on your memoir to me hoping desperately I would actually read it. After staring at the cover for a few heavy days I finally cracked it open and gazed half heartedly at the first page. From that moment on I

couldn't put it down. Mia, your account of the hard times you had barely survived and the strenuous work you had done at Spring Creek was like a reassuring hug from a long lost friend. To see the words that seconds earlier were running through my own head down on printed paper was so comforting. It felt like there was actually someone out there who had gone through what I was fighting against with all my might. You had actually gone through a program and survived; you were able to be a real person again, to live without the chains that had been so heavy for so long. I didn't believe it was possible until then.

The second most rattling aspect of your memoir was to hear your perspective, Claire, as a mother. It opened my eyes to a whole different person I didn't acknowledge actually existed. To read how heartbroken you were when your daughter ran away unexpectedly, made such an impact on me. I never understood how a parent could be upset over a child's absence, until your raw pain was so bluntly spilled onto those off-white pages. Your revival of the journey you went through while your daughter was also getting help, pushed to try to understand the hard work my mother was doing. I came to finally realize that I was not the only one being touched by my journey to find myself. This program I was and am in was reaching out and touching all who knew me.

Through these hard and sometimes seemingly impossible realizations I have come to appreciate not only my mother but all the loved ones in my life, far greater. It has been a rocky road but I am so thankful that I have been able to begin to trudge down it. With the help of your eye opening dual memoir I have been blessed enough to reincarnate my mother and I's relationship. My new understanding of her pain enabled us to become closer than I could have ever imagined and I would have definitely not been able to do that if it weren't for you two. As authors, people and warriors, you are two of my greatest inspirations and motivators. People really can get through the black and make it out alive.

Sincerely,
Carli Schall

LEVEL 3

Honorable Mention: Stephen Staszewski

Title: *Exodus*

Author: Leon Uris

Dear Mr. Uris,

I have never read a book that has had more of an impact on my life than *Exodus*. Your book is one of the primary factors that inspired me to move to Israel. It showed me that Israel is truly a great nation, which is also in constant danger. It opened my eyes to the struggle of my people to justly claim a state of their own. And most of all, it showed me that people are capable of thinking of more than themselves, and that they can devote their lives to something greater than the value of any individual.

The children of *Exodus*, like Doy, and Karen, who would give anything to come to Israel, gave me inspiration to do the same. Their struggles helped inspire me, and kept me going when my struggle to fulfill my dream became difficult. I knew that I would be away from my friends and family, living in a land that I had only dreamed about, learning a language that I did not know. But I also knew that I would not be the first to take such a wild adventure. All of the children who risked their lives, making the perilous journey in wretched ships, to go to a land they did not know, to defend a country that was not yet their own, to fulfill a dream that seemed impossible, is what gave me inspiration to do the same.

But it was not only the hope of the children that inspired me to come to Israel to fulfill the dream of a Jewish state, but also the courage and sacrifices of men like Ari Ben Cannan, who have inspired me to want to defend that state. In *Exodus*, the sacrifices of these men to a cause greater than themselves, a cause that believes in freedom, righteousness and safety for their people, have inspired me to want to do the same. It is from reading about the dangers that the Jewish state faces to its existence, and the courage that it takes to defend it, that has inspired me to want to give my life in defense of its ideals.

From reading *Exodus*, I have learned the vital necessity of a Jewish state, and why I should not take it for granted. It is the blood, sweat, and tears of people like Karen Clement, Ari Ben Cannan, and Jordana Ben Cannan that paved the way for the birth of a nation. They gave their lives to the perpetration of the dream of a land where Jews can live in peace, and never be ashamed to call themselves Jewish. Even I, a Jew who lived in a nation that prides itself on being one of the most tolerant in the world, have experienced anti-Semitism. Without Israel, I, and many others who experience anti-Semitism on a scale much larger than I, would have no place to turn to. It is from reading about the acts of heroism, and the torment of my people in the Diaspora, that has truly made me appreciate what it means to have a Jewish state.

Without reading *Exodus*, I doubt that I would be sitting here right now in an Israeli boarding school, learning Hebrew, and preparing myself to defend Israel. There has been little in my life that I can say has influenced me more than this book, and that has truly changed the path of my life.

Thank you for giving me the inspiration and courage to make this life-changing decision.

Stephen Staszewski

LEVEL 3

Honorable Mention: name and letter not released

Title: *Sold*

Author: Patricia McCormick