

Erica Langan (6th Grade: Cincinnati, Ohio)

Level I First Place Winner

Letter to Emily Dickinson concerning her poem, "I'm nobody! Who are You?"

Dear Emily Dickinson,

I can still remember that trip to Borders Bookstore with my mom. As we were walking down the aisles filled with hundreds of books, all of them calling our names, she stopped and pulled out a slim book with a creamy blue cover.

"Emily Dickinson," she murmured. "She's really a good poet. Here, look at a couple of her poems." And with that, she handed me the book, and I took it from her, neither of us aware of how powerful the treasures within truly were. I opened the book to a random page and began reading. Well, I don't know if you could call it reading, because, unfortunately, I was finding it difficult to understand a single line. "They're very deep poems," my mom told me, "a lot of them might be difficult to understand."

I was on the verge of putting it back in its place, of leaving it in the bookstore to await another, more experienced reader, when I had a thought: "I just can't leave this book here!" I thought with defiance. Because even though I really couldn't understand whole poems, I could understand enough to recognize the beauty, and the depth of your writing, and surely no one in their right mind could leave something like that behind. So I announced to my mom that I wanted to buy it.

The whole ride home, I was searching through the collection of poems, reading my ever-changing favorites to my mom, who listened intently. She's a big fan of you, too. As I read on, I began to realize something. Although maybe I couldn't comprehend a couple of words or couldn't fully understand a line or two, I was beginning to understand many of the messages burrowed deep beneath the printed words.

Eventually, I came across this poem:

I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there's a pair of us-don't tell!
They'd banish us, you know

How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the live long day

This poem truly spoke to me, because, sometimes, I do feel like nobody. Emily, you made me feel like being nobody is so much more fun than being somebody, and you made me agree with you. Also, you made me feel like I am not alone. The fact that someone as brilliant, as influential as you could call yourself a nobody, makes me feel like everyone exciting, everyone worth anything in this world is a nobody, and all of the somebodies are the boring, plain people who are really trying too hard to be somebody.

I think one of the best lines of the poem is the fourth: “They’d banish us you know.” That line stuck out to me, mostly because no one wants to be nobody. They want to be somebody, because, even if nobodies are far superior, somebodies are the ones who get noticed, the ones who become rich and famous. Everyone casts off nobodies, because, whoever dreams of being a nobody? The answer: nobody. Emily, your poem showed me the wonders of being a nobody, and how, even if there’s not a spotlight shining down on you, the light inside of you is the brightest of all, brighter than any camera flash.

Sincerely,

Erica Langan