

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2017  
State House Awards Ceremony  
May 16, 2017

TOP  
HONORS  
LEVEL I

Dear Mr. Dickens,

I'm not a miser. I'm not even greedy, but of all the characters in all the books I've read, I saw myself in Ebenezer Scrooge. Your message that people can change made me realize that I've changed. You can meet change at the door and invite him in, or you can slam the door in his face. Where Scrooge did not have a choice to go with the ghosts, and didn't really want to go, I had a choice whether to change my ways and that choice was mine. Your book showed me that real change requires honesty and it isn't easy. You need to be honest with yourself to make a difference in your own life. Like the ghosts helped Scrooge see that he needed to change, your book helped me.

You separate past, present and future in your story with the arrival of the Christmas ghosts. Luckily, or unluckily, I haven't seen any ghosts. These ghosts' arrivals marked the timeline of Scrooge's life and reading about them helped me understand mine. Whether the ghosts were real or just a part of a dream doesn't matter because I believe you are saying that change begins on the inside. I agree and you made me realize that. You have to think it on the inside before you do it on the outside.

To be honest, what I don't understand is why you don't say much about when Scrooge was young. You don't tell us, Mr. Dickens, all the things that happened to make Scrooge unpopular at school. We don't know many details of what caused his behavior. Maybe you didn't want us to feel bad for him because he was selfish and mean, but I can fill in the blanks. Maybe his brain was going so fast that he couldn't pay attention. Maybe he couldn't sit and always felt like he had to move. Maybe he blurted out answers, interrupted his teachers or forgot to raise his hand. Maybe he always got in trouble and the teachers made an example of him every single time. Maybe he was good at sports, but got yelled at by coaches for being distracted. Maybe the other kids threw grass in his helmet and he ended up running the laps. Maybe he was kicked, tripped and pushed. Maybe the kids lied and said it was a prank. Maybe he was so nervous that he said the wrong thing or tried always to be funny so kids would like him, but no one laughed. Maybe he heard no, stop, and don't so many times that he just didn't care anymore. Maybe he worried about everything like being wrong, no one liking him and it squished all the goodness out of him. Maybe all this happened and the kids turned on him like they did on me.

When Scrooge was sitting alone at a boarding school on Christmas Eve, I saw myself sitting there too. Grown up Scrooge even cried. The ghost said that Scrooge was a solitary child neglected by his friends and left there still. Scrooge was alone without a loving home, alone without friends, and very sad with no idea how to fix these problems. Alone is a terrible thing to feel, trust me. Where was Scrooge's mom? In all this, mine was sick. His dad was mean and mine was busy and worried about my mom. Everyone gets sad, but I know what it is to be really low and feel like things are really dark.

Last year, I had enough. I was done trying. I didn't care if I was sent out of class or in the "time out" chair every single day. I was going to end up there no matter what I did. The teachers didn't care about me and just kept pushing me aside, but at the same time they were shining a huge bright light on me and what I couldn't do. No one was listening to me, but they were all looking at me, and groaning. So I gave

up. I didn't care and I didn't try. My grades were pretty bad. Scrooge knew he was a miser and I knew I didn't fit in. I sometimes don't think about people around me even though I don't do it on purpose. Scrooge was so greedy that I think he didn't realize how badly he was hurting Bob Cratchit, or what he was doing to his girlfriend who loved him. Underneath everything, Scrooge was angry and I was too. This scared me. Scrooge was definitely scared too.

With the start of this new school year and after I read your book, I decided this was my year. Like Scrooge, I think I finally woke up. I worked hard in school and made Highest Honors this term. I made some new friends who like me for who I am and I was the captain of a flag football team in the sixth grade tournament. We lost in the first round, but you know what, half of the teams playing did too. You taught me that you need to unlearn your own ways and unlearn your thinking. Scrooge did this by seeing his life laid out in front of him and the future that was in store for him if he didn't change. Unfortunately, unlearning can be harder than learning. Even if you learn everything about what you are supposed to do and how you are supposed to act, there's no real change unless you can actually do what you've figured out. You have to earn people's forgiveness and I'm trying every day. I don't think everyone forgave Scrooge immediately. It takes time to change people's minds. Some might not change at all. Scrooge shows he is a changed man right when he wakes up and gives money to the Cratchits and also gives to the men who are fund raising for the poor.

You say that he kept Christmas in his heart every day, and maybe he did, but I can't believe he didn't slip up here and there. Sometimes I just can't keep it together, but I am trying. Believe me, no one wants to be upset or make a scene and be out of control. You made me believe that change comes from small choices that add up. Both Scrooge and I have to try really hard not to repeat our bad choices. Neither of us can change the bad things we've done or said, but making good decisions can affect our future.

You taught me to really believe that there is goodness in everyone, even a Scrooge. You showed me that you can't fight the past if you want to build your own future. I need to push forward. The truth is, I'm just hitting my stride.

Yours truly,

*Owen*

Grade 6