

CHANNIN McNAUGHTON (6th Grade: Cleveland, Birchwood School)

Level I Semifinalist

Letter to Jerry Spinelli concerning his book, Maniac Magee

Dear Jerry Spinelli:

Reading your book makes me think of a young plant growing into a lovely tree. That plant is like me, the water a layer of awareness. When your book “watered” me, I was aware of the harm that I was doing to others. The bright sunlight is like your supportive words, guiding me with its gentle rays, guiding me to find peace and learning how to help others find theirs. The rich soil is a reminder of how important it is to care for other people. Your book, *Maniac Magee*, planted this seed.

I have been teased for being short for years. Your book gave me a different perspective on life. I saw how I overreacted whenever someone or something said something regarding my height, even if it wasn’t insulting. Now, instead of yelling or insulting them back, I either smile and walk away or say that I am proud to be who I am, and no one can change that. Magee showed me not to hurt other people for revenge on something they said or did to you. After reading about him, I make friends easily, and they respect me. Even if they do make fun of me, I am, learning to accept that and laugh with them. They are exactly like the friends I imagined Magee would be to me—someone to help me stand on my feet and catch me when I fall.

I noticed a huge improvement in my life after reading your book because I learned to ignore comments and stopped myself from being vexatious back. I argued less with my friends and was instantly surprised by the hypnotizing power of pleasant words and actions.

“Don’t judge a book by its cover” is a phrase I would hear and not really think about, but your book has caused to think twice about the meaning of it. Magee has inspired many others. His courage to be himself without anyone changing his person has helped young children, teenagers, adults and even me. I wish I were as brave to bring many people to become friends with the ones they hated. He became friends with African Americans, and Americans, and eventually brought enemies together because of the kindness he showed them. There is so much hatred before he came that there were streets that certain colored people couldn’t pass. When Magee came, he didn’t care about what color skin people had and was so confident and brave. One of my favorite parts in your book was when he made a courageous move to bring Mars bars into the McNab’s home, and everybody froze. Your book gave me more courage and confidence.

I now realize that I have “water,” “sunlight,” or “soil” to grow. I’ve had what I needed all along: supportive friends, loving family and inspiring books like yours.

Sincerely,

Channin McNaughton