

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016
Massachusetts Center for the Book
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Level I Honors Award

Dear Mr. Wiesel,

When I finally put down your book, I was overwhelmed with a whole new world of thoughts and emotions. Your novel opened for me a window into the Holocaust. This book was even more powerful because the Holocaust took the lives of my own relatives. My grandfather and his mother were set to visit their family in Lithuania when the war broke out. They were able to stay at home in Russia; however, all the rest of my grandfather's family perished in the ghetto. In 1943 most of them were executed in a forest called Ponary near the city. Therefore, your book did not just touch me because of the extremely powerful images and ideas it contains but also because I feel a personal relation to what you write about.

I think that your book has been able to show very powerfully what the Holocaust was to people, which is the world of darkness that people had to experience. It amplifies the cries of those who were destroyed and killed in the nasty, mortal way of torture in front of the eternal. There were moments in the book where I could not stop myself from crying for the first time in my life, and this is something that I will never forget.

Your writing shows the suffering in the "factory" of human extermination so powerfully that at moments I saw the tired eyes that lost all hope, I saw the flames rising above crematories, I felt the stench and the smoke of human flesh and beyond all this, I myself saw the inscribed words "Work is Freedom" and wondered at their cynicism. The scene of the separation of the protagonist's family was probably one of the most touching in the whole masterpiece. I could feel the desperation and the horror in the eyes of people who have just realized that they would not see each other again. What they experienced at that moment made me cry and revealed to me the deepest world of human pain.

I do think, however, that the main reason why your book made such a strong impression on me is that it was not just about suffering. I think it is also very much about human strength, about ways that allow people to remain human and remain spiritually strong in spite of all horrors. Your book has taught me that hope is gathered to be kept not only in the times of Light but also in the times of Darkness. At the end of your book, the protagonist boy looks at himself in the mirror and sees a corpse. However, he is not dead. He was able to survive on the cattle train, to rise from the horrors of the ghetto and concentration camp, from death itself. He was able to pass through Auschwitz and remain both alive, human, and greatest of all, Jewish; and I think that this proves to us that the world of good people is stronger than that of the satanic Third Reich.

I also think that this book changed my own perspective as a person. Half-Russian, half-Jewish, I was able to feel my own belonging to the Jewish nation. I also was able to comprehend the fact that the Holocaust itself has changed the history of Judaism and Jews forever, that it related and connected one nation, soul to soul and heart to heart, and proved and celebrated the integrity of Jewish people. Your book has made me a stronger person and a better Jew. I thank you for doing that for me.

Sincerely yours,

Alexander

Alexander
Arlington
Grade 5

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Level I Honors Award

Dear Sharon M. Draper,

In a way, for a while at least, my family had to adapt like Melody's family. No one in my family has cerebral palsy like Melody, however we know what it is like to have to learn to communicate with someone who can no longer communicate and my grandmother knew what it was like to have the words in your head but you can't get them out.

I have many very fond memories of my grandmother teaching me to play games, playing cards with me, making long trips to see me, going for boat rides, the list goes on. I think the most important thing to her was family. Before things got in the way, if you asked my grandmother what the most important thing in her life is, I have no doubt that without hesitation she would say "my grandchildren of course". She cared and wherever she is now still cares deeply about my grandfather, her five children, and especially her eleven grandchildren. My grandmother, however, had a stroke when I was the age of five, but mostly recovered. She could talk and everything and even walk with a walker but then another series of strokes left her unable to move. For a time, she was able to communicate a little bit with the help of a device and the movement of her mouth and eyebrows but that too eventually went away.

On my visits I would try talking with my grandmother. At the time, I was probably six or maybe even seven. I understood what had happened but somewhere deep down when I was talking to my grandmother I expected her to start talking to me like nothing had happened. Silence. Sadly, the cruel thing that is reality stopped that miracle from happening. Still, I would read to her and talk with her but I couldn't help wondering if she could really understand me. Melody's Dad wanted to understand what Melody was thinking and I know how that feels.

My Aunt Lori is a special education teacher. She acquired a book, your book, and after reading it saw how inspiring it was and how it fit our situation. She then passed it to her daughter. Her daughter then passed it to my mother. Then my mother passed it to me. Your book truly opened my eyes and gave me a whole new perspective to this world. More than that your book finally answered my question. The answer to my question is nothing on the inside changed with my grandmother and that even though I could no longer get a response I strongly believe that my grandmother took in all the information I said and that she could still think.

On my next visit to my grandparents, after reading Out of My Mind, I talked to my grandmother and read to her. I talked to her like anyone else because I was keeping in mind what Melody taught me. My grandmother was taking it all in just like Melody does and I was so happy. Your book gave me the best gift that it could have. It gave me an even stronger bond with my grandmother. As I would talk to her I could see her expression changing and I even got her to smile as wide as a smile could be. I would love to think that I have a special bond with my grandmother even now thanks to the determination and knowledge that your book has given me. My grandparents' home is very far from ours so we always used Skype. I had recently started to take piano lessons and started to play music from *The Sound of Music*. My grandmother loved *The Sound of Music* and the piano so when I played that for them on Skype she lit up and I could tell that she was singing right along in her head.

Melody's relationship with Mrs. V taught me and many others that if you take the time to know someone like her or my grandmother it will be worth it. In recent months, my grandmother has passed away but I believe that from heaven she is looking down at me. Sometimes I can feel her sitting next to me when I play the piano. My grandmother was an extremely strong woman and her love of her family was always and still is in her heart. After reading your book I truly did realize that nothing on the inside changed in my grandmother and the love she has for her family didn't even come close to wavering it only got stronger. Thank you is not even close enough to express my gratitude but that is all that I can think to say, so from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

With much gratitude,

Amanda

Amanda
Danvers
Grade 6

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Level I Honors Award

Dear Philip Reeve,

I've always thought of the world as a movie: each second, a moment captured in a piece of film. All the people on Earth swept away on the current of the film which would inevitably conclude in a happy ending. I thought that everyone's fate, their roles and lines, were already written and were unchangeable. Reading your books made me think differently about our future and what could happen if we don't do something about it.

If everyone just sat around and did not try to stop worldwide problems like war and global warming, our world and economy would crumble and chaos would erupt. All the amazing things that our human ancestors have worked towards would burn and the ashes would litter our minds. Fantasy books and stories like the *Mortal Engines* series would become the reality and I'm pretty sure that would not be good. I don't think anyone would want to live in a world with little to no plants and where seeing wildlife would be like hitting the jackpot in mega millions. People live and thrive on hope, so our currently hopeless future will be inhospitable and catastrophic unless we make a change in our ways.

I think your book had a very realistic picture of our future because it was ruined by war and by the destruction of the environment. Just in my short 11 years I have realized that this is where we are headed at full tilt as a planet. I did a little research and figured out that the top three causes for global warming are emissions from machines, agriculture, and commercial cattle lots. I wonder why these few easily changeable problems are not being stopped. Even if everyone on Earth just cut back a little bit on their power usage or made a better choice on what kind of food they bought, it would make a huge difference. Of all the horrible things that could be going on in our world, these are the problems that are ruining it?

I used to think that only really important people like governors and senators could actually make any sort of difference in problems like global warming. After reading your books, I realized that anyone can make a contribution, no matter how big or small, that will rid our world of these dilemmas. Many people have already helped to stop global warming. For example, my family has helped by getting solar panels and buying local produce, but there is still one thing we need to do. We need to change that "many" to "all".

I now know, because of reading your books, that we can choose our own fate and that our future is not already planned out. If there are problems in the world that need to be solved we will always have the power to solve them, we just need to use it. We shouldn't just sit around and think "I don't need to help solve problems. Other people can". I think the two things we need to remember is that we are all just "other people" to everyone else, so if we don't contribute, no one will and that a happy ending will never happen if we don't try.

Sincerely,

Amos

Amos
Whately
Grade 6

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Level I Honors Award

Dear R.J. Palacio,

I remember sitting in my 7-year-old brother's room, my mom reading Wonder to us for the very first time. I was only 9-years-old, but I remember looking forward to reading it every day. I may not have understood the book as thoroughly as I did when I read it a few weeks ago, at age 12, but I loved it just as much. Out of the blue a few weeks ago I had a sudden craving for Wonder. Sure, I wanted to read it because it's a wonderful book that I love to revisit, but there was more to the story. Wonder helped me appreciate what I have, and helped inspire me in what has been a tough time, even though it's nowhere near as tough as Auggie's whole life was.

Last year I found out that I had something called alopecia areata. It makes your hair fall out, and it is an autoimmune disorder. Most people don't lose all of their hair, but I did. The first year was hard – it was all new to me and I felt very sad or afraid sometimes. Even now, a year later, I get upset about it. A few weeks ago, my mom had to go to a bookstore to buy Wonder because I wanted to read it again so badly. Wonder really inspired me. The way that Auggie dealt with things, even little moments like going to the store or taking his dog for a walk throughout the book made me feel really brave. At least I don't have to worry about those kinds of problems because I can just throw on a hat or a wide headband. If Auggie could have so much courage, so can I. The part when Auggie goes to school for the first time in fifth grade even though he didn't want to really made me feel encouraged. I really felt like I understood how Auggie was feeling. He had to make a difficult decision that would help him in the future, and I have had to do that as well. Now, whenever I am having trouble putting on my wig, or I just don't feel like having to go to school without my hair up in a ponytail like most of the other girls, I just stick through it even though I don't feel like it, because Auggie would stick through it too. Reading Wonder made me feel lucky because even if I had to wear a wig to school every day, it would never be as hard as what Auggie has to do at school every day. Speaking of school, I am so glad that everything worked out in the end for Auggie, but the way that people treated him in the beginning made me really appreciate the way that the people in my school treated me. None of them treated me differently because of what I had. Some of them even sent me letters, which made me feel really grateful that I had such good friends.

Every two weeks, I have to get steroid injections in my head to make my hair grow back (which it is, in case you were wondering) because there are no cures for alopecia, and if I stopped my hair would probably fall out again. I know that it is nothing compared to the surgeries that Auggie faced, and whenever I am sitting in the waiting room and am nervous, I think of him and how brave he was. Brave: I've used that word a lot, but if I had to pick one word to describe Auggie that's what it would be. Brave, and inspirational. Auggie has inspired me so much throughout my life.

Another one of my favorite qualities that Auggie has is a positive outlook on life. He is so optimistic most of the time, and that makes it feel like it is easier for me to be optimistic. While I can easily relate to some of Auggie's feelings, I know that what he is going through is much harder than what I am going through. Every day Auggie inspires me to be brave and positive. So thank you, Auggie. And thank *you* R.J. Palacio.

Sincerely,

Anna

Anna
Hingham
Grade 6

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Level I Honors Award

Dear Hergé,

Before I read *The Hunger Games*, before Percy Jackson, even before Harry Potter, your books were sitting in my bookshelf. My dad would come to my room, take the latest one from the shelf and start to read to me. I would laugh at the jokes, and my dad would pinch my nose whenever someone saw stars. Before anything else, your books came first. They will always be with me, no matter how buried deep beneath the pile of young adult novels. They were here first.

At first, *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets* was just another book on my shelf. I hadn't read it. I had thought nothing of it. Then one day, my dad started reading it to me. This changed everything. I was only five or six years old, but I absolutely fell in love with reading. Your books taught me that everyone can be a hero like Tintin. They taught me it's okay to be a little weird like Professor Calculus. They taught me it's okay to be your own person.

If somebody asks if I've been out of the country, I would probably say just to Canada. But that's a lie. I've been to Egypt to investigate strange cigars and learned to speak elephant. I've been to China to meet an important businessman and someone tried to cut my head off to "show me the way". I've been to the moon! The moon I tell you! And I almost died from lack of oxygen.

You are the reason I devour books. You are the reason I dance in the hallways. You are the reason I can be strange and different. So thank you, for allowing me to be me. I will always be me. I cannot be controlled. I will not be a stereotype. I am me. That is the best I can do.

Sincerely,

Anna

Anna
Arlington
Grade 6

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Level I Honors Award

Dear RJ Palacio,

I read your book Wonder and it changed the way I look at how the whole world treats people with disabilities. It helped me to understand that everyone should be treated the same. It doesn't matter how they look, what color they are or what disabilities they have. People learn, look and act different and people shouldn't change who they are to be "normal". People need to accept that without judging them, but I also understand that when people judge, it is something that is natural and we need to ignore that and move on.

There are similarities between Auggie, the main character in your book, and me. In kindergarten, I was diagnosed with ADHD and a learning disability. It was very hard for me to keep focused and keep my hands on my own body. Lots of kids treated me differently and wouldn't want to be friends with me. Sometimes they looked at me weirdly, just like the kids did to Auggie in your book because he had a facial disorder. Some parents wouldn't let their kids have playdates with me because I was too impulsive because I liked to tackle kids and run around like a "madman". After I read your book, I understood why my mother always told me to ignore what other parents or kids said about me because sometimes people didn't understand my situation. She was trying to tell me that people were naturally judgmental and I need to understand that, too. When I read your book, it made me realize that people are naturally judgmental, they only judge on what they see without understanding. In your book, Auggie's classmates judged him and looked at him weird too because of how he looked. They thought he was dumb and had no other qualities and no one wanted to be his friend. The children thought being friends with him would ruin their reputation of being cool. Auggie understood that people can be mean but it didn't stop him for being who he was. He knew he had a facial disorder but also knew he had other qualities. He was smart and had a sense of humor. He joked about his face in your story too. I think it was to make him feel better and the people around him more comfortable about being around him, so they didn't have to focus on his face. In my situation, sometimes, I was asked "why did you do that or say that?" Most of the time, I didn't know why, my body just reacted. I get so excited at times, so I would laugh and say "it's my ADHD kicking in". I couldn't always control my impulses. Sometimes the parents and the kids would say things about me that wasn't nice but I tried my best to make them understand. These are some of the examples of how your story hit close to home with my life story. The world treats people with disabilities differently and sometimes not in a good way.

No one should have to change to be "normal". Auggie had a facial disorder, so what? What is normal? Is there a definition of normal? Normal to me is what a person considers themselves to be. I have ADHD and a learning disorder. That is my normal. I spend hours and days studying before a test when maybe another person spends one or two hours before a test. I take ADHD medication to stay focused when lots of other kids just take vitamins. If everyone in the world was the same, it would be a boring place to be. This book and with my own experience helped me accept differences in people and knowing that being judgmental is a natural thing, but I realized that it is ok but I need to also take a step back and understand the other person. Today, I try not to be judgmental and I try to understand other people's disabilities and treat them with the same respect.

Sincerely,

Anthony

Anthony
Arlington
Grade 6

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Level I Top Honors Award

Dear Anne Braff Brodzinsky,

My name is Calla and I'm 11-years-old. I was adopted from inside the United States when I was two days old. I love my family more than anything in the entire universe but I often feel alone and sad when I think about my birthparents and adoption.

When I was eight, and my mom first bought me your book, *The Mulberry Bird*, I thought, "Oh no, not another book about adoption," and refused to have anything to do with it. But that night she started reading it to me and my brother, who is also adopted. In the beginning I wasn't really paying attention, but after a while I got pulled into the story. One of the main ways you did this was by using personification, with birds as the main characters. I love animals and sometimes it's easier for me to understand things through animals.

As I listened to the story, I felt very emotional but at peace. I felt like there was a soft blanket wrapped around me, safe and reassuring. I felt sorry for both Mother Bird and Baby Bird. Their separation was tragic. Mother Bird tried all she could to help her baby. She was determined and strong even when she knew that she might not be the best mother for this baby. She still tried and she ended up making a wonderful but extremely hard decision. They could have had such a good life together under different circumstances. But as it is, the baby bird did have a very good life with his adoptive parents.

Adoption has always been a hard topic for me to talk about with others. Especially when kids ask, "Why didn't your mother want you?" When I explain to them that my birthmother placed me for adoption because she loved me and wanted the best for me, I feel like it's myself I'm trying to convince. Your book is told from the point of view of the birthmother bird. It helped me finally convince myself that my birthmother really only wanted the best for me, and it was extremely hard for her.

In third grade, your book inspired me to write my own story of adoption. I wanted to teach people about the love and sadness involved in adoption. In my book *The Adventures of Snowy the Owl*, I told the story of a young, male snowy owl facing struggles and finding happiness in his own adoption story. I am currently writing a sequel where his family adopts two younger twin snowy owl sisters from his birthparents. In both stories I include a few chapters from the birthparents' point of view. Writing these books has helped me to understand that other kids are facing similar challenges around their adoption.

Your book is moving, inspiring and wonderful. Whenever I am feeling sad now, I think about the baby bird and how he found happiness and wisdom. I also know that I have two families: "One far away but not forgotten, and one that [greet me] each morning."

Sincerely,

Calla

Calla
Bedford
Grade 5

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Level I Honors Award

Dear Linda Sue Park,

My name is Chloe _____, I am 11-years-old and I go to school in the United States. Over the summer I read your book *A Long Walk to Water*. I was incredibly moved by this story of a girl that can't go to school because she has to walk miles to get water for her family. It seems unfair that such a huge responsibility is put on such a small little girl and that this prevents her from going to school. While reading your book I was surprised and almost angry that once the boys hit the age of ten they had the privilege of going to school and the girls still had to stay home and walk the eight miles every day to get water. Where I live girls and boys are treated as equals and both are given the opportunity to get an education.

In my family I have responsibilities just like Nya does but none that prevent me from going to school. My biggest responsibility is to make sure that I do well in school, finish all of my homework before I go play and to make sure I take my time and do a good job on all of my work. It is unfair that Nya's responsibilities take away from her going to school. Education is the most important thing in the world and for Nya to be pulled away from getting an education by chores and responsibilities is unfair. Education should be available to everyone in the world.

Where I live boys and girls are supposed to be treated as equals. After I read your book I started to think about some of the differences between how boys and girls are treated in the United States. For example, in hockey girls are not allowed to body check but boys are! Everyone thinks that we will get hurt. I started to realize that all around the world girls and boys are treated differently. Women are not allowed to do the same jobs as men, and sometimes when they do get the same jobs they get paid less!! Why?! I don't get it!

I have always just assumed that education was a right for everyone. I did some research after reading your book and was shocked to find out that millions of girls don't have the right to be educated. I don't like the thought of going to school knowing that girls around the world want to be educated but don't have the right to be. I feel guilty and that is why I know I want to make a difference in this world. I want everyone to be treated as equals and I want for everyone to have the opportunity for education.

After reading your book I have so many questions. Why do girls have to be the ones collecting water and why can't girls have the same opportunity to get an education just like boys? I don't understand why some cultures don't see boys and girls as equals. Your book has changed the way I think about school. I now feel much more appreciative of my rights to go to school and how I am able to so easily access fresh and clean water. Thank you for inspiring me to make a difference in the world and to step up and not wait for someone else to do the job.

Sincerely,

Chloe

Chloe
Marblehead
Grade 6

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Level I Honors Award

Dear Sharon Draper,

My name is Erin ____, I'm in 6th grade, and I go to High Rock Middle School. My favorite book I have ever read is your wonderfully written novel, *Out of my Mind*. This book truly means a lot to me because my younger sister, Maeve, too, has been diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy. She is 9-years-old. She recently had a major hip surgery and is recovering now. Maeve and I have a very close relationship. Having this surgery has made me very emotional and has brought me to tears. I think it made both of us even closer to each other. I am very proud of Maeve for being such a trooper and surviving through this tough time.

I believe Maeve is as smart as Melody. She uses a computer to communicate, but instead of her hands, she uses her eyes. She is very quick and accurate with her words. She rarely makes a mistake unless she's distracted. She knows all the right words and when to say them, just like Melody.

This book has impacted my life so much by showing me how mean some people can be. I remember this one time when I was at her Girl Scout meeting, and I overheard one of the girls whispering to another, "Ewww, look at that girl, she's drooling!" I wanted to go over to her and scream at her face "SO WHAT?! SOME PEOPLE DROOL! IS THERE A PROBLEM WITH THAT?!" But I didn't. I kept all my feelings bottled up no matter how hard it was. Melody had her own experiences when she wanted to yell at Claire and Molly, but she couldn't. I find other ways to stand by my sister.

I also learned how smart people can be. My sister is so smart. She talks to everyone just how regular people would talk to each other (not that she isn't a regular person). She understands everything everyone is saying, but some people don't know that. And that's what bothers me the most. Take a waiter for instance. Even when she has her computer right in front of her, the waiter looks directly into my mom or dad's eyes and asks, "What can I get for *her*". It bothers me so much, and I hope that soon they will figure out why when they take my order, there is a scowl upon my face.

Because of this major hip surgery Maeve had, she has been recovering at Spaulding Rehabilitation. I have had the chance to meet so many new people and work with all of them. I've heard so many different stories and how everyone has been recovering. There are so many amazing people and it changed my life meeting all of them.

I am working on reading this book with Maeve, and she is really enjoying it so far! I hope she likes it as much as I did!

Thank you very much!

Erin

Erin
Needham
Grade 6

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Level I Honors Award

Dear N.H. Senzai,

I had never thought about the world that way I do now. Before, I thought that all people had fun coming to America, that it was like a vacation. Happily grinning like a child on Christmas day, they would walk into a new life, new house and enjoy a new place. But Fadi and his family did not have that kind of experience. None of them wanted to leave Afghanistan, and when they came to America it was no vacation. *Shooting Kabul* helped me open my eyes and realize what was going on around me.

If an immigrant from Asia or the Middle East came to our school at the beginning of fifth grade, unfortunately, I would not have tried to get to know them. I wouldn't care if they were fleeing from a war. Because I read your book, I realized all the hardships anyone could face coming to America. It has changed my perspective immensely. I was wrong before to think it was like a vacation. Now, if an immigrant came to my school, I would definitely want to become friends with them. I would want to know everything about where they came from. Even though I never experienced what immigrants have, your book has given me a better understanding of what they have gone through.

Now I know that many people come to America for a better life than they lead before. They want to turn a new leaf, and to use their knowledge for something better like Fadi's father. Or they want to come for better rights, like women's rights, affordable education, and fairness for everyone no matter their beliefs. Currently, there are many Middle Eastern refugees trying to flee their country and escape to other countries. They are fleeing because of all the war going on and the bad influences in the government. They want a better life, a safer environment to live in, and to be in the hands of good leaders.

Reading your book enlightened me to the world around me and everything going on. Now when I watch the news I understand what and who it is about. I know that distressing events are occurring, and that everyone is different and has different backgrounds. Your book changed my way of thinking towards how and why someone comes to the US. I now have a much better understanding of the world around me, so thank you.

Sincerely,

Gigi

Gigi
Wellesley
Grade 6

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Level I Honors Award

Dear Beverly Cleary,

Looking back on my life up until the third grade, it seemed perfect. I lived in a big, comfortable house with my Mom, Dad, and brother. My only concern was finishing that final page of math homework and trying to be popular. That was until one day, one day that rocked my world to its very core. That was the day that my parents told me they were getting a divorce.

I had known this was a possibility for a while, but I denied it. I kept on saying to myself, "They're my Mom and Dad, they would never split up". But they did, and my heart was shattered to pieces with one blow. I felt like everything in my life up to that point had been a complete lie. Even though everyone offered "anything they could do," I felt completely alone because nobody understood me. To add to my problems, my best friend had just moved away, I was sobbing all the time, and I didn't fit in with the other boys at my school. That was until I was changed forever by your book, Dear Mr. Henshaw.

In your book, I quickly connected to Leigh because he felt completely alone and had his heart shattered by the breaking up of his parents. Leigh was deeply frustrated by his father's absence from his life and I was deeply depressed because my life would never be the same. As I read on, I saw Leigh get knocked down again and again by life's issues. Leigh's problems ranged from kids stealing his lunch, to his fear that his father may get remarried. But when Leigh found happiness writing, reading Mr. Henshaw's books, or enjoying nature, my spirits rose and I felt something that I hadn't felt in a long time. Hope. Hope that like Leigh, I could find happiness, even in the worst of times.

Your book has changed my view of life forever. It has given me a way through the hard times. I'm now much happier than I ever was before. I coped with my parent's divorce by doing things I enjoy, such as reading, writing, sports, and cooking. I have made new friends that I can count on to help me and I try to enjoy the present, rather than dwell on how my life used to be. I have a great relationship with both my parents and have accepted their choice. Beverly Cleary, you have shown me that life is full of problems, big and small. But you have also taught me to enjoy those simple moments of happiness that can light up the darkest of times.

Sincerely,

Lee

Lee
Grade 6

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Level I Honors Award

Dear Eleanor Estes,

One word brings up a distressing, but true story about my mom. Bullying. This book has triggered a whole bunch of questions for me about my mother's experience when she was a child. When she was in third grade, students were bussed around Boston, plucking children from here and there, forcing them to attend different schools, in order to increase diversity. My mom however was not one of them, and instead stayed at the local elementary school she had attended since kindergarten. But that was her downfall because she got bullied by the newly arrived students. Although rarely physical, the bullying took the form of repeated taunts and cruelly directed teasing. Based on what my mother has told me I can draw two conclusions. The first is that the children from other schools were not happy about their new situation; the second is that they took their anger out on my mother. They would pick on and tease her, while the teacher stood still as a stone column watching.

I never truly understood what she went through until about a year ago when there was a little rip in my life fabric for me to peek through. Through that tear in the seam I experienced a few small, but hurtful comments about my short stature. While not exceptionally small, I am on the little side for my age, at times being mistaken for a child of six or seven, when I was actually eleven. I'm not sure if the snide comments were truly bullying, but they didn't feel right. It felt like that person was a twirling ballerina up on a fine line between friendly teasing and being cruel. I never got an "I'm sorry" or a "please forgive me" from that person, but I forgive them. I think in the book *The Hundred Dresses* Wanda was saying I forgive you to Peggy, who bullied her, and Peggy's friend Maddie when she gave them her dress drawings that Peggy had teased her about. After that, I could truly imagine what that experience for my mom was like. Not just a figure of my imagination trying to grasp the thought of someone hurting my mother.

Thinking about Wanda and my mother I wonder what would have happened if someone had stood up for them when they were being bullied? Maddie wanted to stand up for Wanda but was afraid. When she finally found the courage, Wanda left. Was that the same situation for my mother? She eventually fled her school to find refuge in another school in another town. But if just one person had stood up for her, maybe she could have avoided the disruption. This leads me to wondering, did anyone feel like Maddie? Did anyone even want to protect my mother, and if they did were they afraid that everyone would turn on them?

Reading your book, and thinking about my mother I realize that sometimes you just have to speak up for someone without thinking about what others would do. Maddie had wanted to speak up for Wanda, but she was afraid to because she thought others would start making fun of her. What would happen if I didn't speak up for someone, but then the same thing happened to me? If I was truly bullied, not just getting teased, would someone speak up for me? Would they stay in the shadows watching? No one said a thing when I was getting teased.

By reading this book I now think that you can't simply want to help, because your window to help will often close. You just have to thrust yourself at them open-armed, ready to support them at a moment's notice. And by doing that you have not just made a difference for that person, but you've made a difference in the world.

Thank you for your wonderful work.

Sophie

Sophie
Harvard
Grade 6

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016
Massachusetts Center for the Book
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Level I Honors Award

Dear Lensey Namioka,

I am different. I talk differently, I think differently from the people around me, but just like the narrator of your story "*The All-American Slurp*" I always find a way to fit in. When I read your story I had a feeling, a feeling of connection, a connection that made me feel that I was not alone because I was the same as the narrator in your story.

The girl in your book is new to America, she has only one friend, no one else. She does not act or talk the same as the girls and boys in her school. For example, she wears a skirt to school, not jeans. She and her family don't know how to act at a buffet or how to eat celery like the Americans do. She feels really embarrassed about it, she tries to find ways to fit in. For example, she convinces her mom to get her jeans and a shirt, so she can dress the same way as her friends in her school.

I'm the same way. I'm from an Arab country, my family and I speak Arabic, a language different from English. I could not fit in when I came to America. I had no friends and no one to talk to. I used to be in a public school with only one friend. My parents tried to help me to fit in, but it didn't help. Just like the narrator who felt embarrassed at the fancy French restaurant, I felt embarrassed because I was different and stood out from all the other people around me.

After a year in a public school, my parents enrolled me in Alhuda Academy, a school where most of the students share both my culture and religion. And just like your narrator found a friend who helped her fit in with people in America, I also made friends who helped me. Just like Meg helped your narrator feel confident and strong, my friends and parents helped me feel confident and strong. After a while, your narrator and I solved our problem.

Dear author, your book made me feel a connection and that connection made me realize that just like your narrator, even though I'm different from other people, I am not the only one, and that it will turn out just fine. Your book changed my life and it made a big difference in my life.

Sincerely Yours,

Tala

Tala
Worcester
Grade 5

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Level I Honors Award

Dear Philip Pullman,

When I started reading your book, The Golden Compass, I viewed it as a piece of fantasy that one would read for fun, nothing more. What could a classic fantasy story; a tale of good and evil, possibly say about the real world? I found that your book started out without heaviness. It seemed to be striking the same note as a lighthearted book, like the first Harry Potter. However, as I delved deeper and deeper into the book, a realization dawned on me. The problems in Lyra's world were just accentuated versions of the problems in our world. Reading The Golden Compass really changed my opinion of science, in regards to its regulations, and politics. I have realized the need for laws regulating science, and I now realize that politics are not what the campaigns and media portray them to be. In politics, many untruths are told, and many illicit things are done. The world tries to hide the raw information through glamour and sugar-coating. But I know the truth.

Before I read your book, I found any document binding scientific experiments tyrannical. Whenever I talked to my friends or family about outlandish topics, like cloning, or androids, the answer was always that the experiments were illegal. As this continued I got more and more outraged. When science could do so much good, why would certain people insist on limiting it? In my mind, science could do no harm. I also believed in black-and-white politics. There was one candidate that was bad, and one that was good. One good party, and one bad party. These views were radically changed when I read your book. The experiments and purpose of the General Oblation Board were contrary to the image of scientists that I believed to be true. I began to consider ethics, and the emotional effect science had on the rest of my life. I will do my own research about science and politicians. I will no longer be deceived by the web of lies that surrounds us all. The Alethiometer, or Lyra's golden compass, showed her the truth. Your book showed me the truth, so for me, your book was truly a golden compass.

With all respect,

Tejas Vir

Tejas Vir
Arlington
Grade 6