

Annabella Mayer (Grade 5, Bay Middle School, Bay Village, OH)
Level I Honorable Finalist
Letter to author Jerry Spinelli concerning his book, *Stargirl*

Dear Jerry Spinelli:

I, like everyone else, am not perfect. I don't always feel that I fit in. All my life, I've thought that being different, being imperfect, somehow made me inferior. That to be different was to be tolerated, but never embraced. But now, I know something new. *Stargirl* has taught me what no parent could convince me of: you really should embrace the difference.

Being a kid, everyone tells you that. People throw that phrase around like it isn't nearly as difficult as it actually is to be comfortably different. I never really believed that it was even possible. At the time, I had never ever heard of anyone who didn't take into account the way people thought of them. Although *Stargirl* is just a character in a book, she made me realize that you really can celebrate your differences in real life. *Stargirl*, after all, is just a high school girl. She's not perfect either, nor is she not trying to be. She plays her ukulele and dresses however she wants, all without being too worried that people think she's "weird."

For instance, *Stargirl* has tried to be normal. She once tried to wear what other people were wearing, put on makeup, and be Susan instead of "Stargirl." *Stargirl* wasn't happy like that, though. She didn't like the toil of attempting to fit in. It was like she was a butterfly among a zillion caterpillars, and she could not hide that. She had to embrace it.

That made me realize something. I didn't have to blend in with the crowd and be embarrassed when I didn't fit in. Can anyone truly be satisfied with that? I'm not saying you have to don crazy clothing or get a pet rat as *Stargirl* does, but you could at least be happy with who you are. I decided to be a butterfly.

I joined an art class program for writing with some other girls, became friends with people I had barely known before, and I dressed to make myself happy, not other people. I have always been a bit of an avid reader, so I entered a few writing contests. And I was, for the first time ever, not trying to be anyone but myself. It was a little change, but it made an unimaginable difference. *Stargirl* has led me to be myself. And I am forever grateful.

Sincerely,
Annabella Mayer