

Lilliana Romaker (6th Grade: Columbus, Ohio)
Level I Second Place Winner
Letter to J. K. Rowling, OBE FRSL on her *Harry Potter* series

Dear J. K. Rowling:

I am a girl that appears to love reality. I'm realistic about situations that I run into in life, I'm eager to learn about the events that happen beyond the borders of my perspective of the world, and I've never shown that I want something that the world wouldn't give.

That's how I appear to the world on the outside. However, what I feel in the inside is a completely different matter.

When I was nine years old (what seems like a billion years ago), my mother suggested to me a new book series: "Why not try Harry Potter?"

No. No was the immediate answer. Never.

I had grown up learning that Harry Potter was super scary and super horrifying, and that I should shield my eyes if I ever go into the living room whenever my family watched the movies. Plus, they were way too hard and way too long of books for little girls like me who never, ever read.

That was, until, my mother locked me in her bedroom and forced me to listen to her read aloud the first chapter of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. My initial reaction? "Can I borrow that?"

Over the next few months while I read the books, I didn't live in the real world, I didn't live on Earth; I didn't live in pointless reality. I lived in a magical place of spells and magic creatures, a great and mysterious castle with teachers from dark pasts. A place where there is love and darkness; people who care about you no matter what; a home where you can find out who you are.

Everyone in these books taught me lessons that have each individually affected my life drastically. I've realized lately I haven't had an opportunity to learn again at any other time or place in my life; so, if I hadn't learned these lessons through your books, I never would have learned them in the first place. Harry taught me to be brave and accept my destiny head on. Ron taught me to learn from my mistakes and forgive those of others as well as not to judge a book by its cover. Neville taught me to stand up myself no matter what, and to have the real kind of courage that no one seems to know about lately. It's not the kind where you are without fear; then you can't be human. It's the kind where you accept your fears and become stranger than they are. Luna taught me to not be ashamed of the person who I am and always will be, and to live how I want to live. Sirius Black taught me to right the wrongs that were never meant to be. Dumbledore taught me not to let my past define me and to be who I am now, not who I once was. Hermione, though, taught me to never be ashamed of who I am.

I pride myself on being very book-smart, and I'm not ashamed of it. I've never been very street-smart, and it's held me back sometimes over the years, so being book-smart is something of which I am very proud. However, since I'm not ashamed of it, I've been called a know-it-all on countless occasions. Whenever I say that I got a perfect score on attest, say that something academic is easy when to others it's difficult, bring up pieces of random, scientific information, or just overall imply subconsciously that I have any intelligence whatsoever, it always leads to the same thing: "Wow, I can't believe how much of a know-it-all you're being." It makes me ashamed of my greatest God-given gift. In this day and age, it's almost a rite of passage at some

point to be ashamed of what you look like or who you are, and this truly breaks my heart. Hermione was never an exception...well, not really. Instead of going through the simple teasing and name-calling for being an intelligent girl and a "Mudblood," Hermione is threatened, excluded, rejected, is literally tortured, and at several points in time her life is on the line because of who she is. And yet, in the very end, she becomes a hero and plays a vital part in the defeat of one of the world's greatest evils. In my darkest moments, I don't want to forget this, so I may have hope that things will get better.

Every moment, every chapter, every word has melted into my mind and become my own memories. These memories have become a part of me. They opened up a new world for me, and made me want to read more and more, because books to me are really the only place where you can learn what really matters. No facts of math, dates in history, or rules of grammar, but how to be a good person, because that's what I want to learn more about than anything else. I want to be a good person for the sake of being a good person. And books are the only place where I can really learn how. Now, three years later, I have lived a dozen lifetimes instead of one. I can say that I'm proud, and I can't say that this is a temporary thing.

I want to do that for someone. Everyone wants to feel like they've affected the world in some way or another. They want to feel like that getting out of bed, putting each foot in front of the other, living and breathing, hearing the cruel words and actions as you go on, overcoming the simple daily trials, merely existing for your personal eternity is all worth it somehow in the end. If I can do what Harry Potter did for me to other people, then I would feel victorious over my troubles. I want to become part of someone, a part of who someone is. Before all this happened, I was a nobody who was lost in the scheme of everything; I didn't even know what right and wrong was. I didn't know why I was here, or why I even went forward. I know now that I've changed, and now there's magic in my life.

These books got me into reading, which is everything that I am. There's magic in the world and that's something reality can't give me. It's beautiful and gives me the realization that if dogs can have three heads, the end of a stick can spark and create, there's a world out there just for you, then anything can be true. It's made me a deeper person, and that today is something that I hold close, but it's also made me more realistic. I can decipher what is real or not so much easier and makes me appreciate both so much more. Days are never boring because I can escape into my own mind, to a far-off land of magic and mystery. If reality gets through I can escape into the endless words and stories of reading. Sure, it's all in my head, but why in the world should that mean it isn't real? It gives me the feeling that I'm not alone, that there are others out there just like I am. I'm not the only one who remembers true darkness and silence before my first memory, who hates the sound of my own voice on tape, who lives like I do. There are others out there like me, and it's the best feeling there is.

I want to write my own story one day, because I want to change someone's life like you have mine. I want to protect someone from being a lost, coldhearted ghost like I was and teach them what I've learned and how to truly live like there's something out there that can save them. I want to show people the world I've made, my own world, and feel like I've made a change somehow. I want to bring magic to someone's life, just like your books did.

Sincerely,

Lillianna Romaker