

Massachusetts Letters About Literature 2016

Massachusetts Center for the Book

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Level II Honors Award

Dear Maggie Stiefvater:

Often people refer to me as a person with many layers, like an onion (yes, I am comparing myself to an onion). Before you genuinely get to know me, I may seem quiet, shy, and ever rational. But, once you look underneath the skin of the onion, you will find that I can also be pretty close to the opposite – loud, stubborn, and reckless, just like the tang of an onion when cut. Imagine my surprise when I opened up *The Scorpio Races* and observed that the two main characters reflected the two sides of my personality. One is persistently stubborn and loud, often making slightly reckless decisions without fully considering. The other is eloquent and wise, carefully analyzing and observing everything. These two main characters in *The Scorpio Races* may seem radically different, yet I saw myself in both of them.

The character I can relate to the most is Puck, the wild one. She can incorporate herself into slightly reckless situations, but once she has made her decision, she makes a commitment. I'm like this sometimes – I don't usually consider too well before making slightly reckless choices, but once I'm on a path, it's really hard to deter me. If I had been in Puck's place with one of my siblings leaving the island, I would have done exactly what she did – ride in the races. Whenever I have a strong opinion, no matter how trivial, I will go to great lengths to defend my ideas. Seeing this part of myself in Puck helped me realize that being fiercely opinionated isn't necessarily a bad thing. Sean, the wise, well-spoken one, is the hushed, calmer side of my personality. Using few words, he conveys a lot of meaning and observation. When I am thrust into new environments with people I don't know too well, this side of me comes out. The character of Sean taught me that it can be advantageous to be the quieter, observational one – after all, humans have two ears and one mouth.

Another aspect of reading *The Scorpio Races* that certainly made me contemplate my own skills as a writer was the immersion. As I read about Sean and Puck racing, I could actually taste the spray of the sea. I could feel the salt crystals grinding against my skin as gulls squawked overhead. I could hear the waves pounding against the jagged shoreline. I could see every moment of the race just as if I was there watching it myself. I forgot that I was sitting on my couch staring at ink on paper. I was somewhere else. The vivid descriptive language and the masterful use of the sensory imagery woven into the fabric of the story had me captivated. Through only a few words, countless thoughts and sensations were provoked from the reader. Afterwards, I began to wonder about my own writing skills. Did people who read my writing experience the kind of immersion that I experienced when reading *The Scorpio Races*? Your writing has changed my views on my own writing.

Along with relating to both the characters and becoming fully immersed, this book also provided me with “girl power” inspiration. When Puck makes it clear that she will compete in the Scorpio Races, locals don't believe in her, discriminating against her because of her gender. My favorite part of the entire book is when Puck lifts her chin and says “I have my own reasons for riding, just like every man who climbed onto this rock. Just because I'm a girl doesn't make those reasons any less”. I felt like jumping out of my seat and yelling “You go girl!”. Puck's “stand tough” persistence to put-downs and ability to remain unchanged by the thoughts of others has inspired me, as a girl, that I should not be affected by stereotypes. One of the careers I hope to pursue later in life is engineering, a prominently male-dominated field. I know I will face some stereotypes against women. Puck's persistent attitude is inspiration for me to stand strong against stereotypes and show what girls and women are capable of.

When you think about it, a book is only a couple sheets of paper bound together, printed with a bunch of symbols arranged in a specific way. But a book is so much more than just that. *The Scorpio Races* showed me that my two different personalities can work together and be successful. The powerful language and imagery of those specifically arranged letters enthralled me and made me take a second look at my own writing. In its bound together pages I found inspiration for my goals later in life. Whenever I think of an onion, I will always reflect on the path into my layered personality that I found in your book. Thank you.

Your reader,

Maria

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