

Rebecca LaManna (7th Grade: West Chester, Ohio)
Level II Semifinalist
Letter to Jay Asher concerning his book, *Thirteen Reasons Why*

Dear Mr. Asher,

Your book *Thirteen Reasons Why* taught me to look at the world differently. It also helped me to get over my depression. You know why? I went through a predicament somewhat like Clay's. But it wasn't my crush who committed suicide. It was my best friend. I'm not writing to praise the wonderful writing skills or the intense situations, but writing to inform you on how your book impacted my life. I probably impacted other people around the world, too. I never knew of Kayne's (my friend) suicidal thoughts until that day in July, the day before my 12th birthday. When I got a call from his mom, all I heard was crying. She was in hysterics. I couldn't understand a word she was saying until she calmed down. When I actually understood what she was saying, I dropped the phone in shock.

In your book, Clay has a crush on Hannah. That's how it used to be with me and Kayne. But, it was Kayne who had a crush on me. Even though we were best friends, I knew he had like me more than that. My theory was never confirmed until I read his journal, after he passed. I thought to myself, Kayne, you lovesick idiot, why? I never knew anyone had liked me. And I thought it was gross. Before he died, I was happy and care-free. When he would complain that his life was miserable, I'd think nothing of it. I'd tell him, "Your life's not horrible. You just think it is." And he'd just smile at me. He used to smile a lot before summer break last year. I knew he'd come to me with his problems and he knew I'd listen. But, he never came to me about his plans or even thoughts about killing himself. I never knew until it actually happened.

When I got the phone call, I was shocked. Looking back, I never thought my best friend would think of taking his own life. The happy, smiling boy I knew was gone forever. He had left a note though. He left a lot of his personal stuff to me. To see these objects made me cry. That's how I spent my birthday, in tears. When I read the note, it made me cry even more. He had spilled out all his depression onto one little piece of paper. When I went to the funeral a week later, I found that I couldn't cry. I had cried so much that past week, I felt as if I couldn't cry anymore. Looking at his body in the casket made me want to curl up and lock myself away. And that's exactly what I did until school started again. I would be always in my room, with the door locked and sitting on my bed, staring at the wall. I was becoming a recluse. I was on the verge of going crazy. I had my own suicidal thoughts, and they were very serious. But, I knew I couldn't do that to my family and remaining friends. That would kill them. I wouldn't talk to anyone. People that tried to talk to me only got turned away. Or, they got something thrown at them.

When school started, Mrs. Ryan, my language arts teacher, was talking to us about a book; your book to be exact. She told us the plot and I knew that was the book I had to read. So, I got it off the bookshelf and immediately started reading. I was taken aback by the web of emotions. The plot related to my life so much! I was amazed. It was the book I needed to get me back on the stable train of thought. It helped me gain peace of mind. I was more open to my family. My mom even convinced me to go to therapy. That was a giant step for me. To get my mind off things, I got interested in music, which is a major part of my life now. Sadness still fills me, but not like before. I was mentally stable again. I still as myself, "What did I do to deserve this?" The answer I've come up with is I haven't done anything. It wasn't my fault. I've realized this over many weeks.

Sometimes, life doesn't go the way you want it to. I learned that last summer. I was deeply depressed and had I, too, suicidal thoughts. I had them until I read your book. It taught me how much suicide affects people. It leaves scars in people's lives. I know it did on mine. My mom, who is bipolar, said I'm most like her, which means I would get depressed easily. I know I wouldn't think of suicide since I've read your book and have had my own traumatic experiences. And I thank you for that. You might as well have saved my life. Thank you, Mr. Asher.

Sincerely,

Rebecca LaManna