

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

A national reading and writing promotion program, sponsored in the Commonwealth by the Massachusetts Center for the Book, with lead support from the Calderwood Writing Initiative at the Boston Athenæum and assistance from Houghton Mifflin Co. & Massachusetts Library Association

READ. BE INSPIRED. WRITE BACK.

Author Roald Dahl once said that writing a book was like taking a journey. You knew where you wanted to go but you didn't always know who you might meet or what you might experience along the way. Reading a book is a similar kind of journey. Where has a book taken *YOU*?

Have you wandered with J. D. Salinger through lonely streets in New York City? Did you trek back in time with Stephen Crane to crouch on a Civil War battlefield and understand, perhaps for the first time, fear? Maybe you stopped in the woods on a snowy evening with Robert Frost or played at the intersections of Mexican and American culture with Sandra Cisneros. Perhaps you traveled into fantasy – to Hogwarts, to Middle Earth, or to a future society where books are burned at 451° Fahrenheit.

Select a book that took you on a surprising or inspiring journey. It might be a recent journey or one you remember from your childhood. Then write a personal letter to the author, explaining how his or her work and the journey through it somehow changed your view of the world or yourself. Do not summarize the book's plot. After all, the author wrote the book and already knows what happened. What the author doesn't know is how the book affected *YOU*. Write honestly and in your own voice, as if you were having a conversation with the author. Those are the best letters to read and the most fun to write.

LAL welcomes entries from *all readers*—reluctant as well as enthusiastic book travelers. The how-to-enter tips on the next page will help you write and prepare your letter for submission.

COMPETITION LEVELS

Level I—Grades 4-6

Level II—Grades 7 & 8

Level III—Grades 9-12

STATE AND NATIONAL AWARDS

State Awards. The awards ceremony is held at the Massachusetts State House. All honorees receive *Letters About Literature* tote bags, prizewinning Massachusetts books and/or Houghton Mifflin dictionaries. In addition, the top award winner in each category receives a \$100 savings bond and a \$50 Target GiftCard. Sponsoring teachers/librarians are also recognized.

National Awards. The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress will select six national winners, two at each competition level. Target will send these six national winners and their (2) parents/guardians to Washington, DC, to attend the National Book Festival in Fall 2007 where they will read their letters during the Letters About Literature national awards presentation. Each national winner also will receive a \$500 Target GiftCard.

DEADLINE AND NOTIFICATION

Submission deadline for *all* levels is **December 8, 2006**. State awardees will be notified in March 2007. National winners will be contacted later in the spring. See the how-to-enter guidelines (on Page 2) for specific submission details. *PLEASE NOTE: All letters become the property of the Massachusetts Center for the Book and the Library of Congress. We regret that we cannot acknowledge each letter. Information about deliberations will be posted to the web site (see below).*

CONTACT

Download LAL lesson plans, blackline masters, assessment sheets, sample letters, and information about links between the program and Massachusetts curriculum frameworks via the Massachusetts Center for the Book website: www.massbook.org. You also can contact the program director at massbook@simmons.edu. For more information, call 617-521-2719. Or visit us online at: www.massbook.org.

LAL supports both Massachusetts & national standards for teaching English, Language Arts, and Reading. Read more about it at www.massbook.org.

HOW TO ENTER GUIDELINES

Step 1: Prewriting Discussion

First, REFLECT! Select a fiction or nonfiction book, a short story, poem, essay or speech (sorry, no song lyrics) you have read and about which you have strong feelings. Explore those feelings and why you reacted the way you did during or after reading the author's work.

Second, CONNECT! Consider one or more of these questions when writing your letter: Did the characters, conflict or setting mirror your life in some way? What strengths or flaws do you share with a characters or characters in the book? What did the book show you about your world that you never noticed before? What surprised you about yourself while you were reading this book? Why was this work meaningful to YOU?

Third, EXPRESS YOURSELF! A letter is less formal than an essay or research paper. Write honestly, using your natural voice. Two good tips: (1) Do not summarize the plot or analyze the work's literary merits. Letters are conversational, friendly. (2) Correspond, don't compliment! Your entry should not be a fan letter meant to flatter the author.

Step 2: Writing the Letter

Recommended length

- Level I: 100 - 400 words
- Level II: 300 - 600 words
- Level III: 500 - 800 words

Step 3: Preparing Your Letter for Submission

- RETURN ADDRESS. Print your name and complete address (*either home or school*) in the upper-right corner of the first page of your letter. Letters without a return address will be disqualified.
- LETTER FORMAT. Type or print your letter. Please use ink and write neatly. If the judges cannot read your handwriting, they will disqualify your entry.
- ENTRY COUPON. Each letter must be accompanied by an entry coupon. (*See coupon below.*) Staple the coupon to the last page of your letter. Do not use paper clips as they become separated during handling. If you should win a state or a

national prize, you will be contacted by your state center for the book using the information on your entry coupon. Please be sure this information is both complete and legible!

- MAILING ENVELOPE: Class sets should be mailed in flat (9 x 12) envelopes. Single entries may be sent in business size (No. 10) envelopes. In all cases, indicate the competition level—either I, II, or III—on the envelope. Use correct postage or the letter will be returned by the post office!
- NOTE: All letters become the property of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. Please make a copy of your letter for your files as no letters will be returned

Submission Deadline

Mail all entries postmarked by December 8, 2006, to:

LAL 2007
Competition Level (*Indicate I, II, or III*)
Massachusetts Center for the Book
Simmons College – GSLIS
300 The Fenway
Boston, MA 02115

TEACHERS/LIBRARIANS: Please note!

- Please do not assign the same book to an entire class as this misses the spirit of the program—identifying a personal relationship with an author and/or book. Likewise, rather than assigning the same opening paragraph or topic sentences, encourage students to express themselves individually.
- Mail class sets in one flat envelope rather than individual envelopes. Use one envelope for each level.
- An accurate EMAIL ADDRESS will help us keep in contact with you. Please refer to the Lettersaboutliterature.org website or your state center for the book web page (see page 1) for program updates throughout the year!
- Although we cannot acknowledge receipt of letters, we LOVE *your* cover letters. This will ensure that you are put on the LAL mail list for next year.

Letters About Literature 2007 Entry Coupon

- **PLEASE PRINT.** Often our failure to contact you is due to incomplete or illegible information on the entry coupon!
- **STAPLE COUPON TO THE BACK OF EACH LETTER.** Use one coupon per reader, rather than one coupon for the entire class.

Name: _____ Age: ____ Home Phone: (*optional*) (____) _____

Grade: (*Circle one grade only.*) Level I: 4 5 6 Level II: 7 8 Level III: 9 10 11 12

Book/Story Title: _____ Author: _____

Home Address: Street: _____ City _____ State ____ Zip ____

Parental Signature (if submitting as an individual entry): _____

IMPORTANT! If submitting through a school or library, please complete the additional information below:

School/Library _____

Street: _____ City _____ State ____ Zip ____

School/Library Telephone: (____) _____ Email : _____

Teacher/Librarian contact: _____ Email: _____