

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

TOP  
HONORS  
LEVEL II

Dear Jay Asher,

As long as I can remember, I've always considered myself a healer rather than a hero. I've always tried my best to put others' needs before mine. Since the fourth grade, I've served as a counselor for friends in need of one. If they need to express thoughts or feelings that have been bugging them, I'm the one they go to talk to. Then I help them decide what to do with those thoughts or feelings. I've dealt with a lot, from secret crushes to nasty drama to anxiety issues. But, one of the most life-changing dilemmas I've come across as a teenage guidance counselor relates closely with your book, *Thirteen Reasons Why*. Suicidal thoughts.

It was a couple months into sixth grade and I had just been acquainted with my current group of friends. One of my close friends had been looking upset all morning, and at lunch I asked her what was wrong; she responded that she was thinking of hurting, or even killing, herself. At first I didn't know what to think. This was not the normal elementary school drama my twelve-year-old self was used to dealing with. I was so deep in thought that my mind felt like it had ridden a Tilt-a-Whirl ten times in a row. But, by the end of lunch, my frantic mind had come up with an idea. I ran up to my locker, grabbed a pen and some paper, and dashed into the bathroom. I don't remember much about what I wrote on that note, but I do remember writing the last two words before signing my name: You matter. I dashed out of the bathroom and went to go give my note to her. My mom got an e-mail the next day from the school guidance counselor and my friend's mom saying thank you to me for the note and for possibly saving a life.

I read your book over a year later. In seventh grade, my group of friends had become much more close, but I still had to play my role as guidance counselor from time to time, dealing with depression and anxiety on more than one occasion. About halfway through the year, in health class we were asked to read a novel related to a health related disease and put together a report on that disease. And due to its intriguing plot, great reviews, international bestselling status, and an infinite number of recommendations, I chose to read your book. Reading your book was definitely the most pivotal experience I've had thus far.

I was shocked and disappointed by how unfair and unjust Hannah's experiences were, and there were countless times where I had to ask myself, "Did that really just happen?" During Clay's recording specifically I could feel my heart shatter as I tore through the pages. I also related to Hannah when she was worried about the countless rumors that were clouding her reputation because I have anxiety myself and, even though I try my hardest not to, I care a lot of what other people think of me. However, I do have my family and dear friends who give me love, support, and hope when I need it most. It hurt me very much reading that section of the

book, knowing that if Hannah had at least one person she could trust, maybe she wouldn't have killed herself.

As much as I related to Hannah's side of the story, I think I learned the most from Clay. As Clay listens to Hannah's tapes, he felt so much anger at himself because of what he could have done to save Hannah. He is regretful because he took for granted the time he had with Hannah. And most for all, Clay is left devastated by Hannah's death. From Clay I learned that it matters to care about the people around you, but how you show that you care is what matters most. Clay is a generally shy character, and had he shown Hannah that he really cared about her when he had the chance, Hannah might not have seen a need to kill herself.

Reading your book, Jay Asher, inspired me to further educate myself on suicide prevention and what I can do to help. Since I read your book, I've been further considering a career in psychology, and have already determined which career paths that I could be suited for (at the moment I'm stuck between being a health care social worker or a high school guidance counselor). I also want to educate my peers to prevent more situations like Hannah's from happening. Recently another student and I were selected by my school guidance counselors to give a presentation to parents about the benefits of PBIS and how we use it in our school. PBIS (or Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) is a program designed to build a kind and cohesive school community by encouraging and recognizing positive behavior between students and staff. I believe in this cause with a burning passion, especially because if Hannah and Clay's school focused used PSIS, a lot of the events leading up to Hannah's suicide may have been noticed and put to an end. This year, I plan on spreading the idea of PSIS to my fellow peers and teachers so that nothing similar to what Hannah and Clay experienced will ever affect anyone at my school.

Finally, I thank you, Jay Asher, for opening my eyes to the importance of suicide prevention. You showed me that just the smallest actions, like saying, "Hi," in the hallway, may seem like nothing special to me, but may mean the world to someone else. You inspired me to think more about the way I act to the people I care about, but also those who I may not know so well. You helped me realize that Hannah's suicide may have been much more serious than my friend's situation, but in the end, they both could have had the same awful outcome.

Best regards,

*Nick*

Grade 8