

LEVEL 1

Winner: Lucy Dyal

Title: *The Giver*

Author: Lois Lowry

Dear Lois Lowry,

I am just an average kid who likes language arts a lot. For a while, my dream has been to become an author or journalist. To do this, I try hard to do extra credit and whatever else I can to challenge myself. I write in my free time and in school work write a longer or more complex paragraph/essay. When I heard about this particular extra credit option, I thought something along the lines of “How am I going to do this!?!?” I decided to do a little more research on it and my teacher gave me a packet. The packet broke it down into simple steps and one of these was titled “Select and Reflect.” At the time we were reading a class novel called The Giver, written by you. I wanted to tie my extra credit to the class lessons anyways, so this seemed perfect. Then I researched you and found an interview. The interview stated that you didn’t have any message in mind when you wrote The Giver, that you just wanted to tell a good story. Well, let me tell you something: whether it was your intention or not, I got a message out of this book and it was a strong one. The message was this: Life is to be enjoyed because we not only have it, but because we have the freedom to do what we want with it.

This book became very meaningful to me in a number of ways after I found the message that is sent. It made me realize something, and a lot of kids may disagree with this, but it made me realize that if you don’t at least try to live each day to its fullest, then whatever attempts you made at being perfect are automatically failed. Life is a valuable thing and it should not under any circumstances be wasted.

The Giver showed me that even simple things in life are beautiful, such as the rich smell of a chocolate bar, or the bright yellow of a leaf in fall. It told me these things not directly, but through hints. It showed that Jonas, after finding that things were once different, wanted change. When journeying to Elsewhere, he found bits of joy in the colorful blue sky, a sweet scented flower, or the throaty warble of a new bird.

It's amazing how much a novel that is well written can affect a person. It will not only change the way you think, but if it is good enough, it can change the way you act. This book led me to resolve to *carpe diem* (Latin for seize the day). It may seem like a lot for an 11 year old, but my theory is now to not only seize the day, but to enjoy it. I'm not just saying cram as much as possible into a single day; I'm saying to enjoy it.

This novel not only told me to find joy and happiness in little things and seize the day, it hinted in a very subtle way, almost unnoticeable, that you shouldn't sweat the little things. It hints this by putting things into perspective. Have you ever heard the expression "first world problem"? Imagine if you had to bear the weight of millions of people's burdens from thousands of years, like Jonas. Again, it puts things into perspective. People today worry about stupid little things like what they tweet or if they are drinking the same kind of coffee as everyone else (first world problem) when there are people who walk across countries to find water (third world problem). Jonas experienced mortifying things and was so burdened by them, he ran away with the help of the Giver. This is yet another example of a third world problem.

In conclusion, although not meant to, The Giver sent three messages: Find joy in small things, seize the day, and don't sweat the little stuff.

Thank you for reading this letter. I hope to one day follow in your footsteps.

Sincerely,
Lucy Dyal

LEVEL 1

Runner Up: Chloe Montague

Title: *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*

Author: Rick Riordan

Dear Mr. Riordan,

Lots of good fantasy books give me brave characters who yearn for adventure. The characters are brave, and they want to face monsters. These books are great, but your series Percy Jackson and the Olympians take me on an adventure like no

other. Unlike most adventure books, even though the characters are heroic, I can connect. They make decisions I would make and they run away from things I would run away from. I feel so much alike to them that I feel like I am tagging along on their adventure.

Many books give me great details so I feel I am there. Percy Jackson and the Olympians gave me that, and more. The characters act human, meaning they are only as brave as a real human would be. If my family ran into a hydra one day, we would run, screaming, away. If we had a sword (which is extremely unlikely), we might try to use it. Percy Jackson and the Olympians is a fantasy, so of course Percy carries a sword. But they do just what any human would do: run. In many other books, they stand their ground and challenge the monster. It's not realistic to be that brave, so I can't connect with any of the characters so easily.

Because I can connect with the characters, I can also learn more easily from them. Even though they are demigods and they fight monsters and that is something I can't relate to, there are things that I can relate to. For instance, they are regular school kids in New York who have to deal with things like being teased. The whole way through the story, I am experiencing it, and learning what they learn.

Heroes have fatal flaws. It comes with a hero. It is what makes them interesting. Heracles. Achilles. Theseus. Pandora. Pandora opened the box that contained all the evils of the world. She changed the world in a bad way, and also let loose her fatal flaw – curiosity. Fatal flaws have something that lead the hero to their downfall. Sometimes, they don't fall at all. They succeed, but that flaw is still lurking in the hero. No matter how hard some heroes will try to rid themselves of it, they learn that a fatal flaw will never go away. They're born with it, and they die with it. Sometimes they die because of it. Lots of times, it causes failure. Other times, it causes disaster. But all heroes have them.

Of course, Percy Jackson and his friends are heroes. And because they are heroes, they have fatal flaws too. Percy Jackson learned his fatal flaw from Athena. She told Percy that his fatal flaw is personal loyalty. She warned Percy, "To save a friend, you would sacrifice the world." It's interesting because loyalty is good, but too much loyalty could be bad. A fatal flaw doesn't have to be evil. I learned a lot

about flaws from this. Fatal flaws come up a lot in your series, and that is important because all heroes have fatal flaws.

Annabeth learned her flaw in *The Sea of Monsters*. Percy and Annabeth were on a boat, and near the island of the Sirens, which sing to you and make you wise – if you can survive it. They will tell you your fatal flaw. When the Sirens sang to Annabeth, she found out her flaw was hubris – deadly pride. After, she told Percy that it's thinking you can do better than anyone else, even the Greek gods.

Sometimes when I succeed, I feel that I am the best. My parents are always telling me that no matter what, I can always be better and do better. I know this is true, but it is easy to forget. Especially because they are my parents, and parents always are telling you what you do wrong. But when I heard Annabeth, my favorite character, find out hers was pride, I began to wonder if I had one too. I was alike to her. It is easier to learn from her because I can connect with her. I knew mine was pride, but maybe not deadly pride. Still, it could be fatal. I'm not fighting monsters, and I have no sword, but it can still be fatal to my future. I want to play soccer in college, but will never get there if I always think that I am the best. I won't get better. Annabeth is much more heroic than I am. I still have a fatal flaw. Everyone does.

Percy Jackson and the Olympians opened my mind to my fatal flaw. I could not learn from the characters if I could not connect with them. And I could not connect with them if they didn't do things that I would do if I was being chased by an 8-headed monster. And if I hadn't found the first book to this series mysteriously placed under my bed and begun to read it, I wouldn't have had my mind opened to flaws, because it's important that I know that everybody has them and you can't get rid of them. And if I hadn't learned all about fatal flaws and learned to pay attention to mine...well, that could change my future.

This book also opened my mind to nighttime noises. I'm afraid of the dark. Now, after reading this great series, I feel I know I can deal with any monster that scares me. I'll pull out that ballpoint pen that I always carry around. But some centaur will probably come to the rescue, so I need not worry.

Sincerely,
Chloe Montague

LEVEL I

Honorable Mention: Madeleine Moreland

Title: *Endangered*

Author: Eliot Schrefer

Dear Eliot Schrefer,

My name is Madeleine Moreland. I am twelve years old and in the sixth grade. I like what most twelve year old girls like: shopping, hanging out with my friends, and cooking. I also enjoy the outdoors and bowling.

For a Christmas present, my grandfather gave me your book, *Endangered*. The first thing I thought when I saw it was, "Oh great, another book on nature. Joy." I skimmed the inside cover that held the plot summary. I quickly realized that it was to be a boring, predictable kind of story: Girl named Sophie goes to Africa to visit Mom. Mom works with apes. Girl rescues an ape. Names it Otto. Girl loves ape, ape loves girl. The war, revolution, separation, and confusion. Then girl and ape must survive on pretty much nothing but ants and roots in the jungle. They are rescued, and big bada boom, they live happily ever after! So I decided that now I basically know the whole story, so I needn't bother with reading the book. Plus, I still wasn't too keen on the whole "Nature Thing".

The thing is, my grandparents have this super weird belief that they must give us nature books, or the zombie apocalypse will suddenly happen right then and there. My grandma gives me books about crazy things, like a tailless dolphin. She also gave me a book about a hippopotamus and a giant tortoise that are best friends. (Don't ask me where she found the books, because I have no idea.) My grandpa also spends his free time watching as many nature shows as he can possibly can and cramming his head with info on polar bears.

Anyways, two weeks after Christmas, my brother and I were going over to my grandpa's house to stay the night. I didn't want to hurt his feelings by not bringing the book he gave me; he also might think I did not even want or like the book, which would also hurt his feelings. So I took your book along with me. Later that night I was bored, so I took out *Endangered* and started reading it. I was instantly hooked! The way you leap right in to the story immediately caught my interest!

The funny thing is I kept seeing the words bonobo, but in my head, I was reading the word baboon. I read over half of the book before I realized it was really bonobo! I had assumed it was baboon just because it started with a B. I also learned that I was nowhere near correct when I said *Endangered* was predictable. I learned it was about compassion and love, bravery and friendship, survival and skill. All the while Sophie and Otto's adventure happened in the middle of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's confusing war. But miraculously, they managed to stay together, survive, and trust each other to the very end.

Your book has made a significant impact on the way I see things, feel, and think. It has changed my perspective of my life and other people's life. You showed me that no matter how pretty you are, or rich or famous, or even human, that you can make a difference. It all comes down to your skills, your knowledge, and your attitude towards life. Your book showed me that no matter what you must always persevere.

Your book has matured me in many ways. I realized things about myself that I had never realized before. You taught me the importance of caring for others. *Endangered* taught me that not everything I do has to be about me. You taught me the importance of life, and how to love and cherish every precious moment of it. People may make mistakes. We may trip and stumble, but there is always a reason to get back up again, to keep on trying. And it may be hard to get back up again, but it is for other people, and not myself, that I keep on going.

You also made me realize how fortunate I am. How privileged I am that I don't have to kill others for my own sake. I'm privileged that I don't have to threaten death to innocents just for a bottle of water. I am lucky that I don't have a huge war going on full of drunken soldiers brandishing machetes in their unworthy hands. I'm glad that I don't have a chaotic and unorganized revolution happening. I am thankful that I have a warm house and a loving family to care for me. I'm glad that the place I live in is a free and safe country; I'm glad that Americans have rights, and that we can make our own choices in our lives.

Endangered has taught me more than I ever could have imagined from a "Nature Book". It is a book that I know I will read over and over again, enjoying it thoroughly every time. Your book has encouraged me to read other books that I

normally wouldn't think twice about. I think I will also try reading that book about the tailless dolphin, along with the book about the mismatched friendship between the tortoise and the hippopotamus. I will still do my shopping, my bowling, and socializing, but I will always remember you wrote about a lonely and injured bonobo who is saved by a girl who will care for him, sacrifice everything for him, and cherish his life forever.

Sincerely,

Madeleine Moreland

LEVEL 1

Honorable Mention: Anonymous

Title: *The Brothers Lionheart*

Author: Astrid Lindgren

LEVEL 2

Winner: Sylvani Starchild-St.Clair

Title: *Mockingjay*

Author: Suzanne Collins

Dear Suzanne Collins,

When I was little, the most I knew about war was that there were usually two sides. One was bad and the other was good, and at the end there was a winner and a loser. At least, that's what I was told. I had a vague knowledge that sometimes people didn't come back from wars...that they sometimes didn't survive them. I would always think how lucky it was for me that I was born in a time of peace. I wasn't aware at all of anything beyond my part of the world. But the reality that my young mind was so oblivious to was that, in far off lands called Iraq and Afghanistan, people were still fighting.

My Grandpa is a Vietnam veteran. In his time, people didn't know Post Traumatic Stress Disorder when they saw it. As I read *Mockingjay*, I recognized the transformation in Katniss from a person who had expectations of what the rest of her life would be like, to someone who would spend the rest of that life uncertain, trying to wash away the blood of the innocent from her memory. I can see a similar

thread that runs through my Grandfather and Katniss. I can recognize the load they both carry. The only thing I knew about my Grandpa's experience being in a war was when my dad would warn me to be extra careful about what I said whenever we visited him. By the end of *Mockingjay*, I could feel the cracks that ran through Katniss, and I held more sympathy for my Grandfather.

I remember reading the first chapter of the book, where Katniss is walking through the remains of her home. I knew already about her nightmares of the arena, but you can be forced to relive anything in your dreams, a time when your subconscious is stronger than your reason. Anyone would have nightmares about something like that, and after a while they forget them. But before I knew it, I was counting every time she would find herself falling apart and having to pick up the pieces for the sakes of all of the victims of the Capitol. Whenever she would break down, I could see the damage becoming increasingly permanent.

One early morning in October, I heard over the radio that a girl in Pakistan named Malala Yousafzai had been shot in the head because she believed in equal rights and education for girls. Though they gave no description of her, in my mind she had the image of the little girl in the book who wore the yellow coat, and was shot and killed. Even before this, I heard about other things on the radio, in local newspapers, on TV. These are only some of the things I could see, but I am certain that there is so much more I don't know about and synonymous with that of your books. Though I love your books, more than anything, they terrify me, not because of the content, but because I saw the future of a world like ours that with every shot fired, became closer and closer to our reality. My understanding suddenly reached beyond my grandfather, and Malala Yousafzai, and out of the blue, it was Panem, 2012.

To this day, I still read *The Hunger Games* series at least once every year, and I think that maybe if the people of our governments read a copy of your books they may gain the understanding that I have gained of the possible future, and then maybe they could also see your books as a cautionary tale, as I have. The story of Katniss and Panem should be spread throughout communities, so that with new knowledge, we could all take the next step towards a better world without violence, unified as one people, made stronger by a peace that knits every one of us together.

Gratefully yours,
Sylvani Starchild-St.Clair

LEVEL 2

Runner Up: Camille Dupeyroux

Title: *The Snowy Day*

Author: Ezra Jack Keats

Dear Ezra Jack Keats,

Here in Portland, it doesn't snow. We get plenty of rain—more than our fair share—but it rarely ever snows. Maybe that's why my five-year-old self was so intrigued by the cover of your book, *The Snowy Day*. At that point in time, I hadn't yet learned to read. Even so, I was transfixed. Perhaps it was the strange unknown of Peter in his cherry red, oompa-loompa snowsuit, and his small footsteps following close behind him in the powdery white snow.

Before we learned to read on our own, my mom would always read my twin sister and me a short story before putting my baby brother to bed. Every night she would ask us, "Which one?" I would always reply, "The Snowy Day! The Snowy Day!" without a blink of the eye, and pick it up from its special spot beside the bed. There was something so peaceful about snuggling against my mother's warm body, listening to her words flow through my mind like music. I would imagine myself sliding down hills, stacking snowmen, and creating angels with Peter in the glittering snow. Those adventures I shared with Peter continued through my dreams every night.

Still, I wanted to be able to read the book whenever I wanted without having to wait until the end of the day. It was your book that drove me to learn to read. I practiced reading your book over and over until I finally got the hang of it. Unfortunately, as the years went by and I got busier and busier, *The Snowy Day* slowly made its way to a more permanent spot at the back of my bookshelf.

One winter day, several years later, the unimaginable happened. I remember waking up to snow outside my window; glorious, crisp white snow that covered every rooftop and dusted each tree! Memories immediately washed over me. I remembered Peter sitting on the bed in his patterned pajamas, the same excitement

I presently felt drawn onto his small face. For the first time in years, I unburied the book and read through the twenty-some pages over and over again. After breakfast that day, my sister, brother, and I excitedly headed out the door to explore our very first snowy day.

The snow looked very different up close than it did from my second-story window. The tiny, emerald heads of grass poked out from under the thin layer of snow, which was more yellow than white in a few places. To me, it was more perfect than I could have imagined. My world was now just a less whimsical version of Peter's. I remember walking around with my toes pointed out, like this, and toes pointed in, like that. We made snowmen and snow angels on the front lawn. I ever remember trying to sneak a snowball into the freezer, but my mom caught me in the act!

Even as a thirteen year old girl today, I'll still sometimes pick up your book and am washed over by a wave of old memories. I remember it as the bedtime book, the book that taught me to read. *The Snowy Day* will always be a book that reminds me of my fantastic childhood. Even though it may not be snowing outside, I'll never be far away from a Snow Day!

Warmly,
Camille Dupeyroux

LEVEL 2

Honorable Mention: Mia Bledsoe
Title: *A Mango-Shaped Space*
Author: Wendy Mass

Dear Wendy Mass,

One day when I was eleven years old, I was perusing the library. I, admittedly, do judge books by their covers and titles, and came upon a mottled white book on the shelf with the title *A Mango-Shaped Space*. I immediately thought, *um, way random title! Sounds boring*. That was one of the most incorrect impulse judgements I have ever made. I quickly moved on to the next book, a much more eye-pleasing bright pink one.

Later, I noticed the familiar white cover poking out of the bulging library bag. Inwardly, I groaned. *I don't want this book, Mom! It looks soooo dull!* Nevertheless, I picked up the book – albeit reluctantly – and started to read the back cover, murmuring softly out loud.

“Mia Winchell appears to be a typical kid, but she’s keeping a big secret – sounds, numbers, and words have color for her. No one knows, and Mia wants to keep it that way. But when trouble at school finally forces Mia to reveal her secret, she must learn to accept herself and embrace her ability, called synesthesia, a mingling of the senses.” I gently closed the book but I was so shell-shocked that I felt a jolt like one might receive when they were hit by a bolt of lightning.

I sat down on the couch, tears coming to my eyes even before I cracked the cover. I gobbled down the story, never looking up, not aware of my surroundings or people coming and going. I cried with Mia, laughed with her, became angry with her. When I finally finished *A Mango-Shaped Space*, I sat up with a dry throat, exhausted like I had just run a marathon. The lingering hues from the words spiraled in front of me when I closed my eyes.

When I read, colors wave and dance and float in front of me, curling around to form fantastical shapes, contorting themselves into wispy forms that look like smoke. One of my favorite things about reading is that the words begin to breathe on the page, bursting and billowing with bright shades that stream around and through my whole world. The colors make the book come alive.

You’ve probably guessed by now that I have synesthesia. Part of the shock and astonishment for me, though, when I read the back cover of what would become one of my favorite books: my name is Mia, too. That is one of the many reasons that your book was and is so special to me.

My synesthesia has always been there, like a...a bonus, like a few more sips left at the bottom of a Dr. Pepper can you thought was empty. It’s something that never seemed strange to me. Like Mia, I thought it was normal – that everyone had it – but never really mentioned it until one day when I was about eight.

That day, a turning point for me as it was when I discovered my synesthesia had a name, I asked my mom what color her x was and informed her that mine was white

lined with black. She stared at me for a minute and I, for a single, fleeting moment, wondered if she had the colors too, or if I was the only one. She asked me, slowly, if my numbers and letters and shapes all had their own special colors.

Duh, I thought.

Duh, I replied. (I was around eight at this time and had no problem voicing my innermost thoughts, never mind how rude or sarcastic they were).

She explained to me that I had something called synesthesia, which basically meant numbers, letters and shapes had color for me. I was a little scared at first. My mom is a doctor, and I knew that she knew what she was talking about. Was something wrong with me? But she informed me that she had synesthesia, too (it's often hereditary), and that lots of people actually had it. My mom was curious about whether either my sister or I would have it, but she wasn't sure – she didn't want to tell us unless we started developing it ourselves without any idea about what it really was. When she found out I had it, she was happy. She was glad I got to experience the colors.

I was relieved, but at the same time, a little disconcerted. It was a lot to take in, knowing that my colors had a name. I had always thought it was that way for everyone, and finding out that it wasn't – indescribable. The closest I can explain it is wanting to change your mind when you're already free falling. A sickening *whoosh* in the pit of your stomach.

It's not only numbers and letters and shapes that have color for me, but sounds, too. I really love music based on the gorgeous hues that emanate from the notes. Music makes my colors bolder and brighter, so I play guitar, trombone, piano, and I sing so I can experience those dazzling shades as often as possible. I can tell when I'm sharp or flat because the colors are sour (like Mia). In additions, English is one of my favorite subjects because I can tell when the sentence or the spelling is off, because the colors don't mesh together right. This, I hope, will help me when I pursue my goal of becoming a writer.

When I received my own copy of *A Mango-Shaped Space* for my twelfth birthday from my mom, I leaped up from the couch and hugged her tightly. She had a

twinkle in her eye that seemed to twist and spin like my colors as she smiled and hugged me back.

Your book made me many things: a cat lover (I fell in love with Mango and his mews) along with a better person: I learned to accept myself and my colors, which, though I had loved and appreciated before, had always felt slightly weird about them when I found out that not everyone had them. When I read your words about Mia not wanting to share her gift, and keeping it secret, I knew how she felt. I immediately felt more secure, knowing that other synesthetes felt uncomfortable or ashamed of their closest friends: their own unique individual colors. It helped me come to terms with my own colors and, in turn, my own self, by realizing that I wasn't the only one who felt weird about them because not everyone had them.

I also learned a lot more about the traits of synesthesia from your book and how it is different for everyone who possesses it-and I thank you for that. I learned exactly why and how I had synesthesia (colored numbers and letters) and colored hearing, which happens when the visual and hearing senses in your brain are linked.

But most importantly, your book taught me that I am not alone in my colorful world. Synesthesia is not a disease. It's a blessing in the disguise of swirling colors. I'm glad and proud that I am synesthetic, and I'm glad, most of all, that Mia Winchell and Mia Bledsoe could share their colors with each other and with the world.

Your truly,
Mia Bledsoe

LEVEL 2

Honorable Mention: Lizzy Palmquist

Title: *When you reach me*

Author: Rebecca Stead

Dear Mrs. Stead,

There are many books out there. Some books are made purely for entertainment; for you to simply sit back and enjoy. Others leave you lying awake at night with

your mind spinning like a carnival ride over what you just read. Many make you feel a strong emotion, such as sadness over the loss of a character, surprise that came from a plot twist, or a sense of relief and happiness that popped into your head after a triumphant ending. And then there are the books that change the way you think about things. That change the way you see the world. When You Reach Me affected me this way.

There are several lines in this book that changed the way I thought about things and how my actions affected the people around me. Others made me question my past actions or what I would do in the future. But there was a caption that really caught my attention; that left me reading it over and over again until the words rang in my head like a bell going off and all I could think of was this:

“Mom says each of us has a veil between ourselves and the rest of the world, like a bride wears on her wedding day, except this kind of veil is invisible. We walk around happily with these invisible veils hanging down over our faces. The world is kind of blurry, and we like it that way. But sometimes our veils are pushed away for a few moments, like there’s a wind blowing it from our faces. And when the veil lifts, we can see the world as it really is, just for those few seconds before it settles down again. We see all the beauty, and cruelty, and sadness, and love. But mostly we are happy not to. Some people learn to lift the veil themselves. Then they don’t have to depend on the wind anymore”

I still think of these words often. They are just something that I think will stick in my head forever. They remind me of a time when I used to like my veil, when I used to enjoy having it hang in my face and block my view of the world around me. Then one day, my veil blocked my view of something important. I would not realize until sometime later, but this single blocked view was the key to an event that not only made me lose a friend, but my self confidence as well.

In fifth grade, I became friends with a girl at my school. I was the new girl and I didn’t know anyone until I met her. She introduced herself to me right away. She seemed nice and I became her friend. A few months later, I noticed that she seemed to not be around. If she was I would talk to her for a few minutes and then she would disappear. I didn’t think much of it. I was fine with her hanging out with other people. A few weeks later, she told me she didn’t want to be friends

anymore. When she told me this, I felt as though I had been slapped. She said some hurtful things to me that rang in my ears for days. After that, I didn't talk to her again.

After this happened, I remember thinking things like, "How could this happen?" and "Why did I ever become friends with *her*?" Eventually I realized that lifting my veil when I first met her or even when she started to not be around anymore might have made me change my opinion of her and start working towards finding a better friend. Instead, I chose to keep my veil on, and I have been regretting it ever since.

But I have moved on from where I was then. I am able to lift my veil when I need to now, and it has helped me make new friends, avoid people who might not be the best idea to befriend, and really open my eyes to the world around me and let me see it as it is, not what I want it to be. I have more confidence in myself and my ability to make the right decisions. I still have some moments where I feel as if it might not be the best choice to lift my veil. But I do anyway, and I feel like I will have a better chance of making the right choices in the future if I keep lifting it. Thank you for teaching me how to lift my veil. I am certain that I will never be able to see the world the same way again.

Sincerely,
Lizzy

LEVEL 2

Honorable Mention: Helen Rossmiller

Title: *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate*

Author: Jacqueline Kelly

Dear Jacqueline Kelly,

I relish science. Your book, *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate*, taught me to do this. *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate* changed my life, helping me to realize new things when Calpurnia took me on an adventure as she discovered the natural world around her. Through your book I discovered the wonder of science. Calpurnia's description of the natural world that intrigued her so much made me feel like I was there, and was joining in on her adventures in the real world. I realized what

science really was. Scientists are just people who wonder at the world around them. They are ordinary people who notice the color of grasshoppers, who collect specimens in the woods, who take note of the new flower, who document the wind direction, who count the rabbits who try to discover the species of a hummingbird. A scientist is a person who notices and wonders.

At the time that I read your book I felt like a mirror image of Calpurnia. I am a girl and at the time age 11, just like her. I had long hair that hung to my hips, and it got annoying so I finally cut it in seventh grade like Calpurnia. I played piano as well. I was the logical one in my family like Calpurnia. I never read fantasy. Your book taught me to prefer real facts and logic because there is plenty to explore before dreaming. There is a whole world that is more amazing than anything you could make up because it actually functions. Who could make up something as delicate and intriguing as the human body, as intriguing as nature? Here is the quote by Charles Darwin that I especially loved from your book: “How fleeting are the wishes and efforts of man! How short his time! And consequently how poor with his products be, compared with those accumulated by nature....” It really showed how nature can create amazing things.

As I read the book I realized, that with my walks in the park behind my school I was already enjoying what Calpurnia enjoyed. I started to realize what science really was. Science was knowledge of the world. It is more than most people think it is. Science is more than just a dead body of facts. This is why science is derived from Latin *scientia*, meaning “knowledge”. The Romans were exactly right, science is knowledge. Science is knowledge about the world around you. The facts mean something. After I read *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate* I started to enjoy science. Usually nothing happens in the snap of a finger, but I know that your book planted a seed in me. It gave me wings. You have to fly yourself but you must have the wings first. Your book was my ticket to fly – to enjoy science. My fourth grade teacher, Levia Friedman, contributed to my knowledge of science as well.

After I graduated elementary school I went to school that focuses on science called the Winterhaven School of Math and Science. Now three years after reading your book, my pleasure in science has really revealed itself. This year I won second place in the science fair at my school. That is when I thought about what changed me from before, when I barely knew what science was in fourth grade, before I

even read your book. I realized that your book really had a very big impact on me, one that I perhaps did not notice at first. It may have changed my future even, for when I grow up I want to be a botanist. I thought about Callie's struggles to find a place in the world where she'd be encouraged in the joys of curiosity, and realized how lucky I am to live in a time when science is thought to be a good study for both genders. I still may be out of place the girl who acs science class, loves science and gets a microscope for Christmas.

I like how each chapter of this novel opens with a quotation from *The Origin of Species*, by Charles Darwin. Each quote took time to digest and taught me things as I thought about our world. I liked many of the quotes but three truly spoke to me. "The crust of the earth is a vast museum...." I truly agree. The earth has so many things to share, and so much history is recorded on its vast surface. There is so much to know and learn if you simply think, notice, and ask questions.

Another quote that spoke to me is how amazingly fast things can grow and change. "Linnaeus has calculated that if an annual plant produced only two seeds...and their seedlings next year produced two, and so on, then in twenty years there would be a million plants." This quote is amazing and true. When you start with one inspiration it brings many other seeds of ideas that will soon grow to make more. Another quote that I appreciated was: "Seedlings from the same fruit, and the young of the same litter, sometimes differ considerably from each other, though both the young and the parents...have apparently been exposed to exactly the same conditions of life..." I am now, because of your book, the only science lover in my family, while my siblings like history and art. My parents are not scientists either, yet we all live in the same house. My first word was "book" while my sister's first word was "mama". Yet we both have the same parents. As your book taught me: science exposes many mysteries and explains others.

Sincerely,
Helen Rossmiller

LEVEL 3

Winner: Chelsea C. Lin

Title: Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother

Author: Amy Chua

Dear Amy Chua,

This was *supposed* to be a letter about how your book almost ruined my life.

But instead, it's a letter about self-realization for what I've been doing these past years.

When I came home from school one day, my mom was there, greeting me by shoving her iPad in my face.

"Look, look! Look at what she's been able to do!" I skimmed through the article, found the words "*better*," "*accomplished*," and my personal favorites, "*Chinese*" and "*Asian*," and immediately put the iPad down. I was especially morose when she bought this slim, 229-page book that proved to be the bane of my existence.

Your book Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother – which was what the article was about, of course – slapped me in the face, telling me to wake up and see the world around me.

Battle Hymn scared me. I was terrified that my own mom would absorb your writing and become one of the stereotypical Asian parents that hounded their kids into studying and all A's in school, berated them for being second place and compared them to others. Battle Hymn intrigued me. I was curious about how you even managed to get Lulu to stand for hours to practice violin when I would've already cried half to death. Most of all, Battle Hymn changed me as a person. It wasn't a physical change, but my mind was motivated to the possibilities of what I could accomplish.

I may be an American-born Chinese, but I'm a heck of a sorry excuse for one. Having been used to a life of easy homework assignments and effortless tests, I never tried working hard on anything because I thought I was perfect.

I hated how other people tend to characterize Asian people by saying that they only cared about grades, academics and college. I also hated how I laughed about it with my friends and discriminated against my own race. We made jokes about the “*Asian Dream*” (the extreme version of the “American Dream”) and laughed about how we weren’t true “*Asians*.” Needless to say, your book only kindled the flames of my desire to related less and less to this supposedly alien topic I belonged to.

This was all until I cracked open your book, read over each chapter, and closed it with a sense of finality. I felt ashamed of my “achievements” in school, the gold stars on my tests, the 100% scrawled in red. I felt embarrassed for how much I practiced my music, the mere hours of playing violin and piano in the living room. I felt stupid for thinking that *I* had a hard life, when there were clearly others that worked harder than me and deserved more recognition.

I soon realized that Battle Hymn reflected my own personal life and the struggles of living up to higher expectations. It also made me wonder about what I wanted to do with my life. Was I going to stay in Oregon without fulfilling my dreams? Or was I going out to see the world and live my life to the fullest? I didn’t know where I wanted to go, and my crossroads were wide open. Battle Hymn helped me realize that I would need to be better and improve in order to get the things I want.

My mom often told me that I was born with talent. “You see, some people are born with talent. They’re the people that get a head start in life. But the real fighters are the ones that work hard and diligently. Talent can only go so far. The rest, you have to come up with on your own.” Those words have stuck to me since the beginning, and that also helped me realize the importance of working hard.

It’s been a long and hard road to travel. Thousands of dollars have gone into violin and piano lessons, and countless hours wasted over yelling and crying. Later, I even had to give up piano for the sake of school and violin. However, I believe that my patience and work will pay off later in life.

And someday, I hope that a memoir titled Battle Hymn of Chelsea Lin will hit the shelves.

Sincerely,
Chelsea Lin

LEVEL 3

Runner Up: Anonymous

Title: *And Then There Were None*

Author: Agatha Christie

LEVEL 3

Honorable Mention: Amanda Ramage

Title: *The Book Thief*

Author: Markus Zusak

Dear Markus Zusak,

Humane is an unusual word. It sounds too close to human and yet they are far from humane. In fact, they are complete opposites.

Can a book change a person? How can a fictitious tale convert readers into believers? Sure, there's a small fluctuation in how the reader might perceive the world. But, to change someone's whole life? Impossible.

I read *The Book Thief* during eighth grade in my English class. World War II has always been a fascinating event. The idea of genocide at an elementary school age seems far from rational. Why would someone want to kill others, look them in the eye and end their life? It is something few have experience with, so we all want to know what it's like. The pictures. Families torn apart. A culture nearly eradicated. And for what: For a perfect world that doesn't exist? If a large number of them didn't want this, how can they so blindly follow a leader like this? Pretty words can't change a person, let alone an entire country. How does one fall that far? It's all the same. Genocide, segregation, discrimination, dehumanization are all the same. A pathetic quest for absolute power.

But isn't hating murders a search of power in its own? To point out all the mistakes of another is just a way to climb higher on a righteous level. Like Death, after reading this book I am haunted by such acts of humanity. What God given right do people have to judge others? I'd understand distaste towards the person who causes pain, but a group full of innocent people? Each body has its own personality and

morals, yet we continue to focus on that one person and create a profile for them all. Is it too much to ask for us to stand up against this?

Yet, being a small group of protesters among an unflinching wave of ultra nationalism is deadly. The only relief they can offer without harm to themselves is sympathy. But what about participating in supporting groups of discrimination? Should Hans admonish himself for joining the Nazi Party despite his only intention is to feed his family with the money? Should people hate themselves for living in such society?

My family is from a Christian background. We aren't staunch believers, but follow the Bible to certain degree. Gay marriage wasn't really an issue when I was younger, so I blindly went along with the group and condemned it. After realizing my beliefs on judgment, I didn't care. People just want happiness. It's not killing anyone, so who cares? Doesn't happiness come above all else? Someone argued with me that they didn't care either, they'd just prefer that the government call it something else. Why? Words are just symbols on paper, where thoughts dictate its meaning. Every union is different. Does that mean we should call all marriages by a different name?

When I get down to the root of how your writing changed my thoughts, I think about why I should care. I'm not part of the main target groups people often commit hate crimes against.

Everyone knows what it's like to be discriminated against. No one who knows this pain should turn around and give it to another. But asking for humanity to stop this act is asking for a perfect world, isn't it?

While, I'm eager to lecture others on equality, it's a mere pipe dream. There will never be a moment where the entire human race will be the same in any way. All of us should have two arms, but there's some who don't even have one. Equality will *never* exist. We will never establish it.

Does that mean we shouldn't try?

Respectfully,
Amanda Ramage

