

Audrey Coble (12th Grade: Gahanna, Ohio)
Level III First Place Winner
Letter to Chuck Palahniuk concerning his book, *Fight Club*

Dear Chuck Palahniuk:

I plucked *Fight Club* off of the library shelf. The cover looked well worn, the edges rounded and the layer of paper peeled apart at the edges. Instead of a summary, the back had only a few words emblazoned across in neon color: “Astonishing.” “Irresistible.” “Ferocious.” “Amazing.” “Brilliant.” Your book had supposedly been changing lives from the day it was published. Frankly, I didn’t think it’d be as good as everyone said.

Fight Club had a lot to live up to.

Then I read the novel. I began at a regular pace, but soon found myself reading frenetically, turning the pages almost before I was finished reading them, willing my eyes to travel faster across the page. I was taken not only with the story itself—it was unlike anything I’d read before—but with your visceral, commanding style of writing. As the cover promised, line after line made me feel as though I’d been punched in the stomach. I struggled, caught between wanting to re-read the powerful lines and needing to continue reading and reveling in the fascinating plot twists. Finally, I finished the last line. I shut the book with a loud clap, breathless and almost sore like I’d just been in a fistfight,

Fight Club far exceeded my expectations.

Strangely enough, I immediately decided that I wanted to write. More accurately, the feeling was so strong that I had to write. I hadn’t written in seven years, but at that moment, sitting down at my laptop and banging something out seemed like the only thing that made sense in the wake of the novel.

Writing and I go back a long way; when I was younger, for six months or so I wanted to be a writer. However, I’d try to write in the second and third grade, get halfway through a paragraph, and decide I had no place to take my stories. I began an infinite number of tales about girls my age who fell through mirrors and met unicorns on missions to find healing stones, and girls who attended innocuous girls’ schools that doubled as secret spy schools. Upon hearing the advice to “write what I know,” I even turned out a number of half-paragraphs simply about being a third grade girl with a younger sister. Unfortunately, none of these ideas ever led to a complete plot, and eventually, I gave up writing.

I still wonder what it was about *Fight Club* that sparked the renewal of my interest in writing—was it the powerful message contained in the book itself? Was it the moving way in which the words themselves were strung together? Whatever it was, immediately I felt a pull and a rush to capture that novel feeling before it left me. I wasn’t concerned with whether anyone would read what I typed out; my only goal was that, if I were to revisit this piece of writing, I should be able to relive that moment.

That first time wasn’t easy. I typed madly, pausing often when I couldn’t find words for what I was feeling. I’d found the meanings I wanted to record, but their corresponding words slipped from my mind just as I reached out to grasp them, hiding tantalizingly out of reach in the darkest, furthest corners of my mind. I drummed the table restlessly and wrote circles around the words that I knew existed and meant what I really wanted to say. I was frustrated, but I didn’t stop. I managed to write most everything down, and when I visit the document today, I can still feel that gripping enthusiasm from two years ago.

Since then, writing has become an absolutely vital part of my life. The words come more easily now, even when I'm writing for school, emerging obediently when I need them. I enjoy when they come unbidden, as well, when I'm doing such mundane routines as cleaning or packing up my backpack. The transfer of emotion has become an absolutely vital aspect of my writing. I write to help me find balance. I write to give me confidence. I write to have an outlet for my thoughts. I write to help me push myself and to place my surroundings, and the world in perspective. I write to find my center.

Now, I can proudly say that Fight Club changed my life, and not just because I now think more carefully about everything that I see, read, do, and want.

No, Fight Club changed my life because it gave me means to identify the seven-year-deep emptiness that writing finally filled.

Thank you, Chuck Palahniuk.

Sincerely,

Audrey Coble