

Level I

Third Place Winner

Samuel Geelhood

(Grade 5: Self-entered, Beavercreek. Sponsor: Tara Geelhood)

Letter to author Esther Forbes (1891-1967) concerning her novel, *Johnny Tremain*

Dear Ms. Forbes,

Your book, *Johnny Tremain*, stood out from all of the other books I have read and made me stop to think about myself. Few books have done that before. I struggle with bitterness when people hurt me. When I read your book, I started to notice a similarity between myself and Johnny from the very first chapters. After Johnny was injured by Dove and Dusty, he became bitter and decided not to forgive them, continuing to treat them unkindly and harshly.

Continuing to stay bitter after people have hurt me, I have tried to find ways to get revenge. Once, my younger sister hit me for no apparent reason. Furiously, without thinking, I hit her back. She asked me to leave her room and slammed the door after I was out. Another time, one of my friends called me “horrible” but in a playful way. Offended, I changed seats to move away from him. Even though he apologized, I refused to forgive him or even talk with him for a long time after that. I struggle to forgive people for what they have done to me even though no one has hurt me as badly as Dove hurt Johnny when he intentionally caused him to burn his hand and ruin his opportunity to continue his apprenticeship as a silversmith.

As I continued reading your book, I observed that Johnny began to realize that life didn’t revolve around his past because people eventually forgot about it or stopped paying attention to his wounded hand. For example, Rab didn’t think Johnny’s hand would hinder him from chopping wood when he assigned him the task, and Johnny discovered that with practice, he was able to cut wood. I also realized that I needed to move past the unpleasant memories I was storing up like treasure. The problem was that the treasure I was choosing to hold onto ate away at my relationships with the people I care about the most.

Usually, people don’t change their outlooks in an instant, but gradually, Johnny changed his way of thinking—slowly. Right after he was injured, he felt hatred and repugnance towards Dove. After a year’s time, he showed that he understood Dove and regarded him with more kindness than before by assisting him with his job in the stables. It was the same with me. Slowly, over time, I decided to change my mind-set and my actions regarding my sour attitude. I decided that staying bitter wasn’t going to do anything constructive for me because it wouldn’t change the past. Staying bitter would injure present relationships and unquestionably hinder future relationships.

So I forgave the people who hurt my feelings and I deliberately chose to change my outlook and give others grace. Although I still struggle to forget times when I have been offended, remembering Johnny Tremain’s story has helped me to forgive and move forward. Your book has made a huge difference in my life: instead of being a slave to bitterness, I am free to show love, and fully enjoy the relationships in my life.

Sincerely,

Samuel Geelhood, age 11