

Level II

First Place Winner

Alexander (“Xander”) Shaffer

(Grade 7: St. Michael School, Canton. Sponsor: Amy Krajeck)

Letter to author Rick Riordan concerning his book, *The Lightning Thief*

Dear Rick Riordan,

I have often dreamed of having demigod powers, like Percy Jackson, that would give me the ability to be the hero of every basketball game I play in. However, in reality, to win every basketball game requires that I put in a tremendous amount of hard work and training to even come close. Like Percy, I, too, have Attention Deficit Disorder and can relate to his inability to focus. During 3rd grade, I was a very reluctant reader and never thought I could read an entire novel. Then one evening, my mother introduced *The Lightning Thief* to me. This book was full of adventure, terror, mystery, and humor. The story about Percy’s adventure into Hades to rescue the lightning bolt easily kept me on the edge of my seat the entire time. I immediately fell in love with this book, and could hardly put it down. Afterwards, I begged my mom for the rest of the series and devoured each and every book. Because of *The Lightning Thief*, I now love reading and consider myself a strong and avid reader. One important lesson I have learned from reading your book is that having a flaw is *not* necessarily a bad thing.

I used to think that something was wrong with me because I sometimes had a hard time focusing in school just like your main character, Percy Jackson. Having ADD used to sometimes make me feel like a failure. After reading *The Lightning Thief*, I realized that having ADD is not necessarily a weakness, but something that can be turned into a strength. Your story made me realize that I am not any less intelligent, it is just how my brain chooses to function. Percy is flawed just like me, and has to learn how to control his flaws all while fighting monsters and saving the world. Through hard work, I have also been able to turn my focusing issues into a strength, and I continue to do really well in school. Percy attends a special camp called Camp Half-Blood, where he is trained to use his fighting skills and learns that his flaws have actually been a gift all along. I, too, attend special classes, where I consistently train in karate, kickboxing, and basketball. It is at the dojo or on the basketball court where I have learned that I can truly shine, and show my strengths doing what I love to do. All this training has also helped to control my ADD and I, too, like Percy, realize that I can turn my flaws into a strength. After reading *The Lightning Thief*, I have also realized that no one is perfect. Everyone has flaws and everyone has their own unique strengths. What matters in life is what we choose to do with the strengths and abilities that have been given to us. It is up to us to take responsibility for our own flaws. Training and working hard, just like Percy, gives me the confidence to strive for excellence, not only for myself, but for the good of the community.

Reading your book, *The Lightning Thief*, brought me to the realization that while I may not be able to save the whole world, I am capable, however, of making a difference in my community. I really identified with how Percy felt at the beginning of the story. He felt lost and powerless. However, once he entered Camp Half-Blood and started training, he realized his importance and destiny. I, too, used to feel powerless and wonder how I could possibly do anything important on this Earth. Reading your book has helped me to discover that I am not powerless. I am important and just as capable as Percy of doing significant things in the world. I

often stay at the dojo and help teach young kids karate. I love it when a kid finally learns something that took them a while to understand and his or her face lights up. It makes me feel good to give back and pass on my knowledge even if it is to just one person at a time. During the summer months, I also enjoy helping my dad coach my little sister's Challenger baseball team. Helping them develop their baseball skills gives me great satisfaction. Like Percy, I also love the water and plan to be a lifeguard as soon as I am 16 years-old. I take lifeguard level lessons every summer and because of these lessons I was able to save someone from drowning this past summer. While I may not be saving the universe from evil monsters, I am able to help people one at a time. Doing these things makes me feel good about myself, and in turn, helps spread happiness and goodwill throughout my community.

Reading your book has taught me many life lessons, but most importantly, it has taught me that we all have the ability to make a difference in the world. I want to thank you for writing *The Lightning Thief* because if I had not read your book, my life could have taken a very different path. Your book made me realize that I and I alone had to take responsibility for my own future. Through your story, I discovered that I, too, have a purpose in this world. Knowing my purpose in life has made me a much better person. I still love and read all of your books and can't wait for Percy's next adventure. Thank you for teaching me that I have the power to make a difference. Because of your book, I am now on the right path.

Sincerely,
Alexander Shaffer, age 13