

## First Place Winner, Level I

Sara Goodlive

### Letter to author Cynthia Lord concerning her book *Rules*

Dear Cynthia Lord:

No one is normal. There is *no* normal. People think they have to be normal, and act cool, and be popular. They think they have to text their friends all the time and wear cute clothes. When I read *Rules*, I realized that people are wrong. That *I* was wrong.

Catherine was forced at a young age to ask herself a very important question: “What is normal?” Everyone has their own idea of normal but they all lead back to the same thing. Normal is what everyone else does. My little brother is the opposite of normal. He is about as far as you can get from normal. When Catherine had to figure out what normal meant, she learned that there is no such thing as normal. I was in a similar situation. I was forced to ask myself what normal meant, too.

My little brother has severe autism. He can’t say a word or go to a normal school. My brother and I have never had a conversation. He has never once said the word “Hello” to me. Not even my name. Autism deals with the nervous system. There are other diseases with the nervous system, too. Doctors and researchers have not figured out many of them. They may never. I can’t tell him to stop jumping around, or even to keep on his pants. I love him wholeheartedly, but when he acts “not normal” in public, it can be embarrassing. After I read this book, I realized that embarrassing is just an easier way to say “it is unusual (or not normal) compared to what everyone else is doing.” Just like Catherine, I thought it would be easier to make and have friends without the person knowing. I was wrong.

I have a best friend. Her name is Maddy. We have been best friends since First grade. The first time she came to my house, I was terrified. I didn’t know how Luke would be acting. What if he acted horrible and made her never want to come back? What if, after she met him, she realized I came from a family that isn’t completely “normal” and didn’t want to be my friend anymore? It was petrifying. Once the doorbell rang, I wanted to run to my room and go under the covers for eternity. But I didn’t. And, she met Luke. I went to school the next day with the same best friend. Maddy didn’t care that Luke wasn’t “normal.” She cared about *me*. Only me.

In the book, I felt like I was Catherine’s friend because she understood what I was going through. She was my age so that only helped me feel more like I was her friend. At times, Catherine was embarrassed and mortified of her little brother. Everything would be going “normal” with him, but everyone knows that when things are going right, something’s bound to go wrong. For her, it would be things out of the blue, like undressing in public, starting to scream and throw a fit, or anything to do with fish tanks. The same things happen with my brother, and being the older sister, it is partly my responsibility to watch him. Catherine had to watch David like I have to watch Luke. I feel like I can relate and bond with her. In parts of the book, it made me think of moments in my life. After I started reading *Rules*, I didn’t feel so embarrassed.

*Rules* taught me that normal isn’t a thing. It taught me that “embarrassing” is just compared to what everyone else is doing, and that real friends care about *you*, not your younger brother or whoever else is in your family—*only you!*

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