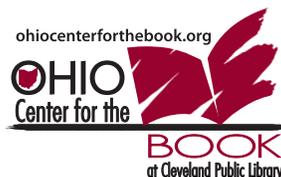


LETTERS ABOUT
LITERATURE
Writing Contest for Young Readers



COMMEMORATIVE BOOKLET 2017-18

This program is sponsored by: Center for the Book in the Library of Congress and Ohio Center for the Book at Cleveland Public Library



FORWARD

Timothy Phillips, Coordinator

Welcome students! Reading is much more than the act of comprehending words on paper. It is an interactive and lively exercise for the imagination and a respite for the soul.

Reading enables children and teenagers to live a thousand different lives, to explore different worlds, and to meet different people; they can travel at a moment's notice, anytime, anywhere (tickets, luggage, inoculations not required). Successful readers discover that being immersed in a book is an escape better than the movies because they are, in fact, the directors, producers, casting agents, and location scouts of the stories they read. In truth, readers are the captains of their own destinies, and the universe is theirs to discover. The spaceship they'll require to reach those distant worlds wasn't built by Elon Musk—it was found on a library shelf.

I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of those Ohio students who entered into the contest, thereby taking a risk by reaching out and revealing their hearts, hurt, aspirations, triumphs, and hard won victories—for which I salute them. Recognition is also extended to their parents, teachers, and librarians for their encouragement and support. Thank you.

A total of 3,110 students throughout Ohio submitted an entry into the 2017/2018 Letters About Literature contest. Of that total, 1,107 students (representing 23 counties and 42 sponsors) were in Grades 4, 5, or 6 (Level I); 1,231 (representing 20 counties and 47 sponsors) were in Grades 7 and 8 (Level II); and 862 (representing 32 counties and 31 sponsors) were in Grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 (Level III).

Congratulations again to students, families, and teachers. We are proud to honor your creative expression at our Ohio Center for the Book Awards Ceremony on Saturday, May 12, 2018.

Timothy Phillips

Coordinator, Letters About Literature
Literature Department & Ohio Center for the Book
Cleveland Public Library



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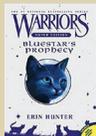
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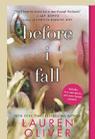
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks goes to Letters About Literature 2017-18 Sponsors

Staff of the Library of Congress Center for the Book

Becky Clark - Acting Director

Kathleen McGuigan - National Program Director, Letters About Literature

Dollar General Literacy Foundation

Cleveland Public Library Foundation

Staff of the Ohio Center for the Book @ Cleveland Public Library

Special thanks goes to Letters About Literature 2017-18 Judges

Linda Feagler

Senior Editor of Great Lakes Publishing's *Ohio Magazine*

A publication covering the best in travel, art, history, and life in the Buckeye State. She served as Senior Editor of *Cleveland Magazine* for four years before joining the staff of *Ohio Magazine* in 2002.

Through the years, she has won awards for her work from the Society of Professional Journalists and The Press Club of Cleveland.

Janet Ingraham Dwyer

Youth Services Consultant at the State Library of Ohio

She provides support and resources for children's and teen librarians and support staff in public and school libraries around the state. She manages Ohio's participation in the nationwide Collaborative Summer Library Program, and collaborates with the Ohio Library Council on Ohio Ready to Read and Choose to Read Ohio.

Todd K. Masuda

Lawyer with Schneider Smeltz Spieth Bel

He is a lifelong bookworm, former Board member of the Cleveland Public Library Foundation, and a regular at the Cleveland Public Library's downtown and Carnegie West branches. Long before going to law school, Todd spent a few years as a freelance children's illustrator. He retains his love for books of all reading levels, and is delighted to be a reader for Letters About Literature. His favorite book is *Charlotte's Web*.

Mindy McGinnis

Edgar Award-winning author

She writes across genres, including post-apocalyptic, historical, mystery, contemporary and fantasy fiction. She graduated from Otterbein University and lives in Ohio with her pets.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks goes to Letters About Literature 2017-18 Academic Sponsors

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Allen County

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Claremont County

- Meadow View Elementary School: Brooke Cox, 5th Grade

Cuyahoga County

- Birchwood School of Hawken: Karen Kufahl, 5th Grade
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- Campus International School: Samantha Glickman, 5th grade
- Chagrin Falls Intermediate School: Heather Hertz, 4th Grade
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- Kensington Intermediate School: Meredith Muccio, 5th Grade
- Kensington Intermediate School: Monica Standring, 5th Grade
- Kenston Middle School: Kristen Peace
- Moreland Hills Elementary: Kate Allard, 5th Grade
- Moreland Hills Elementary: Jean Metzger, 4th Grade

Delaware County

- Olentangy Orange Middle School: Danielle Grate, 6th Grade

Erie County

- Regional Center for Advanced Academic Studies: Jami Scott, 5th & 6th

Franklin County

- Hastings Middle School: Star Simpson, 6th Grade
- Jones Middle School: Michelle Lombardi, 6th Grade
- Saint Brigid of Kildare School: Jill Cecutti, 6th Grade

Hamilton County

- Loveland Intermediate School: Megan Clayton, 5th Grade
- Seven Hills School: Karla Balskus, 5th Grade
- Seven Hills School: Melissa Foraker, 4th Grade

Licking County

- Newark City Schools Gifted Program: Stephanie De Bevoise, 4th Grade

Lorain County

- North Ridgeville Academic Center: Tammi Belko, 6th Grade

Medina County

- A. I. Root Middle School: Kerilyn O'Brien, 6th Grade
- Central Intermediate School: Susan Heideman, 6th Grade
- Central Intermediate School: Sandi Mueller, 6th Grade
- Central Intermediate School: Shannon Schmitt, 6th Grade

Montgomery County

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks goes to Letters About Literature 2017-18 Academic Sponsors

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Portage County

- Davey Elementary School: Caroline Lenzo, 4th Grade
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Allen County

- Saint Charles Catholic School: Jean Blubaugh, 7th Grade

Ashtabula County

- Jefferson Area Junior High School: Jennifer Square, 8th Grade

Butler County

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- Middletown Middle School: Aly Brown, 8th Grade

Cuyahoga County

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- Ballard Brady Middle School: Lee McClain, 7th Grade
- Birchwood School of Hawken: Lorraine Tzeng, 8th Grade
- Brooklyn High School: Kathleen Mack, 8th Grade
- Chagrin Falls Middle School: Karen Phillips, 8th Grade
- Hathaway Brown: Susan Levitan, 8th Grade
- Kenston Middle School: Coreen Schaefer, 7th Grade
- Kenston Middle School: Karen Sunderhaft, 7th Grade
- Lee Burneson Middle School: Sara Latkowski, 7th Grade
- Lee Burneson Middle School: Deborah Schrembeck, 7th Grade
- Olmsted Falls Middle School: Thimi Kemock, 8th Grade
- Parma Senior High School: Halle Dawson, 8th Grade
- Rocky River Middle School: Jennifer Doran, 8th Grade
- Rocky River Middle School: Michelle Gibson, 7th Grade

Erie County

- Edison Middle School: Bethany Stipp, 8th Grade

Franklin County

- Grizzell Middle School: Lindsey Brauzer, 8th Grade
- Grizzell Middle School: Beth Honeycutt, 8th Grade
- Grizzell Middle School: Amber Yuen, 8th Grade
- Hastings Middle School: Kelli Leinbaugh, 7th Grade
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks goes to Letters About Literature 2017-18 Academic Sponsors

Level II Con't

Geauga County

- Saint Mary's School of Chardon: Edie Joyce, 7th Grade

Greene County

- Bellbrook Middle School: Susan Thomas, 7th Grade

Hamilton County

- Sycamore Junior High School: Sandra Adams, 8th Grade

Jackson County

- Jackson Middle School: Jennifer Wolford, 8th Grade

Jefferson County

- Jefferson County Christian School: Renee Hargett, 7th Grade

Lake County

- Mentor Memorial Middle School: Chelsea Apicello, 8th Grade
- Mentor Memorial Middle School: Edie Joyce, 8th Grade
- Mentor Memorial Middle School: Janice Karberg, 8th Grade

Licking County

- Liberty Middle School: Courtney Smith, 8th Grade
- Licking Valley Middle School: Traci Lausberg, 7th Grade

Lucas County

- Anthony Wayne Junior High School: Steve Varga, 7th Grade
- Leverette Elementary School: Christin Wilkins, 7th Grade

Medina County

- Wadsworth Middle School: Jason Ball, 7th Grade

Portage County

- Brown Middle School: Kailey Saltz, 8th Grade

Putnam County

- Ottawa Elementary School: Erika Snyder, 7th Grade

Stark County

- Arts Academy at Summit: Mackenzie Smith, 8th Grade
- Lake Center Christian School: Eric Schlabach, 7th Grade
- Saint Michael School: Amy Krajeck, 7th Grade
- Saint Thomas Aquinas Middle School: Kris Boti, 8th Grade

Van Wert County

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks goes to Letters About Literature 2017-18 Academic Sponsors

Level III

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Cuyahoga County

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- Orange High School: Vikas Turakhia, 10th Grade
- Westlake High School: Julie Davidson, 10th Grade

Delaware County

- Westerville North High School: Jim Grannis, 12th Grade
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Franklin County

- Dublin Scioto High School: Linda Roth, 12th Grade

Geauga County

- West Geauga High School: Kelly Klampe, 10th Grade

Hamilton County

- Archbishop McNicholas High School: Julie Muething, 11th Grade
- Turpin High School: Sandra Dunston Hoover, 11th Grade
- Ursuline Academy: Judy Whalen, 9th Grade

Henry County

- Liberty Center High School: Dawn Mericle, 11th Grade
- Wellston High School: Tina Callahan, 12th Grade

Mahoning County

- Boardman High School: Randy Nord, 12th Grade
- Boardman High School: Katie Tomko, 12th Grade
- Poland Seminary High School: Anne Marie Hurdley, 11th Grade

Marion County

- Marion Harding High School: Amy Dunmire, 9th Grade

Ottawa County

- Woodmore High School: Tina Sandwisch, 10th Grade

Stark County

- Jackson High School: Diana Rankin, 10th Grade

Summit County

- Hudson High School: Christie Annichine, 10th Grade
- Hudson High School: Jacqueline Hannah, 10th Grade
- Hudson High School: Megan Petraska, 10th Grade

Trumbull County

- Maplewood High School: Dr. Christen Clemson, 10th Grade

Van Wert County

- Van Wert High School: Pamela Switzer, 10th Grade

Warren County

- Mason High School: Allison Kolish, 11th Grade

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

WINNERS AND HONORABLE FINALISTS 2017-18

Level I Letters (Grade 4 - 6)

FIRST PLACE WINNER | LEVEL I

SARA GOODLIVE | 11-YEARS-OLD

Grade 6: Saint Brigid of Kildare, Dublin, Ohio: Jill Cecutti, Sponsor

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!*

Sara Goodlive

SECOND PLACE WINNER | LEVEL I

ANNA MANCINO | 10-YEARS-OLD

Grade 5: Dover Intermediate School, Westlake, Ohio: Donna Dieterich, Sponsor

Letter to author Audrey Penn concerning her book *The Kissing Hand*

Dear Audrey Penn:

When I was younger I was afraid to leave my mom and experienced the same fears and anxiety as Chester in your book, *The Kissing Hand*. I was four at the time and had to go to safety town. The first day of it I remember crying because I was afraid of leaving my mom. So, my brother had to stay with me the first day. Kindergarten was the same. Every day I would start bawling, my eyes full of tears because of how much I had missed her. I told my mom about it right away, and she said to maybe say a quick prayer for a sense of comfort, security, and love. The next day I tried to say a prayer: that helped a little, but not enough. After a week or so it got more intense. I wouldn't even want to go to school if she didn't come with me. We tried everything, singing a song together, even going to a therapist. Nothing worked. Until my mom read me your book *The Kissing Hand*. It changed my whole perspective of leaving my mom and was the only thing that worked for me.

Chester showed me that it was okay to leave mom at times and how just thinking to myself "Mom LOVES ME!" can really change how I think about the situation. It changed how I thought. I thought that it was cool that I could leave my mom without being scared. Every day, just like Mrs. Raccoon and Chester did in the book, my mom would kiss me on the head and say, "Mom LOVES YOU, Mom LOVES YOU," and I would head off to school. Now I am ten- years-old and a big tennis player. Whenever I am playing a tennis match and I get nervous I think to myself that my mom loves me no matter what. Mom loves me to the most that she can. Today, I am able to stay home alone without being scared.

Staying home alone was very scary for me when I was eight and nine. My brother would always have to stay with me and watch over me until my mom got home. Sometimes, even though I didn't want to go with my mom somewhere I would have to go. That really stunk because my mom said that I was allowed but that I was too afraid. Eventually, I had to step up to the plate. The first time that I stayed home alone was pretty cool for me. Even though my mom was only gone for 30 minutes it was a pretty big deal to me. But I couldn't have done it without your book. I would be freaked out if I didn't have something to remember my mom with. Luckily, I did though. I also had my mom read me *The Kissing Hand* before my first sleepover: like always, she kissed me on the hand and said "Mom LOVES YOU, Mom LOVES YOU!" My friend was a little confused with the whole thing but she understood. We are still friends and she knows that sometimes I can get scared. Your book has really helped me become more mature and open to new risks.

Without your book, I probably would still have the fear of leaving my mom. Your book really opened up a new life to me and even though I don't use *The Kissing Hand* as often I know that it is there in my heart and in my thoughts. Today, I am not afraid to leave me mom, but sometimes I can be afraid. When in that situation I say a prayer and think to myself, Mom LOVES YOU, Mom LOVES YOU!"

Sincerely, Anna Mancino

THIRD PLACE WINNER | LEVEL I

CHARLOTTE MUSSELMAN | 10-YEARS-OLD

Grade 5: Kensington Intermediate School, Rocky River, Ohio: Monica Standring, Sponsor
Letter to author Catherine Ryan Hyde concerning her book *Pay It Forward*

Dear Catherine Ryan Hyde:

I am writing this letter to share my feelings about your book *Pay It Forward*. Although I read the junior edition, this book was phenomenal. It sent a message of kindness and compassion. *Pay It Forward* was inspiring in many ways. It inspired me to reach out to those who are less fortunate and spread kindness wherever I go.

Pay It Forward showed me that one small voice can make a difference. In the book, a whole world of kindness starts from a small boy's Social Studies project. After reading this, a whole new world of opportunity opened up to me. I saw that I could change the world with one small idea. After all, there are precedents: Thomas Edison with his light bulb, Benjamin Franklin with electricity, and Alexander Graham Bell with the telephone.

Reading *Pay It Forward* makes me want to start my own movement of kindness— even if the kindness only spreads throughout my local school. *Pay It Forward* showed me that I can do whatever I set my mind to. In your book, Trevor's plan doesn't work at first, but then he still keeps trying. In the end, after all his hard work, he succeeds. This is telling me that although a new idea might take some work I can still achieve my goal.

Overall, the main message that I took from *Pay It Forward* is to be kind. So many people are kind to me every day, so it is my turn to pay it forward. After reading this book, I realized that most of the world's problems can be solved with kindness. If we all band together and try to spread the kindness, who knows what can happen. There will be less crime or war. Our Earth could be peaceful.

Thank you for writing this inspiring novel. You have taught me that it is our job to put kindness into the world. Although it might be difficult at first, we should keep trying to make a kinder world. I enjoyed *Pay It Forward* very much and I will treasure it for years to come.

Sincerely, Charlotte Musselman

HONORABLE FINALIST | LEVEL I

JUSTICE DUERK | 12-YEARS-OLD

Grade 6: North Ridgeville Academic Center, North Ridgeville, Ohio: Tamara Belko, Sponsor
Letter to author Joanne Rowling, concerning her book *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

Dear J. K. Rowling:

I was very touched by your book *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* in the sense that I *know* what it feels like to be alone even though I still am with my mom. I really connect with this book because I have always tried to do things that I thought were impossible. For instance, I try to do crazy things like learn flips or learn a hard skateboarding trick that frightens me. That stuff doesn't seem hard, but in my mind it felt like I was doing the impossible.

My parents are divorced, so I know what it feels like to feel like you are alone. My dad was very mean when I was little to my mom and me. When I was little, my dad would always yell at me and my mom really loud; this reminded me of Harry's abusive aunt and uncle. One day, I went upstairs and my dad was cutting up my mom's wedding dress with a knife, and I was scared. I had that empty pit feeling in my stomach. Even though he is better now, every man on my dad's side of the family was (or is) a drunk who has abused alcohol. Growing up in a house with a broken family has fueled my anger when I see others being mistreated by close friends and family. In your book, when Harry is picked on because he is a champion, that really angered me. Even though he didn't want the responsibility of being a champion the rules stated that if you were chosen you had to compete. It was Marty Crouch Junior's (aka the fake Mad-Eye Moody) fault that Harry was in the tournament. Harry had to be so courageous to do what he did. Whether I'm inside school or with my friends, when I am challenged to do something sketchy I either make myself give my best effort or just ignore it and move on. For me, when I ignore it and move on I typically always regret it because I realize I could've done that.

One of my connections with Harry is that I have always wanted a family that doesn't always argue. I also have noticed connections between Malfoy and things that I have seen in the world. For instance, I recently went to the movie *Wonder* based off the book by Raquel J. Palacio. I noticed that when Julian was being mean to August it reminded me of Malfoy because (spoiler) when Julian and his parents are in the principal's office I realized that Julian got a lot of his smugness from his parents (specifically, his mom)—just like Malfoy! Malfoy's parents are very stubborn and like to rub their riches and fortune in other less fortunate people's faces.

My opinion is that everyone in the world wants to make a difference or leave their mark. Each and every one of those people had the potential to do it, but they didn't give it enough effort to do so, and when they failed (due to their lack of effort) they took it out on others.

It is truly amazing how something as simple as a book can impact and connect you so deeply. This book you wrote really personally connects to me through my early childhood and my life today.

Sincerely, Justice Duerk

HONORABLE FINALIST | LEVEL I

MADISON PETTY | 11-YEARS-OLD

Grade 6: Central Intermediate School, Wadsworth, Ohio: Shannon Schmitt, Sponsor

Letter to author Lynda Mullaly Hunt, concerning her book *Fish in a Tree*

Dear Lynda Mullaly Hunt:

When I heard about this contest I was so excited and eager to express my thoughts and feelings about your book, *Fish in a Tree*, because it is relatable to my life.

The novel showed me that although life is complicated it is important to never give up, try to stay positive when life is hard, and overcome life obstacles. It also makes me think about my own life and the hard work, struggles, and obstacles I have had to overcome in my life.

School was hard for me. I struggled in reading because I didn't have glasses and I couldn't see the board before Kindergarten. This caused me to get behind in reading and writing. I also was very behind on my math skills. A lot of people in my class already knew how to read, write, and do math well, except me. My mother found me a tutor to help me with my school work and I've been tutored since First grade. Now, I am in Sixth grade and still have a tutor helping me to stay caught up. I am also at the level I should be reading and writing. I did that by staying positive and working hard.

I related to Ally Nickerson because I was like her in a way: I was in the lower reading group in school and struggled with math. Like her, I had a substitute teacher (and a mom) who saw my struggles, and found my tutor who helped me with my school work. I'm also like you because you were in the lower reading group, too.

School is still hard for me even though I have a tutor. But I'm not giving up! I just keep working hard and doing my best even though it's tough. My hard work is paying off because now I'm getting A's in math, reading, and writing. Because of my perseverance, I know that anything I put my mind to I can overcome and accomplish anything.

In Third grade, I was bullied. I didn't tell anyone about it other than my mom and she could only do so much about it. She taught me skills to deal with the bully and also worked with the school to get it stopped. I learned you can work through obstacles with help from the right people.

I know everyone is different, just like I'm different from everyone because I have a tutor. Ally is different because she has dyslexia. But the kids made fun of her because they didn't know that's OK to be different. They have to learn to overcome that obstacle in their lives.

I have had many obstacles to overcome, too, like my mom and dad getting divorced, moving when my mom remarried, going to a new school, and blending into a family with my step-brother and sister. The message I got from this novel was that there's always going to be obstacles in your life and that you just have to work hard to overcome them.

Some of the messages that I got from this novel is to never give up, try to stay positive, never give up in the tough times, and to persevere against obstacles in the way of doing what I love.

Thank you Lynda Mullaly Hunt for writing *Fish in a Tree*. It showed me that others have similar experiences, life obstacles, struggles and differences. I really enjoyed reading your book and hope to read more of them.

Madison Petty

HONORABLE FINALIST | LEVEL I

ARIEL PAGE | 11-YEARS-OLD

Grade 5: Moreland Hills Elementary School, Pepper Pike, Ohio: Kate Allard, Sponsor

Letter to author Raquel Jaramillo Palacio, aka R. J. Palacio, concerning her book *Wonder*

Dear Raquel J. Palacio:

I used to wonder what people with birth defects were thinking about but I never thought that when they walked down the halls that they knew, sensed, we were looking at them. I didn't know their life stories, anything about their backgrounds, why they looked the way they did. After reading *Wonder* my perspective regarding people with birth defects changed.

I used to avoid them but having read *Wonder* I now try to learn their story and be their friend. They always seem so lonely when no one walks with them and people whisper and point. I used to stare at the kids with birth defects when I was younger. I never really took the time to understand them. When my teacher asked me to be friends with a particular classmate with a birth defect I was scared. I thought that she had this thing and I would get it if I got too close to her, as if it were a cold or the flu. I finally did it and we talked. I wasn't scared anymore and found out that she was a normal kid. I know a girl who was a lot like Auggie and got laughed at as a kid. I can really relate to Jack when he stood up for Auggie and when he felt strange when he went to show Auggie around the school.

I can relate because when I was about four years old I had a good friend in preschool who was blind and missing a hand. I forget her name because it was about six years ago, but I do remember that there was this one particular kid who always made fun of her and laughed. One day, I chased him around the playground; eventually, he got too tired to run anymore and rested, holding onto a pole to catch his breath. To get him to stop teasing my friend, I pushed him into the pole. He got the message and stopped.

Now whenever I see someone with a birth defect being bullied I stand up for them—they don't need to do anything. I do my best to be their good friend and cultivate their friendship.

Wonder has a magical effect that can change everything about a person and their perception of the world. That is the effect it had on me.

Sincerely, Ariel Page

HONORABLE FINALIST | LEVEL I

GRACE SUGASKI | 11-YEARS-OLD

Grade 5: Dover Intermediate School, Westlake, Ohio: Donna Dieterich, Sponsor

Letter to author “Erin Hunter” (authors Victoria Holmes, Kate Cary, Cherith Baldry, Gillian Philip, Inbali Iserles, Tui T. Sutherland, and Rosie Best) , concerning her book *Bluestar’s Prophecy*

Dear “Erin Hunter”:

In your book *Bluestar’s Prophecy*, I knew right away, when Bluestar’s character was introduced, that she was a noble and fair leader. She offered Rusty a place in her clan because of her shortage of warriors. I thought that was a very wise decision. I always wished I could be as calm and wise as Bluestar. Little did I know about her sad and troubled past. As I read your book, I felt like I could relate to her character as she was growing up. *Bluestar’s Prophecy* reminded me of the quote “Be kind, for everyone is fighting their own battles.” I try to be more patient, which all of the *Warriors* books have reminded me, as I face my own battles.

I lost my mom in 2013. I blamed myself because I thought I could have said goodbye or visited her one more time. I felt lonely. I am an only child, and my dad has since remarried. A lot of times, to this day, I feel lonely, and that my family doesn’t love me very much. I am not used to the treatment that is much less gentle than what I received from my mother. This is kind of like how Bluestar’s father never paid her and her sister much attention. It is miraculous how well Bluestar turned out as a warrior and as a character.

I feel that I am still like a piece of clay, still being molded into who I am and who I will be. I am being chipped away and beginning to harden. I feel that I am getting more negative and stubborn with each passing day, for I feel I am always being put down for something that I feel is out of my control. I am forgetful, but whenever I say that I forgot to do something, I am told again and again that “No, you didn’t forget. It’s just an excuse; you chose not to do it!” It hurts. I have been told that it is my fault that I forget. I am trying what I can do to try to be better at remembering things, like writing down lists, but nothing works very well. I don’t have much motivation. I know that I mess up, and make mistakes a lot, but nobody seems to understand and see that. I don’t even know the difference between just saying something and talking back. I am just yelled at for it. It is frustrating. It feels like being yelled at for having an opinion.

When I read your words in *Bluestar’s Prophecy*, I felt like I could understand Bluestar’s grief for her mother and sister. When Snowfur went to Starclan, I understood how hard it was for Bluestar to accept it. It was an emotional area in your book, and I cried when she was telling Whitekit about Snowfur. It was just very sad. It is hard to explain the emotion of the loss of family or friends. You blame yourself, always thinking that there was something you could have done to prevent it or make it easier. Just like Bluestar, I learned to be strong. I relate to Bluestar’s loneliness, I feel like I don’t have anyone to go to sometimes. I bottle up my emotions and never let them out. Both Bluestar and I lost our mothers at a young age. We understand that they were gone and never coming back. It was hard to accept that.

I felt such a strong connection with your book because I could relate to your character Bluestar. Your book was life changing for me. I know my mother watches down on me from above, as Bluestar knew Moonflower, Snowfur, and Moskit were watching and supporting her from Starclan.

Grace Sugaski

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

WINNERS AND HONORABLE FINALISTS 2017-18

Level II Letters (Grade 7 - 8)

FIRST PLACE WINNER | LEVEL II

LAUREN KELLY | 12-YEARS-OLD

Grade 7: Saint Michael School, Canton, Ohio: Amy Krajeck, Sponsor

Letter to author Natalie D. Richards concerning her book *We All Fall Down*

Dear Natalie D. Richards:

Maybe gravity is the reason why we all fall down. Or maybe it's our feelings. Every day is a chance to start over. A chance to begin again. But what if that chance was destroyed in one millisecond? What if suddenly the world fell apart? What if even though we may seem indestructible we all fall down?

Anxiety—the feeling of being trapped inside your own mind, without ever being able to escape. It's the feeling I face every day. For a long time, I was insecure. I was afraid of myself. I was afraid of not being good enough. Afraid of never fitting in. I felt as though nobody understood me or what I was going through. I recently read your book *We All Fall Down*. Like the character Paige, I often overthought things. Paige was often timorous, but in a way that comforted me knowing that I wasn't alone after all. Paige would imagine terrifying things that didn't even happen, and she had to take pills for her anxiety. I rarely heard people tell me that they understood where I was coming from. Paige seemed like her mind was keeping her from feeling how she wanted to feel—and how she actually felt. Even though Paige wasn't a real girl, I felt as though her sleepless nights and troublesome anxieties were becoming my own.

Paige motivated me to keep being strong no matter how weak I become during this fight called my life. I felt like I was paralyzed by a wave of fear that would never reach the exit doors of my brain. I pressured myself to be a perfect version of me. Every time I made a mistake, I immediately became disappointed in myself—regardless how inconsequential the mistake might have been. I would try to remind myself that I would do better next time, and that I had learned a lesson, but for some reason, I could never convince myself. I'm still trying to figure out why I worry so much. I've always understood that it is practically impossible for anybody to look or be perfect. Even though everybody has their problems and flaws, I tried so hard to conceal mine—like trying to cover up a pimple or blotch with makeup. I tried to be an unblemished and ideal version of myself because I was afraid of rejection. I was afraid of not being good enough. I was afraid of others ripping me apart, when in the end, I was trying to be strong when I just couldn't be. I was so afraid of others ripping me apart when in the end I was my only attacker. Some days I would look at myself in the mirror and be negative about the reflection I saw staring back at me. I would make myself unreasonably anxious over every situation that happened.

Knowing that Paige also had severe anxiety made me feel less alone in this lonely world. I waited so long for someone to understand how I felt every single day. People always told Paige that anxiety was a temporary emotion. Even the closest people in her life rarely offered true support to help her lesson her anxiety. Often, all they did was tell her she couldn't do it—that the anxiety would be too much for her. Maybe Paige would've been able to handle her anxiety better if people actually helped her. They believed she was making it up—or overreacting. Like Paige, everyone I told about my anxiety told me I was just being “dramatic.” As someone who was diagnosed with GAD, or Generalized Anxiety Disorder, I can tell you that it's hard to function and pretend not to worry on an everyday basis. It's a challenge to do normal everyday tasks like talking to people and doing schoolwork. I felt like I couldn't talk to anyone about it because they would make fun of me. Paige made me feel like an ordinary person who could overcome her anxiety disorder. I'm now stronger than I ever was. I might have anxiety tomorrow, and I know I can't change that, but at least I know that I'll never be alone.

Although anxiety is horrible, friendship can also, at times, be just as abominable. Friendship is a word that can be so beautiful, but so utterly destructive at the same time. Friendship starts when you find another human being you can relate to. From there, you're supposed to become closer and closer friends. You're supposed to never have a falling out, right? Wrong. Very wrong. Theo and Paige were inseparable—as if they were two elements chemically bonded to each other. But even the people who seem perfect aren't. My best friend and I have gone through a lot together, but I can slowly see our friendship drifting apart like ocean waves carrying away seashells and secrets. People call us “perfect.” Oh, what a lie that is! We are drastically far from perfect. I'm night and she's day. I think it's practically impossible to be perfect. No matter how much society wants you to be perfect, sometimes it just can't happen. I believe that everyone has faults, especially friends. Friends are supposed to understand each other, but what happens when one of them stops responding to your call for help? Like Theo and Paige, we felt fearless together. We believed that nothing would ever tear us apart. But life happens. Reality hits. I met one of my good friends in kindergarten. She welcomed me to the school when I was afraid that I wouldn't fit in. Slowly, over time, we became closer and closer friends. But one day, out of the blue, we got into a massive fight. We texted each other hurtful things and also said some rude things in person. After that, she and I drifted apart. I had to learn to forgive her—even though she never truly apologized. That's when I started to rethink the phrase “best friends forever.” That's also when I realized that no matter how hard anyone tries to be friends, sometimes it just can't happen. No matter how hard anyone tries to never have flaws, it's truly impossible. I used to believe in the phrase “Best friends forever.” But over time, I've realized a year can do a lot to a person—or two people. Theo and Paige had a huge falling out, and because of this, they're afraid of each other. At first, I didn't understand why Paige was afraid of Theo because punching her wasn't her intention. Theo tried to hurt Chase, the guy Paige was hanging out with. But when Theo was in the process of hitting him, Paige stepped in front of Chase and took the punch instead. I was so confused about why Paige couldn't move on—and in way I thought it was her fault because she got herself involved in the fight. But now I understand. Paige was afraid of getting hurt again. Theo was afraid of himself. I feel like I'm both of them. I feel lost and confused inside my own head. I don't want to hurt anybody—but at the same time, I don't want to shut myself away and hurt myself. But I've realized, no matter how hard you try for it not to happen, someone will eventually get hurt.

Unlike anxiety and, occasionally friendships, new beginnings are a wonderful thing. We all have regrets. We wished we would've picked up the phone. We wished we would've made this or that decision—or didn't. We wished we would've written little notes to make people happy. We wished we wouldn't have torn others down just to snag bricks for our own walls. But what if you had a chance to start over? To begin anew? Would you take the risk? Many years ago, I had to take the risk. I was in a very dark place in my life. My anxiety was at its worst point and I had to decide if I wanted help, or if I wanted to try to conquer it on my own. I decided to get help and it completely changed my life for the better. I am very proud of myself for how far I have come from that point in my life. I am happier and better than I have ever been, and I'm still making progress today. Although I was in a very dark place, so were Theo and Paige. They wanted to be friends, but their fear prevented them for a while from being comfortable around each other, from trusting one another. When they finally became friends again, they took a gigantic risk, just like me. They both just needed a fresh new start. Everybody says that children are the future. But what if children didn't forgive themselves for their mistakes and, out of grief and remorse, spent their entire lives dwelling on things they couldn't change? I believe that doing so would make the world a rather dull and harsh place. I also believe that everyone has a purpose in this life. Somebody's purpose may not necessarily be to make a huge, crucial world impact, but maybe just to brighten up somebody's life in such a way that they will never go into darkness again. Maybe all we need to do to be happy, to make the world a happier place is to forgive ourselves, forgive each other and be kind. Let me tell you, sometimes change is a good thing.

I went from being a rude, anxious, conceited girl to someone who lives for helping others and being kind. I am incredibly happy that I had the chance to start over. I am incredibly happy that every day I have the choice to change someone's perspective of the world for the better, and if we begin by changing other's lives for the better, we're half way there.

Theo and Paige are just fiction. But to me, their story is so real. I spend most of my time thinking—wondering about the world. I think about how the world could be changed for the better. I think about all the “almosts” that were so close to happening. In your book, *We All Fall Down*, I found people with the same struggles I fight every day. I found truths and relations in your plot. I found reality in your imaginary world. I've become an altered reality of me—a better person. I've become someone who wants to fight for what needs to be changed in this cruel world. I've become someone who feels things so deeply, and understands the person who says they have nobody there for them. I want to change the sadness of my life, even if, in the end, we all fall down.

Sincerely, Lauren Kelly

SECOND PLACE WINNER | LEVEL II

SOPHIA HUDSON | 14-YEARS-OLD

Grade 8: Hastings Middle School, Upper Arlington, Ohio: Vincent De Maria, Sponsor

Letter to author Sharon Draper concerning her book *Out of My Mind*

Dear Sharon Draper:

In your book, *Out of My Mind*, the character of Melody is so much more than she appears to be. Just like me. We are all guilty of judging people by their appearances. Because of Melody's outward appearance she was labeled dumb and unworthy! In my case, because of my age, people didn't think that I could be suffering from severe anxiety.

"Why can't you just calm down? It's not a big deal." These are words that I've heard frequently throughout the last couple of years. At a very young age, I was diagnosed with a hearing loss. I have fluctuating hearing, meaning sometimes it can change dramatically in a good way or a bad way, which is why I wear hearing aids. In 2014, my hearing changed for the worse. After several visits to doctors and being put on medication, I was back to my normal hearing in no time. Soon after, however, I could tell that something was different, that something wasn't right. My heart would pound, as thoughts swirled around in my head and my breath felt like it couldn't come out. I couldn't figure out what this feeling was, or what I was experiencing. Was it a heart attack? Cancer? Failed lungs? Was I dying? The only logical explanation in my Fourth grade mind was that I was a ticking time bomb waiting to blow. I didn't know it at that time, but I was experiencing the horror of a panic attack.

Similar to Melody, people would've never guessed that this happy little Fourth grader would have such a war inside her head, that she would cry every night, that she walked around her little elementary school with the weight of the world on her shoulders. I had no reason to be scared (so everybody thought): my family loved me; I did well in school; I lived in a good neighborhood; I had lots of friends; I had a strong church community. I gave no outward reason for anyone to suspect that I wasn't okay. Your book helped me realize that people can't see your thoughts. I know that sounds silly, of course you can't see someone's thoughts. I somehow had the idea that someone could tell what I was feeling, and that I wouldn't have to say something. Sadly, in Melody's case, no one would've ever guessed that she was so smart, because of her appearance. She was judged by her outside and her true self was not recognized. I felt her pain as she longed for someone to notice her true feelings and what she was capable of. I wanted someone to notice that I was scared for my life. Thankfully, it all worked out for Melody, and people finally saw her true intelligence. I realized that no one would've known if she hadn't taken action, so I knew what I had to do. That summer going into 5th grade, I finally told my parents my feelings and my fears.

I've made much progress since then, but anxiety is still a struggle for me. When I start to feel these feelings bubble up, I'm able to identify what's happening, and why I may be feeling that way. Anxiety is a constant battle for me every day. I can either let it control me, and make me miserable, or I can live, and make the best out of every situation, just like Melody. She didn't wallow in self-pity over the things she couldn't control, so she chose every day to make it the best day possible and live her life. She is a great example of not letting disabilities get in the way! It's amazing how a few words in a chapter book can make such an impact on someone!

I'd like to say thank you for your encouraging book. It played a large part in helping me overcome one of the biggest trials in my life (as did the encouragement of my family, friends, and church community). It wasn't too long after I read your book that I told my parents about my anxiety. Your book encouraged me during my hard times. It taught me that there's more to a person than what's on the surface, that although there may be a smile on someone's face, it doesn't necessarily mean that they're happy. Thank you.

Sincerely, Sophia Hudson

THIRD PLACE WINNER | LEVEL II

LILLIE FORBES | 12-YEARS-OLD

Grade 7: Lee Burneson Middle School, Westlake, Ohio: Sara Latkowski, Sponsor

Letter to author Shelley Pearsall concerning her book *Crooked River*

Dear Shelley Pearsall:

One of the greatest issues in the world today is prejudice. Everyone judges everybody else. How do I know this? It has happened right before my eyes—not to me personally but to someone I love.

On April 17, 2012, my brother Glenn was born. I held him for the first time in the hospital and he fell asleep in my arms. From that moment on, I vowed to always protect him. After he turned one-year-old, things went downhill. Glenn started losing his speech. He stopped eating, would cry in public, and would even hit himself. Strangers would look at him with disgust. Their eyes would shoot daggers at him as if to say “What is wrong with that child?” While our mother was focused on soothing him, I watched. I listened. I knew what people thought. It was a hard time for my family. After months of screaming, turning down food, and crying, my parents took him to a specialist who diagnosed him with Autism.

We started changing the way we lived. He opened up my eyes to the world around me, too. I never knew actually how prejudiced people were towards children like my brother. I still needed comfort, though, comfort beyond human ability. So, in fourth grade, I decided to find a book to share my emotions with. I had loved reading since the age of three, so I figured a book would be the perfect solution. I was, however, disappointed with the selection. I couldn’t personally connect to any of the books. Then I picked up your book *Crooked River*.

When I first read *Crooked River*, the book had been assigned to my language arts class for guided reading. The moment I read the first sentence, I was intrigued. The more I read, the more I connected myself to the book and the character of Rebecca. Before my brother was born, I had been like Rebecca before she knew Indian John. I had thought people with special needs could sometimes be dangerous—just as Rebecca had. I am not proud of what I thought before my brother was born; he opened my eyes. I thought kids like my brother were the only ones that had to suffer judgment and prejudice, but your book helped me realize that was not the case. People are judged because of race, gender, disabilities, and more. It’s unfair, but that’s the world we live in. I didn’t really take the time to look around me until I read *Crooked River*. I realize now that everyone has to suffer one way or another and I wasn’t alone.

My connection with Rebecca helped me out in so many ways. *Crooked River* was like a blanket that I could burrow into when I felt sad and hopeless. It made me want to do more about Autism, to be more vocal about the unfairness that children like my brother encounter. My family makes donations to Autism Speaks and one time we even participated, as a family, in a walk for a cure.

My brother has also found help from a group of therapists. He can talk now and be in public. Sometimes, though, whenever he is frightened or sad, I still catch a glimpse of the shy, scared little boy who couldn’t talk. He knows that he can look to me for help, that I will make a difference. *Crooked River* taught me to be there for him. Always.

Sincerely, Lilliana Forbes

HONORABLE FINALIST | LEVEL II

LAURA FLAKER | 12-YEARS-OLD

Grade 7: Wadsworth Middle School, Wadsworth, Ohio: Jason Ball, Sponsor

Letter to author Lauren Oliver concerning her book *Before I Fall*

Dear Lauren Oliver:

Your book, *Before I Fall*, has taught me how important it is to be kind. It has also taught me that popularity doesn't matter, but my reputation does. Your book showed me how far bullies can go and how bullying affects someone. *Before I Fall* has truly made an impact on my life. Here is more on kindness and its importance.

When I think of kindness, two things come to my mind. Those two things are actions and words. The reason I think of these two things is because they work together as one. You might say something nice but not actually mean it. Or, you could do something nice but just be doing it to look good. In conclusion, I feel as though you have to mean what you are doing for it to be a true act of kindness. So, in your book, Sam starts off not showing either of these traits. She was so caught up in being a perfect little high schooler that she was turning into a monster. Then as the book went on, she started to do small things just to basically "clear her conscience." She still didn't actually mean what she was doing. Finally, Sam realized how to actually be kind and try to save Juliet. I was so proud of her. She figured out that kindness really is important. That is what I think about kindness.

Next, *Before I Fall* taught me that my "popularity status" doesn't matter, but my reputation does. Sam was very focuses on being popular. Her reputation was slowly becoming worse and worse because she wasn't thinking about her actions. She was just thinking about her popularity. Your book taught me about the limits of popularity. I learned that you can be popular without pushing it, but there are a lot of ways to go over the edge. In *Before I Fall*, Sam and her friends go way past the limits. They went so far that Juliet decided that she didn't want to be in this world anymore. There are also many ways to be popular without pushing it. You might just have more friends than some people or be better known. Those aren't bad things. In addition, your book taught me about the importance of reputation. I learned that I need to set a good example and try my hardest to be kind in order to have a good reputation. I am very glad that in your book Sam loses her good reputation from when she was younger. I thought that this was important because it showed me a real life situation on the importance of a good reputation. Those are my thoughts on popularity and reputations.

Finally, *Before I Fall* taught me more about bullying and why it is wrong. I have always known that bullying is wrong, but your book showed me so much more than that, it showed me how bullying actually affects someone. I learned how Juliet really felt and how it was destroying her life. I was in so much shock when I read that the person who Lindsey hit was Juliet. Reading why Lindsay hated Juliet demonstrated to me why bullies are bullies: most of the time they are usually weak, insecure about themselves, or have a problem at home that is driving them to act out as they do.

Thank you, Lauren Oliver, for teaching me these things and showing me real life situations.

Sincerely, Laura Flaker

HONORABLE FINALIST | LEVEL II

THOMAS GORENC | 14-YEARS-OLD

Grade 7: Birchwood School of Hawken, Cleveland, Ohio: Lorraine Tzeng, Sponsor

Letter to author Kate DiCamillo concerning her book *The Tiger Rising*

Dear Kate DiCamillo:

The human heart can open and close its valves to allow the blood to flow throughout the blood vessels. Much like that, the human soul can open and close its valves, but its vessels do not carry blood, but carry emotions. And much like the heart, if someone shuts off their souls' valves, it leads to horrible things. Your short novel, *The Tiger Rising*, is a book that I can soundly relate to. The reason I can understand your book is that the protagonist, Rob, tends to shut his soul's valves from others. I did the same thing until I read your book. Your book showed me the effects of hiding your emotions, and I am truly grateful for it.

I hid my emotions to avoid others because they assume that I do not want to talk. By not showing my emotions, such as laughing or crying, I avoid attracting attention to myself, which I find nice because I am kind of shy. By avoiding attention, I feel as if not showing my emotions gives me a sense of strength. Being able to hold myself together when others fall apart makes me look and feel stronger. I used to believe these were good parts of shutting my emotions in, but now I see that no matter what I will suffer because of it later.

By not expressing my emotions, I am often kept up at night, thinking about all the unsettling and unpleasant things that happened during the day. I bottle up everything inside. When I'm alone, all I can think about are the mistakes I have committed, or a fight I got into with a friend, and then my mind constantly reminds me of that: no matter how hard I try to stop it, my mind replays those moments and I relive them again and again, which makes it hard to sleep. I remember the night after my grandmother was pronounced dead, I had tried to hide my emotions from my parents, even after they told me that it was okay to cry. When I went to bed, I couldn't sleep because I was kept awake by the heart-wrenching sadness that enveloped me.

Hiding your true emotions can also make you look like a blank slate. Just like Rob in *The Tiger Rising*, I locked up all my emotions, like in a suitcase, and ran the risk of them bursting out in a moment of sadness or anger. Rob decided to shut everything out after the death of his mother, which took a toll on his way of thinking. He thought that letting out his emotions was a sign of weakness, which caused him to develop an antisocial personality. I had this mindset as well, which caused me to often stay in my room all day, even staying off my phone so as not to be reminded of my friends texting me. It was really depressing and sad, which made me distance myself from the world. Another time was when my dog Chuck died, I did this exact thing, and it stayed like that for at least a week. Your book helped me realize that I needed to get out of this depression and talk with people, or else the pain would not go away. In *Tiger Rising*, Rob talked with Sistine, which eventually had him open up about his emotions. I, however, tried to talk to people but found it hard because I am a bashful person.

When I read about Rob losing his mother, it reminded me of how I lost my grandparent, which was devastating. When my maternal grandmother, Nanny, died it was a bright summer morning. My parents were on vacation in Italy, and I had just gone from playing video games to making myself a sandwich for lunch. Nanny had been in bed, but she told me she would be alright. Being only in Fifth grade, I didn't think much of her going to bed, because she was tired in the morning. It was at that moment that I heard her voice faintly say, "Thomas call nine-one-one ..." The rest was just a blur of me running upstairs, dialing the phone, and the ambulance team coming up into the bedroom. It was the most intense thing I have ever experienced. I tried my best to hide my emotions, which helped me cope in this dire situation.

What was even harder than that was trying to help my grandfather keep himself together. *Tiger Rising* helped me realize that the best way to comfort someone is to remind them that they are not alone. Other people are there to care for them. I tried to help my grandfather, but for a long time afterwards he was not in the best mental state. Your book helped me understand how to get myself out of my depression, but also how to help my grandfather because it showed how venting your bottled emotions can help relieve you of your bad thoughts and feelings. I wished to be able to apply this in future in any tragic event. The insight helped me realize the necessity of releasing my emotions, and not to bottle them up. What goal is it if you look stoic on the outside, but on the inside, you're the most unstable person around you? This is why I have made it a personal goal to not hide my feelings and to be more open with them.

Rob justified not sharing his emotions because he thought it unnecessary and thought about the consequences of his actions before he did anything. I used to be that way, too, and I recall one time where it helped me. It was during a hike with some friends. They had crossed a river which had a long, dilapidated log barely spanning its width to the other bank. Even though I wanted to follow them, my good judgment kept me back from my friends as I could have been severely injured. Basing things off facts instead of opinions and emotions is really important in Boy Scouts when we were trying to decide on what direction we wanted to lead the troop. I analyzed the rank, leadership position, etc., of each of the scouts and deduced the best possible strategy that would contribute to our success. This showed that being able to hold back emotions and think rationally can have its benefits, such as evaluating situations clearly. Rob helped me uncover this side of my personality through reading your book. From this event, I was able to learn that holding back emotions and thinking through things factually can sometimes be a beneficial tool, but from your book I realized that it can only happen in specific events when the tool is required.

You helped me realize that it is alright for me to open up to my parents and friends. Revealing my emotions can really help when I am down in the dumps.. I also learned that it is okay to open up to people that you know and that I do not have to be the stoic figure in the midst of a tragedy.

Thank you for bringing me to a better place in life with your book.

Sincerely, Thomas Gorenc

HONORABLE FINALIST | LEVEL II

PAUL ABOU HAIDAR | 14-YEARS-OLD

Grade 7: Birchwood School of Hawken, Cleveland, Ohio: Lorraine Tzeng, Sponsor

Letter to author S. E. Hinton concerning her book *The Outsiders*

Dear S. E. Hinton:

Although it was only 192 pages long, I never would have thought that your book *The Outsiders* had such depth to it. It impacted me and changed my thinking. Initially, trying to understand and relate to a poor boy affiliated with gangs seemed abnormal to me. Upon reading the novel, however, I saw that in quite a few cases, Ponyboy's thinking and mine were quite similar. The novel made me recognize the consequences of my complacent behavior.

I learned we both ran away from trouble, rather than confronting and learning from it. I would shirk my way out of my teachers' grasps and go on to repeat the same mistakes. Ponyboy allowed me to see that I need to change the path I was headed or reap hard consequences.

In the past, running away from trouble was as automatic and instinctive to me as running away from snakes (of which I am afraid). If I was kicked out of a class, I would automatically defend myself and attempt to justify what I did even if I was wrong. I don't want to suffer the consequences of what I do, but it's the only way to learn and change my behavior. I witnessed that after Ponyboy ran away from home he assimilated the bad behaviors of the people who had negatively influenced him, like Dally. Instead of being the conscientious and innocent boy he was, Ponyboy began losing the values that made him a likeable character. Eventually, Ponyboy realized that if he had only just made better decisions none of the unnecessary drama with the police and his family would have happened. I was determined not to be like that. You opened my eyes to see that by not facing facts, I tarnished my reputation and suffered from lying.

Recently, I was involved with a good friend in an incident of cheating at school. He asked for help in writing an essay on a test, and rather than telling him how to do it, I shared mine with him, which he partially copied. With a penitent conscience, he later confessed to our teacher that he had copied from me. The worst part was that when the teacher questioned me about it I blatantly lied, angering him so much that he gave my essay a failing grade: getting into trouble with my teacher and getting the failing grade could have been avoided if only I had told the truth. I suffered harshly because I ran from the truth instead of owning up to it. Since then, I have become prudent at realizing how to cope with trouble. Perhaps my main issue was that I mistakenly perceived "loyalty" to my gang (i.e. friends) to be above honesty, which the book helped me realize (because of what happened to Ponyboy), was not the right choice. There are plenty of other ways in which I could have helped my friend in that situation and still be a true friend. Allowing him to cheat from me denigrated both of us.

Overall, your book *The Outsiders* opened me to the truth about how dishonesty can hurt a person. It helped me to dramatically change the way I conduct myself. Ponyboy's struggle and choosing the wrong path led to pernicious consequences. It is a timely warning which allowed me to open my eyes and change my direction, acting proactively to prevent any future incidents from occurring.

Thank you so much for writing such an amazing book.

Paul Abou Haidar

HONORABLE FINALIST | LEVEL II

SHELBY TUPCIAUSKAS | 12-YEARS-OLD

Grade 7: Anthony Wayne Junior High School, Whitehouse, Ohio: Steve Varga, Sponsor

Letter to author Lynda Mullaly Hunt concerning her book *One For the Murphys*

Dear Lynda Mullaly Hunt:

There are many different ways that people change. Whether it be through small events throughout your lifetime or one huge event that changes your whole outlook on life, no one stays as they were, whether that be from weeks or years ago. However, I've learned that what really determines how those events change us is how they are perceived. Besides physically, it is almost impossible for an event itself to change you if you are not thinking of it in a certain way, whether that be good or bad.

After going through one of these unfortunate events in my own life, your book, *One for the Murphys*, was able to pick me back up.

Parent divorce is extremely common, usually just being a mistake between the couple of having picked the wrong person. This does not mean it is not painful. Looking back on it now, I am grateful that I can be in two different households with people who can be themselves completely, not having to worry about a spouse that makes them feel unhappy or restricted. To see the happiness of my parents is something I value much more than being able to keep the idea of being in one happy family. From this, I can understand why Carley was set on separating her mother from her boyfriend, because she deeply cared about her mother. However, when that idea was relevant, I can no longer remember if I was unhappy or just drastically different than now because this event was a way to redesign my life, which I can now say was for the better.

When our family started to split, I did not know what the concept of divorce was. This went on for a while, until my parents were actually looking for new houses to settle into and new people to associate with. Days full of pain and wishing to have the feeling in just one family back eventually turned into feeling like my entire personality was being stripped from me. I became secluded from those around me, not talking unless I had to. I didn't participate in class, or get excited over school activities like I had. This led to my parents' frustration, a feeling like I could please no one even though it felt like it took all of my being just to breathe. Just like the character of Carley in your book had become accustomed to the way she was treated by her mother, I had become accustomed to the numb feeling in my stomach.

After feeling like I was seeing everything underwater for a matter of time, the numbness I had started to turn into anger. Anger that I couldn't just be in one family, where I didn't have to drive from house to house just to see the people who were supposed to raise me together. Anger that I didn't feel like I deserved one. Not knowing how to handle it, I directed it towards myself, was constantly bombarded with negative comments about all aspects of my life.

I no longer felt kind.

But a few years ago when picking out a book at the media center, I happened to pick up your book, *One for the Murphys*. The way Mrs. Murphy helped the main character, Carley, was a way for me to realize that in order to change, that is how I must treat myself, because no one was going to do it for me. The seclusion I had endured convinced me that going through hard events does not prove strength. That you can still be weak regardless of what you've been through, and that I was. But the way I related to Carley's guard on the people around her, and how she thought expressing emotion showed weakness helped me take Mrs. Murphy's words to heart when she really recognized what Carley had been through when going through being put in foster care, and how she said that she was the strongest person she'd met.

When watching my parents date new people, I felt almost betrayed. After all, I wanted to be raised by my own parents. However, when seeing what Carley felt when having to stay with the Murphys, it made me realize how much people can change you for the better; moreover, that I must take chances in order to feel anything close to happiness. For this, I will have to risk changing as a person, just like Carley finally felt she was in a real family.

So instead of not even trying to look at the surface of the water, I started to relearn how to swim. I connected with people I once knew and people I'd never met before, and started to find my happiness within them as well. I'd learned their stories and how they affected them, just like when Carley had Toni, her best friend. I met new teachers who gave me not only inspiration, but motivation to try again. I then became invested in my grades because it was something that could show a fraction of the work that I put into everything that I do. I started to feel what was around me again, rather than just being able to watch it and feel like everyone else was in on something I wasn't. And I know that when I endure another event like this in my lifetime that I will be able to not only use my strength, but the strength I have learned from Carley and Mrs. Murphy in *One for the Murphys* to get me through it.

Thank you for everything you've done, and everything you will do for me in the future.

Sincerely, Shelby Tupciauskas

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

WINNERS AND HONORABLE FINALISTS 2017-18

Level III Letters (Grade 9 - 12)

FIRST PLACE WINNER | LEVEL III

SANDY SHEN

Grade 11: Solon, Ohio: Self-entered

Letter to author Celeste Ng concerning her book *Little Fires Everywhere*

Every once in a while, I want to ask my mother, “Do you wish your life was different?” But I already know the answer: “Life has already happened. What is the point in regretting something that you can’t change.”

That’s how she’s always been: fiercely independent, wise, and patient. She would let me cry and whine about hiccups and spilled milk, but I always knew when I should stop and move on (not that I always did, though). Maybe that is why I felt so confused about Mia Warren; I wasn’t sure what to make of her. It wasn’t because she was a nomadic artist or a caring mother; it was that she was so dynamically both. I wasn’t accustomed to that—seeing a woman as more than a one-dimensional mother, worker, or daughter. I had missed a major step in understanding the people around me: that they are complex people with pasts and thoughts and lives.

It was Mia Warren who woke me up from my self-absorbed reverie. After Pearl was conceived—with Mia as a surrogate mother—Mia’s life changed direction. She was no longer a struggling photographer working questionable jobs to survive art school; she was a mother of a fragile being whose every breath demanded her complete and utmost attention. And she took these burdens in stride, raising a precocious, genuine, and sympathetic daughter.

Yet the part of her character that struck me the most was Mia’s stubborn individuality. Unlike Elena Richardson, who defined herself on the basis of her picture-perfect family in the suburbs, Mia shaped motherhood to suit her dreams and situation. Unlike Elena Richardson, who extinguished her dreams of high-profile journalism in order to comply with social norms and familial expectations, Mia continued curating breathtaking photographs and fashioning her own creative path. Unlike Elena Richardson, who lived for the sake of appearances and conformity, Mia lived however she wanted regardless of society’s confines. Perfect foils for one another, they reflect the dark worries and questions I have for my mother as I glance through her yellowed photos. Who is the sallow-looking waitress in a 1989 restaurant? Who is this woman with crow’s feet creases and a sweet smile in her eyes? Who is this muse looking across the waters at a grainy statue masked by haze? What did she expect from her life, ten, twenty, thirty years ago? But the photographers’ film coverings have always sealed parts of her from me because for all the questions I have asked, so many have been met with a distracted wave of the hand and a noncommittal sigh.

I want to know my mother for all that she is, because all I have known is a cookie-cutter figure: dutiful, loving, and responsible. I know there is another side to this woman, vibrant and real but hidden beneath the burdens and responsibilities of adulthood. I can see her sometimes, in the small collection of pretty clothes that she buys but never wears, the battered nursing textbooks she stows in the basement, the girlish, decades-old letters from friends overseas, the laughing, jovial conversations with old friends. Yet that side of her remains elusive and shy, preferring to stay behind the smokescreen of my mother’s memory. Here I find a startling resemblance to Pearl, Mia’s treasure daughter, who has never wondered about the past of a person so constant, so essential to her life. We both never fathomed the complexity, the struggles, and the vitality of the women in our lives.

Because at first glance, my mother and Elena both checked off the requirements of the traditional female archetype as housewives successfully raising multiple children soon to be shipped off to college. Yet I know they couldn't be more different as mothers and people. Tied down by immaculate appearances and never-ending expectations, Elena Richardson is a mother whose expectations I would crumble under: however rich in ability and knowledge, she is so limited in her compassion and understanding of others. All she has ever known in life are white picket fences and endless brownstones, so she harshly scrutinizes those who incinerate the foundations of conventional society. Not even her own daughter Izzy, a wild, fiery girl, can meet her mother's inexorable expectations. On the other hand, my mother grew up as the only daughter of multiple sons and knew how to cook and clean from a young age: her weary knees and stiff fingers speak more than enough for her. So while many conventional values persist in her ways of thinking, she pushes all of us, her children, to strongly stand by what matters to us—not what society or typical tiger-moms demand. Regardless of whatever arbitrary standards society has set as the parameters for success, my mother has been a wild success, learning English alongside medical terminology, setting aside money for her parents back home, and raising independent children who value morals, education, and wisdom. If that isn't a success story, I don't know what is.

It is through *Little Fires Everywhere* that I realized the kind of parent I want to be. For most of my life, I have been afraid of motherhood and everything it holds. The idea of raising a child, from the moment it takes its first breath outside the womb to the moment I take my last, is terrifying. Sometimes, all I can do is look at my mother and marvel at the universality and enduring presence of a mother's love, of the titanium bond tying a mother and child together beyond the limits of time itself.

I remember the cozy folk tales about foxes and grapes that my mother would recite when we were but a little taller than her knees and the steaming clothes (fresh from the dryer) that she would dump on me and my sisters during the icy winters. My mother gave—and continues to give—us all little memories that bring us warmth during chilly times, regardless of time or place.

But I also think of all the worry, the appreciation, and the strain that comes with children. I think of all the times when I have said cruel, horrible things to my mother and how her face contorted in response. I think of my naiveté and ignorance as a child, sheltered by the wings of my mother's care and worry. I think of all the opportunities she has given up that we may never know or recognize. And I think, "Will I ever be able to be a mother? To be as independent as Mia but as devoted as Elena? To be anything like my mother?"

Before I read *Little Fires Everywhere*, I was wary, skeptical of parenthood. What could be so rewarding, so beautiful about raising children that makes parenthood worth every moment of pain and sadness? What is so sweet about getting up in the dead of morning to cuddle a screaming infant? What could be the source of a parent's relentless patience in times of never-ending frustration and miscommunication?

For all the questions and issues you felt unanswered in *Little Fires Everywhere*, you answered a few that I had thought were unanswerable. From the beginning, I should have never expected there to be a clear, cogent answer to my confusion. After reading and rereading about the lives of your wonderfully vibrant characters, I realized that all of the women in your story understand the hurricane of joy and worry that is motherhood; that it ultimately settles into a long, laborious sigh of sweet and steady relief that keeps mother and child coursing along. Through rocky seas and quiet stills, the sacred bond flows past time, past words, past translation. This, not short lived electric lust, is the true love we seek for the rest of our lives. Thank you for not only teaching me to fear a little less, but to also love a little more.

Sincerely, Sandy Shen

SECOND PLACE WINNER | LEVEL III

THALIA SOTO | 17-YEARS-OLD

Grade 11: Dublin Scioto High School, Dublin, Ohio: Linda Roth, Sponsor

Letter to author Ashley Rhodes-Courter concerning her book *Three Little Words*

Dear Ashley Rhodes-Courter:

I read *Three Little Words* in about three days. The night I started reading, it was midnight and even though I had to be up at seven, that book was in my hands till 3:30 am. I literally couldn't put it down. I can't imagine being thrown into the system as a three-year-old, and being tossed between 14 foster homes. That's so much to endure and try to understand, especially at such a young age. I know lots of kids go through this and it breaks my heart. I want to share with you my experience, even though I was only in care for two years, I didn't deal with even half as much as you did. Believe it or not, they were the best two years of my life and I'll cherish every memory.

There was one week left in the Seventh grade until we were out for summer break. My mom and I got into one of our usual spouts about God knows what. Sometime into our argument, the police showed up and took me. Just tossed me in the back seat and took me. I didn't know what was happening or where I was going. I won't lie: I was scared. We showed up at a building (which I later found out was the Franklin County Children Services building) and they put me in a small room. After a while, a lady came by with a box of movies and said I could watch one. That was the first time I saw *A Night at the Roxbury*. Just when it finished and I was going to pick out another movie, a lady came to the door and told me to gather my things (I had nothing with me); she was going to take me somewhere. I got in the car and dozed off in the back seat. I didn't know where I was when I woke up (I later learned I was in Newark, Ohio). We were parked on someone's lawn. We went to the door and the police lady knocked. It opened almost immediately.

Her name was Michele Hart. There was a tub of baby kittens in the living room meowing their hearts out. Michele let me upstairs to a room with a bunk bed, two dressers, and someone already asleep in the bottom bunk. She showed me where the bathroom was and said goodnight, and let me be. I didn't know it at the moment, but she would be the one to change my perspective on life. Michele Lee Hart was the best thing to ever happen to me. When I came to her, I was a 13-year-old that didn't feel life was worth living. Michele had 10 kids in her home almost at all times. When I arrived, two were biological, one was adopted. When I left, a total of three were adopted.

I was always busy with Michele. The age range of kids was mostly 2-15 years old, but always changing. Her biological kids played basketball, so for both summers Michele and I, and seven other kids, would sit in the sun and watch them play. Those were the good days. I always had fun with Michele. I could talk to her about anything. We did a lot of laughing. We'd watch *Family Feud* after dinner almost every night. She'd make this "yellow meal:" she knew it was my favorite. It was pork chops with some fancy seasoning, corn, mac and cheese, and cornbread—my favorite meal in the world. Even my grandma's spaghetti can't beat it.

November 1, 2014. Not only was it Michele's birthday, but my time with her was up. It was time for me to go to my biological mother in Dublin, Ohio. I was excited to be back home and see all my friends again. I can't remember for sure, whether it was April or May of 2015, but it was definitely Spring when Michele texted me and asked if it was a good time to talk. She knew I worked as much as I could, but I could always make time to talk to her. I had just got off work and was sitting, eating some fries before heading home. I told her to call. It turned out to be the worst phone call ever. I never wanted to hear those words come out of her mouth, and was shocked when they did. "I have Stage 4 breast cancer." I felt like the wind had been knocked out of me. She let me know that she was starting chemo soon, and said not to tell anyone; only her parents and I knew. Not even her own kids knew yet. We were both positive as much as possible. I knew she was a fighter. She was the strongest woman I had ever met.

Sometime in June, I got to stay with her for about five days. I remember feeling at peace. I felt safe. I felt at home. Fast forward to November, 2015. My Michele was in remission. She beat it, right?! Wrong. After about 2-3 weeks of her being cancer free, the cancer came back stronger than ever in her liver and lungs. The beginning of December she was in the hospital for fluid in her lungs. We decided to make plans to visit over winter break. I scheduled a week off from work starting December 27, 2015. I had a job interview that morning, but I was more excited about seeing my Michele in a few short hours. I remember sending a text, telling her I was excited to see her, and to let me know when I could head her way. I got home, sat at the kitchen table, and got on Facebook. I saw it. Her oldest son had posted, "My mom is gone." I thought my own heart stopped beating. I let out a blood curdling scream. My mom rushed over to me, but I couldn't speak. I threw my phone and ran to my room. I didn't want to believe it. I couldn't. She was my hero. She helped shape me into me. She was my true mother. I had taken a week off work to visit her, not to attend her funeral. That wasn't supposed to happen. I got into contact with two other kids that were reunited with their biological families. Elyza stayed the night with me before Michele's funeral. We cried together the whole night. I was glad I had someone who could understand. We picked up Dajohn the next morning and headed to Beverly, Ohio to see our one true mom one last time before she entered the ground. When I say Michele was popular, that's no exaggeration. Family, friends, and even teachers from Newark made the drive to Beverly to say goodbye. The line was out the door and then some. There wasn't nearly enough chairs to seat everyone. Lots of people had to stand. Needless to say, it was crowded in there. Mamaw Sherry, Michele's mom, asked if I wanted to speak. I wanted nothing more than to hug my mom one last time, but speaking would have to do. I told everyone how much I loved Michele, and how sad I was she wouldn't get to see all her kids grow up.

The grieving process was hard. I don't cry every day, but she still weighs heavy on my mind. I'll never find someone like her again.

There are such things as good foster homes. They're just hard to find. I'm sorry your experience wasn't as loving as mine. Reading your book showed me that I was lucky to have Michele. I know I was and it's something I'll always cherish. In my opinion, we need more Michele Harts in the world. We need more foster parents that are in it for the kids, not the money. Being a foster parent shouldn't mean "temporary home," it should mean having someone that loves and cares about the child's well-being, regardless of the fact that they aren't biologically related. Michele did that for me and so many other children.

I'm glad you found your forever home. That's how all these stories should end. No child should have to deal with what you did. You're a warrior. You made it. And now you're sharing your story with kids all around the world. I think all of our stories need to be heard. Every experience is different, but they matter.

Sincerely, Thalia Soto

THIRD PLACE WINNER | LEVEL III

GRACE WATKINS | 18-YEARS-OLD

Grade 11: Maplewood High School, Cortland, Ohio: Dr. Christen Clemson, Sponsor

Letter to author Holly Goldberg Sloan concerning her book *Counting By 7s*

Dear Holly Goldberg Sloan:

I am writing this letter of praise to you for your novel *Counting by 7s*. To be honest Ms. Sloan, I contemplated and racked my brain long and hard on how I wanted to write this letter because I really wanted this to be perfect and insightful. However, the deeper I dug the less certain I was that it would be, so instead of thinking up a master plan, I just decided to pick up a pencil and write.

To begin, I must first confess that my personality is greatly OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) based. I have not been diagnosed with OCD but I suffer from repeating dreams both day and night, obsessions, and I am a perfectionist and a germaphobe. Due to this I am always nervous and occasionally twitch and have recently been diagnosed with irritable bowel syndrome from my stress and anxiety. To help with my flare ups I took a liking to music where I strum my guitar. I also beat my drums, read, and count in my head which helps me to focus on whatever it is that I might be doing at the time. I first picked by *Counting by 7s* because the title of the book intrigued me but I will tell you, Ms. Sloan, that it distressed me that it was an odd number (I really wished that it was *Counting by 8s*, but I admit it does not sound as good). I did find that when I was reading your book that the storyline blindsided me for when I was reading the novel there was no main character named Willow Chance. Willow Chance was non-existent to me because the book is not about her but my past. For me, it all started when I read the seven descriptions of Willow which are:

1. She's different (as in strange)
2. Almost everything interests her. But some things—like plants and medical conditions—interest her the most
3. She has learned (the hard way) that life can be extremely unfair
4. She understands that family is what you make it and that people who understand you and chose you in their lives are the most important people
5. She doesn't have a lot of friends, but she would do anything for the ones she does have
6. She knows that the most wonderful thing in the world is feeling like you belong
7. Her story will make you laugh, cry, and appreciate your friends, family, and the things around you in a whole new way

These seven descriptions—*my* seven descriptions—may seem harmless to many people standing on the outside but to me, they are nothing but haunting. My obsession with medical conditions causes me to stay away from extracurricular activities that I enjoy. My obsessions bring me fear that I may have one of these diseases that I have found interesting although I know physically that I do not possess them. I also love plants and plan on becoming a geologist with a minor in forensic archeology, similar to Willow. I have learned in a harsh manner how unfair life is to the point where I accept whatever comes in my direction because in no way could I have prevented those memories from happening in the past. My only hope for the future is that I am strong enough to handle what comes my way and be brave enough to take it on. In fact, bravery is probably the only difference between Willow and me. I am aware that in your novel Willow says she was not brave but she was because she has the knowledge to accept that all other choices are gone. I myself cannot contain this truth knowledge because if I did so, I would not be able to walk this Earth with the little happiness that I had achieved after leaving my crucial past. I must always believe that there is another way out but until then, I enjoy being the vulnerable person that I have become.

Counting by 7s has changed my outlook on myself and confirmed my perspective of this cruel world. I never speak words because the words always taste strange, almost foreign to my taste buds. My silence can be comforting at times but it also eats me up because of the pain that builds up inside me. Not being able to talk about my pain, I shut myself up and locked the doors. I thought that everything would be fine and I would be safe—that is until fear besieged and breached my inner fortress. My past interferes with all my actions and I found that I could not even escape from my bad memories in my sleep because they are manifest in reoccurring dreams that haunted me—until I read *Counting by 7s*. At first I did not know why this was but now I believe it was because my mind believed that Willow’s story was actually my own. I now do not have to hold the memories that your novel brought to me because they were released in those pages, where other people can read all about them. I find this astonishing because I did not have to speak a word to anyone. It may not have freed my mind completely but I am indeed much more relaxed than before and happier as well. As for the cruel world, there is not much for me to say because everyone’s perspective on the world is brought to life by the life that they have lived. “All reality is a blender where hopes and dreams are mixed together with fear and despair,” and you, Ms. Sloan, allowed me to know that I am done or almost done with my despair and hope is on the way. Even as I am writing this I can feel that familiar fluttery feeling I have when I have been writing something sincere to me but this feeling is something more, for more weights have just been removed from my shoulders. Although it lasted only briefly, the calm and inner peace that *Counting by 7s* brought to me was the most healing experience that I have had. Thank you for spreading truth and light in the world but mostly for helping me to exorcise my demons.

Sincerely, Grace Watkins

HONORABLE FINALIST | LEVEL III

MAKIYAH BROWN | 16-YEARS-OLD

Grade 12: Westerville Central High School, Westerville, Ohio: Jim Grannis, Sponsor
Letter to author Matthew Quick concerning his book *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock*

Dear Matthew Quick:

It was hard for me to talk about my situation to anyone. I felt as though no one understood me. That was until I read your book *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock*. This book created so many unwanted emotions, making me wage a battle against myself. It opened my eyes to issues that needed to be addressed about mental health, sexual abuse, and suicide.

Unfortunately, I have personally run across sexual abuse multiple times in my life. I held a lot of anger and pain toward the ones who took advantage of me. Your character Leonard and I share this rage. I never felt like I could relate to people after what I had gone through. I felt that I could never go back and be myself again, that I would never be happy again. Trying to escape my life, I pretended to be someone, anyone, other than myself. I thought that doing so was my only chance of happiness. I really connected with Leonard during that moment in the story when he cut his hair. I was in pain and wanted to escape from it so I shaved my head. It's people like Leonard and I who just want and need people to talk to who will listen and understand. We couldn't even talk to our own families. I tend to keep memories and emotions tinged with pain locked inside a box which I hoped would never be opened. I realized after reading your book that in order to free myself I needed to unlock it and dump everything out.

Your book also brought up topics that are uncomfortable to talk about, but need to be addressed. Your book talks about mental health, bullying, suicide, and rape. Male rape isn't talked about enough or is barely addressed. But it is an issue that people face and are silenced on. Males can be traumatized just as much as females, but society has decided to not address the issue of male rape as often as they do the rape of women. Your book opened my eyes on issues that we don't normally talk about. I admire that.

Around the time I was reading the end of your book, my best friend, Alex, committed suicide. I wondered if some of the same exact things Leonard was thinking about in that moment under the bridge were in Alex's mind before he took his own life. I then began to feel a pain for not helping him more. This pain I experience is unbearable. I wish I could have saved my friend. But we all can't be saved. Teen suicide occurs at a high rate, yet schools do not educate us very well on it. Coming from a person who has dealt with suicide at first and second hand, I can tell you that suicide is NOT the answer. It is very damaging not only to oneself (of course) but also to families and friends. I am one of those friends.

Sometimes when we can't express our emotions, it helps and influences us to see other people express their own (at least it helped me). I've been bullied for a long time starting at a young age. For years, I have stifled the cries of agony over what people have said and done to me because I believed that no one would understand. Reading your book made me feel like I was talking to Leonard, and that he understood. I finally found someone to relate to, and that's all I ever asked for. However, I do contradict the ending of your novel. It was confusing and I didn't understand why. Then I realized that sometimes in life, events happen and we don't understand why. We don't have the answers for everything. Your novel also taught me that it is good to talk about something that is bothering you. Keeping everything bottled up inside isn't healthy. There is only so much that a bottle can hold, and when you try to overfill it, pressure builds up and it spills. I was very close to exploding, but I believe your novel did help me regulate myself.

Your book has changed my view on things and has changed me as a person. This was a very heartfelt, painful, but moving book to read. I thank you for helping me through the dark times I was in. My eyes were opened a lot.

Sincerely, Makiyah Brown

HONORABLE FINALIST | LEVEL III

MARIA BURDJALOV | 17-YEARS-OLD

Grade 10: Orange High School, Pepper Pike, Ohio: Vikas Turakhia, Sponsor

Letter to author Alexander Pushkin concerning his book *Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish* (Сказка о рыбаке и рыбке)

Dear Alexander Pushkin:

When I was a little girl, my favorite fairytale that my mom read to me was *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*. This tale became part of my nightly routine. My mom would come home from work and I would immediately beg her to read the story for the hundredth time. We would sit on her big queen bed, pillows hugging us, and she would read aloud the magical words that rested between the pages.

In the story, there is an old man who lives by the sea with his wife in a poor hut. One day, he fishes and has no luck catching any fish. On his last try, the old man throws his net into the sea and catches a golden fish. The golden fish pleads for him to spare her life and in return she will grant him any wish he desires. The old man, content with his life, lets the fish go without wishing for anything. Upon returning home, his wife yells at him for making the mistake of letting the fish go and not asking for anything. She demands that he seek out the fish and demand of it a new trough to replace their old, broken one. The old man returns to the sea, encounters the fish, and asks it to grant his wife's request, which it does. As time goes on, the fisherman's wife becomes increasingly greedy and covetous, and sends her husband out to sea again and again to demand of the fish everything from a new house to making her czarina over all the Russias; out of a sense of obligation to the fisherman, the fish complied. However, the day came when the wife went too far: she demanded that the fish grant her wish of being the ruler of the sea with the golden fish her servant. Outraged, the fish refused and punished the old woman by revoking all the previous wishes, leaving the fisherman and his wife in the same condition as they were at the start of the tale.

Your story has become a fond memory of my childhood not only for the lessons it taught but also for the moments it allowed me to share with my mom. As a child, I was not observant of how tired my mom was coming home from work, as I was mainly concerned with her reading the story to me. I was not observant of the fact that every time I asked her to read it to me, she would not refuse, no matter how exhausted her day had been. You unveiled to me my first realization of how devoted and loving my mom is towards me.

As a kid, I never fully comprehended the lesson within this fairytale and its significance in my life. In the story, the old man reluctantly keeps going back to the fish to please his wife. He demonstrates his unconditional love and support for his wife by doing everything he can to get her want she wants, no matter how excessive her requests become. My mom does the same thing. Every night, I would ask her to read the same story. Every night, she would say yes. Although my requests, when looking just at their context, were not burdensome or exhausting, there lies a certain sacrifice within them for my mom. She sacrificed a moment to herself in order to give me what I wanted. She knew I did not need to hear the story every night because I had heard it many times before, yet, there wasn't a night that went by where we didn't sit down together and read the story.

Back then, I was unaware of my subtle greediness towards my mom. Even today, I fail to acknowledge my mom's exhaustion when asking her to do things for me or to get something for me. Similar to the fisherman's wife, I do not always know when to stop asking for things. As a child, asking for things is a tool to learn how the world works and to learn to achieve things. It is innocent and seemingly harmless. In the beginning of the story, the wife asks for small requests that are not hard for the fish to grant. However, her greediness pours out and she asks for too much which, in the end, caused a problem. I know that asking for something from my mom is not greedy, but the extent of those requests can be. I have a greater sense of appreciation for my mom because I see the sacrifices she makes for me and her willingness to make them. However, I fail to show her my appreciation every day in the way that she showed me her love every night when I was a child.

Not only does the story show me the generosity of my mom, it also gave me one of the most genuinely warm experiences of my childhood. Each time she read to me, I would feel safe sitting beside her, comforted by her voice. These moments were shared between us, connecting us. Without your fairytale, my connection with my mom would not be as strong as it is today. Thanks to you, these pleasant moments that my mom and I shared on those nights built a strong sense of security between us.

I have learned to recognize my mom's undeniable tendency to provide for me. This story helped me appreciate even more what my mom does, especially the subtle things she does. One day, I hope to be able to provide and show my mom.

Sincerely, Maria Burdjalov

HONORABLE FINALIST | LEVEL III

SYLVIA NICA | 16-YEARS-OLD

Grade 10: Cincinnati, Ohio: Self-entered

Letter to author Margaret Mitchell concerning her book *Gone With the Wind*

Dear Margaret Mitchell:

I never quite understood why I read your book. I was a tired, angry child, and picking up a 1,000-page book even now seems unlikely. Sometimes, I think *Gone with the Wind* just appeared in my life. Poof. I'm lucky it landed on my bed and not on me.

Southern dames, balls...please. Wizards and mysterious islands interested me. Books had been like popcorn—a cheap treat to devour, not something to savor and analyze. Like Scarlett, younger me was dissatisfied and craved excitement. Sometimes, I created drama when stories would not satisfy me.

In the end, it seemed both Scarlett and I suffered when life became too interesting. Your book first appeared when I was thirteen. By this time, old friends had melted away. Worries about drugs and worse calamities sprouted as those around me fell prey. On one hand, I wanted to stay a child, but wanting to be a child only gave others an excuse to trample me. I plastered a smile onto my face and kept my head down, pretending I belonged in my throng of misfits. Really, I was alone and confused.

I think the final shock came when my friend committed suicide. I can't say we were close, because I had no close friends at the time—I had a talent for discouraging deep relationships. However, this friend was closer than most. His suicide shattered the rosy, plastic haze smeared over my eyes and made me go face to face with the confusing, complicated world I lived in. I spoke to death often those next few months. In this turmoil, books became a mirror rather than a distraction. I couldn't bear to see my horrible, distorted reflection leering up from the pages, and so I discarded them. That is, until I found your book.

Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. Those were my thoughts while reading the first few pages.

Initially, all I saw in Scarlett was a shallow girl trying to grow up too fast. I almost abandoned your novel, but something about Scarlett resonated with me. We share no similarities on the surface. She is a charming, fiery dame from a wealthy family. She twists men around her finger with her quick wit and porcelain skin. She is vain, spoiled, and never takes no for an answer. I, on the other hand, could rarely say no. Shy, timid, and easily passed over, it was like comparing a weak trickle to a roaring Niagara. However, shredding through the pages, I gradually saw our similarities. Echoed in Scarlett was my own undercurrent of steel, the same determination to fight for what we believe in no matter how hopeless the cause. We also tend to alienate people. Half-way through the book, I realized I could easily become Scarlett if I wasn't careful.

The thought terrified me. Scarlett is hard-working and clever and seductive, but she is also vain, jealous, and burns bridges like they are made of paper. She loses the only man who understands her while chasing an unattainable mirage. At my core, I am all these things, though I never reached rock-bottom. Scarlett did that for me, and I alongside her, in *Gone with the Wind*. I fought with her when the raiders came, persisted in running a business as a woman, and struggled through bitter starvation. Because of that, your book was the first to make me sob. I sobbed as if I was the one being left by the one man that loved me, as if I was the one with no friends, no family, and no respect. I sobbed because, for the first time, I understood how one person could ruin their own life.

I can't say the same for Scarlett, but within the following year my life turned around. I worked hard to overcome my grief and regret and tried to make myself a better person. Though I denounced Scarlett, I kept some of her best qualities: her persistence, her intelligence, and her unfalteringly strong opinions.

Gone with the Wind has many flaws. It bends history, shows racism in a tame light, and masks the true horrors of slavery. This ignorance taught me to examine the cracks both around and inside me. From that, I now understand that tomorrow is another day. Because of Scarlett, that tomorrow is one I am ready to face.

Sincerely, Sylvia Nica

HONORABLE FINALIST | LEVEL III

ALLISON ROBERTS | 17-YEARS-OLD

Grade 11: Middletown, Ohio: Self-entered

Letter to author Lou Ann Walker concerning her book *A Loss for Words: The Story of Deafness in a Family*

Dear Lou Ann Walker:

I was raised by two hearing impaired women. My mom starting losing her hearing when she turned 22-years-old and I assume my grandmother did as well: both need to wear hearing aids. It's theorized that the cause is genetics. Both my mother and grandmother happen to be the second daughters born to their respective mothers.

I chose your book because I needed a new piece for my speech and debate competition. I do dramatic interpretation and I was searching for a piece of literature I could connect to. I found it in your book *A Loss For Words: The Story of Deafness in a Family*. My whole life I've dealt with struggles from the fact that I was raised by hearing impaired relatives. I talk loud and am very dramatic in my facial expressions and body movements. I've often been bullied for being obnoxious or exuberant. But none of my struggles are comparable to those which you, your family, and other deaf people have had to fight.

Your book opened my eyes to the trials and tribulations experienced by those who are afflicted with deafness. Never could I imagine the educational and social limits as explicitly as you described them. The demeaning behavior of others to those harboring that pain is inexcusable, and it inspired me to stand up for those in similar situations and people like my family.

I'm waiting in agony to know if I will be next to fall victim to the disease. I'm my mother's first born and my younger brother is her second; therefore, she's hoping to break the cycle. Your book motivated me to learn sign, and I have been studying and practicing it for a couple of months now. A deaf woman came to my work a while back, and she seemed anxious and shy about trying to communicate with anyone. After I spoke to her and learned that she was deaf, I told her that I was learning to sign and that my mother, like her, was also hearing impaired. The smile that broke out on her face was indescribable. She was so comforted that I could comprehend her situation and that I was sympathetic. It made my heart leap to know I was brightening her day even for the few seconds I signed with her.

Shortly after she left, I felt this guilt for not always being so forward and supportive of others like her. Deaf and hearing impaired individuals must feel so much shame and embarrassment when they shouldn't; no one should have to feel ashamed or be belittled for something they can't control. As you said in your book, "Every day they were reminded of their shortcomings. From the petty annoyance of not being able to ask for a cup of coffee in a restaurant, to the sobering knowledge that they couldn't hear cars careening around corners . . ." These few lines aided me in realizing that it isn't about my struggles when living with them, it's about their struggles attempting to mesh with society.

I've seen my mother cry very often over how sorry she is that she is incapable of hearing us at times. I never want her to feel this way again. In your book you also told your point of view from interpreting your parents. Although I don't even compare, I understand partially what it took out of you. I constantly have to repeat and listen for my mother, and kids often ask why she looks at their mouths so much and why she occasionally ignores them. I tell them she is reading their lips and if it seems like she's ignoring them, she isn't—she just didn't hear them.

I want to thank you, even though your parents already have, for all you've done for them, and for how much your book has done to further inform those who are unaware of just how malicious a disease deafness really is. My favorite line in your book was when your father asked your mom to marry him. "Can we marry soon?" This was the first text I learned how to sign. It was so genuine and it reminded me that, in all the gloom deafness can bring, there are moments of jubilation that are worth remembering, like when my mom heard me sing in my first lead musical and she cried. My grandmother heard me, too: I belted as loud as I could for them.

Thank you, Lou Ann, for welcoming me to my new passion for sign language. Of course, thank you for sharing your remarkable journey with the world, and for bringing this monumental book into my life. I've connected with it on a deep level and now carry it with me everywhere I go. Thank you for striving for the equal treatment of all hearing impaired individuals, and instructing to look past the deafness to find the heart and personality of a person. Your book has earned a special place in my life forever, and has helped mold me into a better daughter, as well as a strong advocate for those who rely on us to be their ears.

Sincerely, Allison Roberts

ABOUT THE OHIO CENTER FOR THE BOOK @ CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Ohio Center for the Book at Cleveland Public Library promotes and celebrates books, reading, literacy, and libraries to Ohio's citizens and the book community at large and is affiliated with the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress.

The Center for the Book was established in 1977 to use the resources and prestige of the Library of Congress to promote books, reading, libraries, and literacy. In 1997, the Ohio Center was established at the State Library of Ohio to promote Ohio's book culture and literary heritage. On November 14, 2003, the Ohio Center for the Book was relocated to the Cleveland Public Library.

Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio (CTRO) spotlights Ohio authors and promotes reading across Ohio. The State Library of Ohio, Ohioana Library Association and Ohio Center for the Book encourage Ohioans of all ages to read and enjoy books together.

Each CTRO booklist highlights selected books for a two-calendar-year promotion. Free, downloadable, resource-packed readers' toolkits are available for all CTRO books from current and past program cycles.

Classes, libraries, bookstores, families and community groups are welcome to use CTRO. Participation may be as simple as a book group selecting a title to discuss, or as elaborate as a regional partnership among schools, libraries, and organizations, with educational programming and special events.

For more information see: <https://library.ohio.gov/services-for-libraries/library-programs-development/ctro/>

Cleveland Public Poetry

Cleveland Public Poetry (CPP) is an open mic poetry reading series that began in 2012. The poetry reading series features established and emerging poets who read and discuss their work at the Library. Past CPP events have featured such renowned poets as Dave Lucas, Phil Metres, and Dr. Mary Weems. CPP is also a platform where aspiring poets may share their work.

Floyd's Pick

Floyd's Pick is a book award developed by the Choose to Read Ohio (CTRO) Advisory Council and presented in memory of children's literature expert, advocate, and librarian Floyd Dickman.

Each year, the CTRO Advisory Council selects an outstanding book in Ohio children's literature to be Floyd's Pick. This selection is in addition to the 20 titles featured in the biennial CTRO booklist. Eligible books are recent publications for young children through middle grades. The author or illustrator must be an Ohio native or Ohio resident for at least five years (present or past).

For more information, see: <https://library.ohio.gov/services-for-libraries/library-programs-development/ctro/floyds-pick/#2018>

2018. *A New School Year: Stories in Six Voices* by Sally Derby, illustrated by Mika Song (Charlesbridge, 2017)

"In a unique narrative, readers meet a diverse group of six children ranging in age from Kindergarten through fifth grade. With nerves and excitement each child gears up for a new school year by hustling in the morning, meeting new teachers and new classmates during the day, and heading home with homework and relief by day's end.

Simple, bright illustrations focus on each child and his/her worries, hopes, and successes on the first day of school."

Summary from Penguin Random House website

2017. *The Remarkable Journey of Charlie Price* by Jennifer Maschari (Balzer+Bray/HarperCollins, 2016)

"A heartfelt, beautifully written novel of love, loss, and math—perfect for fans of Rebecca Stead and Sharon M. Draper.

Ever since twelve-year-old Charlie Price's mom died, he feels like his world has been split into two parts. *Before* included stargazing and Mathletes and Saturday scavenger hunts with his family. *After* means a dad who's completely checked out, comically bad dinners, and grief group that's anything but helpful. It seems like losing Mom meant losing everything else he loved, too.

Just when Charlie thinks things can't get any worse, his sister, Imogen, starts acting erratically—missing school and making up lies about their mother. But everything changes when one day he follows her down a secret passageway in the middle of her bedroom and sees for himself. Imogen has found a parallel world where Mom is alive!

There's hot cocoa and Scrabble and scavenger hunts again and everything is perfect . . . at first. But something doesn't feel right. Whenever Charlie returns to the real world, things are different, and not in a good way. And Imogen wants to spend more and more time on the other side. It's almost as if she wants to leave the real world for good. If Charlie doesn't uncover the truth, he could lose himself, the true memory of their mother, and Imogen . . . forever."

Summary from HarperCollins Publishers website

Get Graphic!

Get Graphic! is comics and graphic novel programming at the Ohio Center for the Book @ Cleveland Public Library. Programming includes book clubs, workshops and a speaker series that considers all forms of comics: superheroes, autobiographies, documentary, sci-fi, fantasy -- and as many genres as you can imagine! Today's comics depict stories ranging from the super heroics of Superman or Wonder Woman to the autobiographies of Alison Bechdel and Marjane Satrapi. We believe in literature, social justice and the superhero way!

Ohio Pavilion of the State

Ohio Center for the Book has participated in the National Book Festival in Washington, D.C. in the Pavilion of the States since 2012.

At the Pavilion of the States each state selects one title of fiction or non-fiction about the state, or by an author from the state, that is a good read for children or young adults. The title chosen is then included on the National Book Festival's Discover Great Places Through Reading Map. The map is distributed at the Pavilion of the States at the festival and lists Great Reads About Great Places. Past titles sponsored by the Ohio Center for the Book include:

Colo's Story: The Life of One Grand Gorilla by Nancy Roe-Pimm

Rosa by Nikki Giovanni

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

Little Tree by Loren Long

Moonpenny Island by Tricia Springstubb

Ohio Poetry Out Loud

Poetry Out Loud is a national recitation contest created by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation. The contest is administered in partnership with the State Arts Agencies of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. *Poetry Out Loud* is aligned with Common Core and NCTE standards. *Poetry Out Loud* uses a pyramid structure that starts at the classroom level. The winners from participating schools are invited to compete in regional semi-finals.

The *Ohio Poetry Out Loud* competition is administered by the Ohio Arts Council. The Ohio Center for the Book @ Cleveland Public Library (OCFB) is a Regional partner.

Poetry Out Loud workshops, multi-media program materials, including curricula, are free. In preparation for *Ohio Poetry Out Loud* contests, OCFB sponsored poetry recitation workshops (open to all participants from Northeast Ohio) are facilitated by poet and OCFB Fellow Kisha Nicole Foster who serves as the Cleveland/Northeast Regional Coordinator for *Ohio Poetry Out Loud*.

For more information, see: <http://www.oac.ohio.gov/poetryoutloud>

For more information about these programs or other Ohio Center for the Book outreach please visit www.ohiocenterforthebook.org

For further information concerning
the Letters About Literature contest,
please visit: www.read.gov/letters

2018 LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

Ohio Center for the Book

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