

Letters About Literature 2013

Approximately 50,000 young readers from across the country participated in the 2013 *Letters About Literature* reading promotion program of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress and promoted locally by the Rhode Island Center for the Book at the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities. Over 700 letters from Rhode Island students were submitted, describing how an author's work--novel, nonfiction, poetry--changed their view of the world or helped them realize something that they didn't know about themselves.

With a focus on reader response and reflective writing, *Letters About Literature* has three competition levels. The judges name one state winner and honorable mentions at each level:

- Level 1 for students in grades 4-6;
- Level 2 for students in grades 7 and 8;
- Level 3 for students in grades 9 and 10

The deadline for this year's entries was January 11, 2013. After screening and selection at the national level, 154 semifinalist entries were returned to the RI Center for the Book for judging. Local authors, teachers and librarians judged the state's semifinalist entries during April 2013:

Level 1:

Bonnie Lilienthal, Senior Children's Librarian, Providence Public Library
Anika Denise, Rhode Island Author, Barrington

Level 2:

Stephanie Chausse, Writer and Web Designer, Providence Community Library
Kelly Easton, Rhode Island Author, Jamestown

Level 3:

Deborah Barchi, Library Director, Barrington Public Library
Anna Caruolo, Library Patron, South Kingstown

Included in this publication are the letters of the Rhode Island Winners and Honorable Mentions, and the names of all the Semifinalists. The State Winners advanced to compete at the national level. Those winners are posted on the Library of Congress web site at <http://www.read.gov/cfb>. The letters of the state's winners and honorable mentions will be posted on the RI Center for the Book website, www.ribook.org, as will all the semifinalists' letters received by email.

Each year, the state winners and honorable mentions are invited to an award ceremony at the RI Center for the Book Annual Meeting - the state winners read their letters to the membership as part of the evening's festivities. Each state winner receives a cash award and gift certificates to a local book store among other prizes.

The Board of the Rhode Island Center for the Book extends their congratulations to all 715 entrants, as well as those included in this publication.

Level 1 State Winners and Semifinalists

State Winner

Sokeara Sanford, Grade 6, Wickford Middle School
Letter to R.J. Palacio, author of *Wonder*

State Honorable Mentions

Lorelei Alverson, Grade 5, Hampden Meadows School
Letter to Susan C. Bartoletti, author of *Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow*

Shaila Murthy, Grade 6, Vincent J. Gallagher Middle School, Smithfield
Letter to Yann Martel, author of *Life of Pi*

Jerryline Toetee, Grade 6, Sophia Academy, Providence
Letter to Sharon Draper, author of *The Battle of Jericho*

Semifinalists

Lila Ackley, Grade 5, Hampden Meadows School
Krysta Afonso, Grade 4, William Winsor Elementary School
Mary Baertlein, Grade 6, Monsignor Clarke School
Jordan Barrett, Grade 6, Wickford Middle School
Leila Beers, Grade 4, Hampden Meadows School
Warner Casey, Grade 6, Monsignor Clarke School
Taylor Chofay, Grade 6, Monsignor Clarke School
Ryan Coen, Grade 6, Mercymount Country Day School
Madison Conrad, Grade 6, Mercymount Country Day School
Christian Currie, Grade 6, Monsignor Clarke School
Jack Dowd, Grade 6, Monsignor Clarke School
Alexander Godwin, Grade 6, Monsignor Clarke School
Olivia Gray, Grade 4, Hampden Meadows School
Madeleine Greene, Grade 5, William Winsor Elementary School
Joshua Guertler, Grade 4, Hampden Meadows School
Caroline Harten, Grade 6, Mercymount Country Day School
Rose Hassel, Grade 5, Gordon School
Katarina Hatch, Grade 4, Hampden Meadows School
Meghan Healy, Grade 6, E. A. Ricci Middle School
Lucy Hirsch, Grade 6, Wickford Middle School
Gillian Hodge, Grade 6, E. A. Ricci Middle School
Julia Howarth, Grade 5, Hampden Meadows School
Lucy Howland, Grade 5, French American School
Junia Javier, Grade 6, Sophia Academy
Jonah Jehar, Grade 4, Hampden Meadows School
Abby Ladstatter, Grade 6, Monsignor Clarke School
Maddie Lauria, Grade 5, Hampden Meadows School
Angela Leal, Grade 6, Sophia Academy
Latsany Lopez, Grade 6, Sophia Academy
Dylan Mackisey, Grade 5, Blackrock School
Sudiksha Mallick, Grade 5, Hampden Meadows School
David McMillan, Grade 4, Hampden Meadows School
Abigail Medeiros, Grade 6, E. A. Ricci Middle School
Trevor Mohlman, Grade 4, Hampden Meadows School

Anne Frank, *Diary of a Young Girl*
J.D. Greene, *Meet Rebecca*
Ann M. Martin, *Main Street*
Walter Dean Myers, *Slam*
Lois Lowry, *Number the Stars*
Todd Burpo, *Heaven is for Real*
Lois Lowry, *Number the Stars*
J.K. Rowling, *The Harry Potter Series*
Michelle Harrison, *13 Treasures*
Lois Lowry, *Number the Stars*
Rick Riordan, *The Mark of Athena*
Lois Lowry, *Number the Stars*
Kathryn Paterson, *Bridge to Tarabithia*
Sharon Draper, *Out of My Mind*
Avi, *The Night Journeys*
Wendy Mass, *Every Soul a Star*
Janet Taylor Lisle, *Afternoon of the Elves*
Rick Riordan, *39 Clues #1, The Maze of Bones*
Peg Kehret, *Runaway Twin*
Lisa Greenwald, *My Life in Pink and Green*
Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*
J.K. Rowling, *The Harry Potter Series*
Louis Sachar, *There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom*
Veronica Roth, *Divergent*
James Patterson, *I Funny*
John Boyne, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*
Donna Freitas, *Gold Medal Summer*
Kari Krakow, *The Harvey Milk Story*
Marjane Satrapi, *The Complete Persepolis*
Phyllis Naylor, *Shiloh*
Barbara O'Connor, *How To Steal a Dog*
R.J. Palacio, *Wonder*
Mary Pope Osborne, *Perfect Time for Pandas*
Grace Lin, *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*

Letters About Literature – 2013 is a project of the Rhode Island Center for the Book at the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities. The R.I. Center for the Book celebrates the art and heritage of reading, writing, making, and sharing books. Through a variety of programs and activities, the Center promotes a love for books among people of all ages and backgrounds across Rhode Island.

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The National Center for the Book was established in 1977 as a public-private partnership to use the resources of the Library of Congress to stimulate public interest in books and reading. For information about its activities and national reading promotion networks visit [www.loc.gov/cfbook](http://www.loc.gov/cfbook).

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|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| William Monast, Grade 6, Monsignor Clarke School         | Tim Green, <i>Unstoppable</i>                                   |
| Triana Newberg, Grade 4, Hampden Meadows School          | Kevin Henkes, <i>Chrysanthemum</i>                              |
| Elisseos Papandonatos, Grade 5, French American School   | Clare Vanderpool, <i>Moon Over Manifest</i>                     |
| Franchesca Pena, Grade 6, Sophia Academy                 | Lois Lowry, <i>Number the Stars</i>                             |
| Sophie Piette, Grade 5, Hampden Meadows School           | Nancy Krulik, <i>Middle School Survival Series</i>              |
| Erica Puzstai, Grade 5, French American School           | Louis Sachar, <i>There's a Boy in the Girl's Bathroom</i>       |
| Jessica Rizzo, Grade 6, E. A. Ricci Middle School        | Suzanne LaFleur, <i>Eight Keys</i>                              |
| Thomas Rocha, Grade 4, Hampden Meadows School            | Jeff Kinney, <i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid, #6, Cabin Fever</i>       |
| Samantha Rogers, Grade 5, Blackrock School               | Suzanne Collins, <i>The Hunger Games</i>                        |
| Lydia Rousseau, Grade 6, Monsignor Clarke School         | C.S. Lewis, <i>The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe</i>        |
| George Saban, Jr., Grade 6, E. A. Ricci Middle School    | Allison Lassieur, <i>The Attack on Pearl Harbor</i>             |
| Kelsey Scott, Grade 6, Monsignor Clarke School           | Yona Zeldis McDonough, <i>Who Was Harriet Tubman</i>            |
| Giovanna Sgalia, Grade 6, Mercymount Country Day School  | The Kane Chronicles, <i>The Serpent's Shadow</i>                |
| Grace Sowa, Individual Entry, Homeschooled               | Erin Hunter, <i>The Last Hope</i>                               |
| Ryan Sowa, Individual Entry, Homeschooled                | Avi, <i>Strange Happenings</i>                                  |
| Zachary Stolberg, Grade 6, Mercymount Country Day School |                                                                 |
|                                                          | Richard Paul Evans, <i>Michael Vey, The Prisoner of Cell 25</i> |
| Conor Sullivan, Grade 4, Hampden Meadows School          | Tim Green, <i>Football Hero</i>                                 |
| Yamelly Taveras, Grade 6, Sophia Academy                 | Sharon Draper, <i>Tears of a Tiger</i>                          |
| Venus Tian, Grade 4, Hampden Meadows School              | J.K. Rowling, <i>Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire</i>        |
| Maxwell Twardowski, Grade 6, Monsignor Clarke School     | James Dashner, <i>The Maze Runner</i>                           |
| Aliana Zabel, Grade 6, Feinstein Middle School           | Julie Andrews Edwards, <i>Mandy</i>                             |

**Teachers and School Librarians Submitting Letters:**

Mieke Bailey, Hampden Meadows School, Barrington  
Catherine Burgess, Hampden Meadows School, Barrington  
Patricia Connell, Vincent J. Gallagher Middle School, Smithfield  
Teresa Connors, E.A. Ricci Middle School, North Providence  
Tara Cunningham, Hampden Meadows School, Barrington  
Amanda Danis, Mercymount Country Day School, Cumberland  
Sunny Dennis, Wickford Middle School, North Kingstown  
Mrs. Gazeryan, The French American School, Providence  
Tricia Hunt, Hampden Meadows School, Barrington  
Frances Martendale, Gordon School, Providence  
Linda Middleton, Feinstein Middle School, Coventry  
Cheryl Niquette, William Winsor Elementary School, Smithfield  
Sandy Rego, William Winsor Elementary School, Smithfield  
Jennifer Reynolds, Hampden Meadows School, Barrington  
Rachel Sohl, Sophia Academy, Providence  
Seth Tibbetts, Hampden Meadows School, Barrington  
Naomi Viera, Monsignor Clarke School, Wakefield  
Christine Waring, Hampden Meadows School, Barrington  
Michaela Wells, Blackrock Elementary School, Coventry

**State Winner Level 1: Sokeara Sanford wrote to R.J. Palacio, author of *Wonder***

Dear R.J. Palacio,

I've never really chosen to read books on my own, most of my free time was spent playing soccer or hanging out with friends. Silly right? But sure enough, there I was again reading something I *had* to. I thought for sure it was going to bore me to death and by the end I'd just be so incredibly relieved that it was over. Then, when I started to actually read your book, it opened up a whole new world for me, one where reading is actually important and very few books can do that. Fireworks set off full of colors mixing together that form an indescribable feeling; your vision is clouded and just can't take your eyes off a *book*, like seriously? Yes, seriously. New interests have formed now that you opened this door for me, I never even thought this feeling existed, when you're so into a *book*, yup, a book. Your book did that for me. I really loved the character August and how his individuality is the main focus of the story. Before I read your book, *Wonder*, I have to admit, I didn't even know people who had faces like that even existed. Your book really taught me some great lessons.

August has definitely changed my point of view on kids with special needs or disabilities my age, even though August doesn't even have special needs. I've never been bullied or been mean to kids like that, but I'd always ask people about them. I can connect to the title of the novel, *Wonder*, because I've always wondered about these kind of irregular features some people are born with. This book gave me my answers. Whenever I saw somebody like that, I would try not to stare just like August described, and I'd always sneak peeks at them but I didn't know they actually saw me. When I read about how August said people would stare at him, secretly, I felt a ping of guilt because I had done that too. In addition, I always wondered how a person with a distinct feature like that thinks. I always had this theory of them sort of being stupid, or having lower intelligence than people like me at least before I read your novel. I don't have special needs or know anybody who does, but your book gave me a pretty darn good perspective on what they are like. Thanks for that too. When I found out how great August was at science and overall academics, I was actually shocked, sadly. August was probably one of the bravest people I've ever heard of (even though he isn't real). I would've never had the courage to go to school if I looked like that. His words about starting school really touched me like nothing else. August is amazing and nobody can compare to his bravery. I think I really look up to him. This was a very emotional book in numerous ways. Mean kids just don't get how bad things can hurt somebody. The way Julian was asked to befriend August and at first asked him, "what's with your face?" it really made my heart sink because I have been in the same situation before, only I was in the position of August.

First, at the beginning of this year, I had a tooth that was like no other. It stuck out of the left side of my gum and it was there for about 9 – 10 months. I was very self-conscious about it. I would never have a big smile on my face like I used to. Instead I would almost half-smile to hide the tooth and it wouldn't show my true self. People would make remarks about it, not trying to be hurtful but it really felt awful to me. Also, the worst part was, that the dentist wouldn't take it out! Then, at the beginning of 6<sup>th</sup> grade this year, picture day rolled around. I usually am nervous about this day, but this year I was as nervous as a lamb about to get slaughtered, just like August's dad said about August before he started school. I was too worried about it looking horrible, that I messed up and even my older sister said I didn't look happy in it. Eventually, I got the picture back, and there it was, my tooth, completely ruined the picture. I was heartbroken. My very first year of middle school and my yearbook picture was a complete embarrassment. Then one day somebody came up to me and asked me, "wow, what's with your tooth?" I just stood there calmly and answered them completely normal like they hadn't just embarrassed me. But deep inside, it was like my whole body just fell apart, like I had just been broken in two, I probably felt the same way August did when Julian said that.

In addition, the fact that this story is put in present day really hit me. "Were kids like August still treated like they meant nothing?" yes, they still are. It gave me a perspective on how these kids really are gifted in their own ways even if they aren't popular. I even bet, thanks to you, I'm probably one of the only

**Level 3 Honorable Mention: Jennifer Riggan wrote to Lori Gottlieb**

Dear Lori Gottlieb,

I remember the day when I sat begging my best friend to tell me what she was hiding. She didn't want to go to a pool party and I couldn't understand. I sat begging and begging and coming up with silly reasons why she might not be going, hoping for her to give me hints. I didn't realize that these reasons probably meant more to her than I would imagine. My sweet, loving best friend suffered from anorexia.

I never understood why people were anorexic. I always thought, "why don't they just eat and make their self better?" When my best friend told me the news, I was filled with so many different emotions. I swore not to tell anybody but I could not stand knowing without doing something about it. I questioned myself thinking, "is she really that concerned about how she looks that she would actually starve herself?" She didn't seem like the superficial type. I feel guilty admitting how I felt then. I couldn't see her as the same person until I came across your novel, *Stick Figure*.

Modern media has given us the illusion that we must be perfect. With the comments of her peers, Lori, a young girl in the novel, develops an obsession with becoming thin. Through her diaries, I realized the changes she went through. This obsession with becoming thin takes over her mind and she forgets what she truly believed in the beginning of the story. As she writes more entries she developed into a whole different person. This made me realize that I shouldn't judge my friend or think of her as different. It's not as simple as I thought it would be.

After finishing the novel, I realized that my friend had a disorder; she was not a different person. Knowing that she has a tough family and goes through rough experiences, I could finally understand that this disorder is not something that she selfishly chose, but an effect from situations that made her believe that she was fat. I've heard the jokes before: the yelling, the laughing, and all of the mixed emotions. All of these signs lead up to why she had this disorder. My friend couldn't help it, she was a kind girl left in an unfortunate situation.

I now look back on this moment in my life and question how I could have been so inconsiderate. I questioned her without knowing how much this hurt her. She tried to explain to me that it's not as easy as I think, but I couldn't understand. This novel has opened my eyes. My friend is healthy now and I realize that people shouldn't be judged for what they go through because it doesn't change who they are.

Sincerely,  
Jennifer Riggan

sweltering haze of expectation, competition, and phoniness. In the back of my head I heard a small but determined voice call out, "Why?" Why do we cram facts into our heads so we can get into a good college so we can grow up to be adults with important jobs when most adults seem stressed, frazzled, unhappy and worn down? Why rush to grow up when you leave behind the best parts of life when you do? Everyone around me was changing. The things that we used to love to do were replaced by things that we did because everyone else was doing them, too. Being popular, getting ahead, dressing, looking, and acting like everyone else were paramount. Sports are now all about the competition, and no one dares to write poems in green ink on his mitt or use a pseudonym and spend hours writing female adventure stories for fun.

Despite that determined voice in my head, I entered the pool of high school and swam in the direction of all the other swimmers. Not everyone has the courage of Holden. Quiet despair filled most of my days this fall, but I kept my head down and trudged forward. I accepted an invitation to Homecoming. I shopped for a dress, made myself pretty, and I went. I will admit to entering the gym that night feeling awkward, self-conscious, and tentative, but I was doing alright. But, when I saw that an upperclassman was wearing the exact same dress as I was, I froze. Within minutes, the crowd around us was murmuring. This would be social suicide. You know what it feels like, Mr. Salinger. You describe it perfectly. You have forgotten the fencing equipment on the metro. Everyone is looking at you. You have failed at something you fail to see the importance of. At that moment, I was Holden. I had made that fatal mistake that I knew I would be crucified for. That's when I saw that flash of red. It made me think of Holden's hat, my own similar hat, and it made me feel not quite so alone. I had a choice to make right then and there. Do I turn and run? Or do I put on my proverbial red hat and be myself? Do I laugh at small embarrassments like I did in grade school or do I take myself too seriously now? Do I still write for fun or is everything about the graded assignment? Do I still dance like a fool with my friends or am I obsessed with acting cool? Do I put childish things away now when they are the best things in my life? I had a choice to make.

I focused on that flash of red. My friend was wearing a red dress somewhere across the gym. In between dancing bodies and a cluster of humanity like nothing I had ever experienced, I made my way over to her. I located her, and we clasped hands. My dress was unimportant. We danced to the music and felt alive. We recaptured some of the beauty and poetry of our fleeting youth. That night I saw the color red everywhere. I saw it in the taillights of cars reflected in the gym's windowpanes freshly covered with raindrops. I saw it in the streamers above the dance floor. I saw it in the cheeks of exhausted dancers and in the curly locks of my date's hair. When I looked down at the flowers he gave me, I noticed a tiny red rose in the arrangement. Just as that red hunting cap was the way that Holden managed to resist conforming to everyone else, the red I saw all around me that night reminded me to be me!

Mr. Salinger, your book put into words the feelings I had been having all fall as I entered high school. We freshmen are now dangerously close to that cliff at the edge of the frolicking rye fields of our youth. Maybe most of us rush towards that edge, but I am holding back. I know that innocence, imagination, youth and that sense of wonder and awe that comes from experiencing things for the first time are drawing to a close. My youthful days are subtracted from an ever-shrinking number each day now. Yet, I still feel alive, and I must search for ways to preserve that goodness. I must learn to know my own heart and make choices that are right for me even as the world that awaits preaches at me to grow up and conform. More importantly, I know Holden is there at the edge of that rye field, hoping, trying, wanting to catch me. Just knowing he's there helps.

Thank you,  
Grace Miner

ones in my grade who realizes that, but I obviously wouldn't have said that a couple weeks ago. Looks are one of the main things kids are judged by at my school, and when I thought I was having a hard time starting middle school, like imagine August! Now I realize how lucky I really am, and I shouldn't be complaining.

Next, throughout this book, I kept referring myself to Jack and Summer. Even though Jack was requested to be extra-friendly to August, he really enjoyed him as a friend. I would've never been able to be that brave. I would just be thinking about whether or not this would ruin my reputation or maybe make me less popular. Then, I realized that this should be out of pure generosity. In one part of the book when Julian is talking bad about August, Jack punches him in the face. I'm not saying this is a good thing, but he was willing to defend August on his own will and he shows a stupendous example of what I think friendship is all about! I just wish I could be like him! Although, before I get too ahead of myself, Jack and I have some improving to do. Like Jack, I would've had very mixed feelings about Augie and probably just like Jack would've said mean things about him behind his back.

Then there's Summer, she is probably even more stupendous than Jack. The fact that she befriended Augie without anybody asking her to, it was just so shocking to me. I don't think I know a single person who would ever do that. Summer is really a one-of-a-kind, nobody, even my closest friends would do that in a million years and even though she is fiction, I really look up to Summer and someday hope to be as fantastic as her. Also, when I first heard about Summer, I made a false assumption that she had blonde hair and blue eyes with pale skin, just her name wound its way into another one of my wrong conclusions, I still looked up to her. Then, when I found out she looked like me with dark skin and dark hair, it really took me by surprise. I looked like the character I've always wanted to be like! Summer and I have strong similarities and many differences. Such as, I would never, ever be able to do something as out-of-this-world amazing as she did. But we also think about popularity, such as when Summer was invited to Savannah's party, she was so excited. I would be too. Anybody like me would. But, I probably would've stayed, just to fit in, I'm really proud of Summer for leaving that party, and showing me what I can do to become more like her, now I probably would leave too. The whole time I was reading your book, I asked myself over and over again, "Would I be as kind as Jack and Summer and become friends with August, or would I be like Julian?" ehh.....I still don't know about *that*, but there's so much you can really do to a kid like me. You probably did the complete maximum, teaching me wondrous lessons I can use in the future. The entire time I kept thinking how mean Julian was but then I remembered that I would be just as mean before I experienced your novel. Your words really encouraged me with inspiration no other book could have. As I read, August's words just melted into my brain and froze forever. I will never forget them. Conclusions in my mind that I use to have about people like him just clouded away as I read this. I almost felt as if I *were* somebody with a deformed face. You expressed his feelings so well that it felt as if you really sucked me into his thoughts and reformed me again as him.

August really touched me as more than just "another character in another book". Now he is part of my life. Someday when I see somebody like him, I will probably immediately refer to him in my mind. Thank you for writing such an interesting yet educational novel. If I hadn't read this, I would've had the same thoughts about these kinds of people and they probably would've never changed. People are people no matter what they look like, you taught me that. August and I have so many similarities even if we don't look a thing alike. (In fact, I bet so many people just like the person I used to be, have even more similarities than I do, they just don't want to admit it in their mind. You impacted an 11 year old's life who you didn't even know). Your book and writing is one-of-a-kind just like August. August was like a friend to me and I will never forget him or you.

Thank You

Sincerely,  
Sokeara Sanford, age 11, Rhode Island

**Level 1 Honorable Mention: Lorelei Alverson wrote to Susan Campbell Bartolletti**

Dear Susan Campbell Bartolletti,

You probably wouldn't guess it, but my great great uncle was in Hitler Youth. At first I couldn't believe it, too. When my mom and dad told me, I thought they were kidding. Then when they went on to tell me that after the war my great grandmother was so ashamed that she cut the swastika arm bandages off all of his pictures, I knew they weren't lying. My mom then went and bought Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow. That changed everything.

"This is not a book about Hitler. This book is about the children and teenagers who followed Hitler and the Nazi party during the years of 1933 – 1945." With those words, Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow began. More surprising, however, was what was on the next page: A young boy, no more than five, in full Nazi attire, saluting Hitler as he stood on the sidelines. With this opening picture I knew I had to read on.

When we think of bad and then we think of Nazis, we usually place them in the same category. This book widened my eyes to the truth: no one is good or bad; there is only neutral.

In the first chapter it talks about the great organization, Hitler Youth. Hitler Youth stressed the importance of learning and believed in physical activity. It provided members with exciting camp trips and cookouts. It was an organization, for the most part, like boy scouts and girl scouts.

Then it grew. The category of people that could join shortened. Jews were officially excluded from the group. Hitler Youth also grew in another way. It stressed more military training and would only let in children whose parents were for Hitler. Children tried to get their parents to like Hitler just so that they could be part of the group. Some children succeeded, and others turned their parents in to the authorities. The downfall of Germany had begun.

On the morning of November 9, 1938 something the Germans and Jews would never forget began. Jewish shops were burned and destroyed. Innocent Jews were pulled out of their homes and watched as all of their possessions were stolen or destroyed. A total of 1,300 synagogues were attacked. The major part of the demolition of the Jews had begun.

What had once been a fun camp for children was now a military force. But what is scary is the fact that it was done so easily. Millions of children tricked into murdering just by one man with a dream to take over the world. It has to be questioned: if it happened to Germany, will it happen to us? Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow left me with questions still to be answered.

I am a good student. I get good grades in most of my subjects and work hard to achieve. I am also physically active. I can run faster than most boys in my grade. I am also really strong. I would have been one of the people Hitler Youth targeted. Hitler Youth only wanted the best. The most fit. The most smart, and the most clever. This fact was the scariest of all: to know that deep down inside of me, I would have been a participant in Hitler Youth. Susan Campbell opened my eyes to a new perspective.

In addition, if I knew in my heart of hearts it was wrong, and openly rebelled, I would have been sent to a work camp or worse: beheaded.

Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow was a book that helped me to know who I am. It left me with questions relevant to the future. In a way, it protected me. To know how easily people can fall into the hands of a war without knowing it showed me that I should always be aware, and not go with the flow without thinking. Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow is a great book that has helped me in ways I can't imagine. It should be required reading for everyone. Thank you Susan Campbell Bartolletti for your contributions to this world.

Sincerely, Lorelei Alverson age 10

**State Winner Level 2: Allison Paul wrote to Amy Chua**

Dear Amy Chua,

Before I read *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, I thought that my mother was excessively and unreasonably strict. At least, she was stricter than my friends' mothers. I thought it was unfair that she forced me to play the piano at age four and the viola at age seven. I used to resent the fact that she would not tolerate an A-minus on a test that many failed. I remember proudly bringing home a 98 on a math test and her response, "What happened to the other two points? Didn't you check your answers?" Your book has shown me not only that there is a method to her madness, but that I am who I am because of this parenting style.

While reading your book, I was struck by how identical my family is to yours. Like you, my mother is the daughter of two immigrants from China. She was also born in the year of the tiger and married a white man. She too, upholds the Chinese parenting style, although with slightly less vigor. My mother and my father have two daughters, my older sister, Sam, and me. Sam and I even have similar personalities as your daughters, Sophia and Lulu. Sam is calm and mellow. I, on the other hand, am fiercely stubborn and can get angry easily.

Because of the parallels in our families, I felt that my own mother was narrating your autobiography. The only time it was clear that my mother was not narrating the story was when you talked about your dogs. My mother doesn't even go near dogs! I heard her explaining why she is hard on me, why she demands so much. She does it because she loves me; it is as simple as that. I always knew that my mother is doing what is best for me, but I never truly understood how grateful I should be to her. Through your descriptions of your struggles with your daughters, you taught me that Chinese parenting is even harder for the parent than it is for the child. I never thought about the sacrifices my own mother was making. I only thought about the sleepovers I could not attend or the lazy summers I never had. Thank you. Thank you for showing me that my mother only raises me in this way for me.

After reading your book this summer, I thought about who I would be if my mother did not raise me the Chinese way. Would I be as good at math? Would I like the same things? Would I be the driven and hardworking young woman I have become? It is scary to think about. Overall, I am glad my mother was a "tiger mother." Sometimes, I even wish she made me practice the viola more – imagine how much better I would be now! Since I, too, was born in the year of the tiger, I plan on being a tiger mother to all my future children. I will write to you again if I need any tips!

Say "hi" to your daughters for me!

Thank you, Allison

**Level 3 Honorable Mention: Grace Miner wrote to J.D. Salinger**

Dear Mr. Salinger,

It was a horrible moment, but you carried me through it. Well, actually Holden did. In the high school world where fashion, gossip, and Homecoming dates reign supreme, Holden taught me to stay true blue to myself. If growing up is all about *this*, who wants to grow up? If the world I step into as I enter high school is about surrendering my innocence, optimism, and the pure joys of childhood, I am not sure I want to step over that threshold into the gym all decorated for the Homecoming Dance. Where is my red hunting cap? I would wear it backwards now along with this glittery dress if I could, I thought to myself. Yes, Mr. Salinger, I actually bought a hunting cap this fall as my class read *The Catcher in the Rye*. I bought it because I wanted to wear it as I traveled down the path with Holden. And I am so glad I did.

I live in an idyllic, small New England town, and I could not wait to go to high school having watched my two older brothers go off to 9<sup>th</sup> grade before me. But what awaited me was nothing like I had planned or expected. The fun, silly, imagination-filled days of my life up until this point evaporated in a

try to fit in every puzzling fact which occurs to me. As I read this book even in more detail an astonishing idea occurred to me. Why is it that we question more when we know more compared to knowing less about a subject? Even till this day I am not able to answer my question fully. However, I have come up with one possible solution like in the book they came up with solutions one by one. The answer to my question would be: when humans don't have enough knowledge of a subject we have nothing to question too because we cannot relate to areas within the subject, when we know more we tend to relate to areas which we know and start questioning the subject. And when we question the subject it brings upon even more knowledge because we find ways to answer them. After that we start to question more and as a result some people spring up with new ideas. Critically relating to the book that's how they figured out a solution to this life-threatening event.

From day to day, night to night, so much happens, yet we never realize that, and when huge drama happens, we show concern and stay tuned to it daily. But isn't this happening every day? Clearly we have not been realizing the effects of everything around us. I tend to question like the people in the book, was oxygen our friend? Maybe not at some time but it is now, for it is essential for life. I believe we could do better to justify our intentions and thoughts. However, humans like us always want to win over another, some people cannot simply accept defeat; which in turn leads to their own downfall. Unlike some other people who can actually accept defeat and these people are the world's greatest thinkers. Similarly in the book those men didn't argue that much; they accepted what was right and went on to save their lives.

Sincerely, Niloy Singh

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**Level 3 - State Winners and Semifinalists**

**State Winner:** Allison Paul, Grade 9, LaSalle Academy, Providence  
*Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* by Amy Chua

**State Honorable Mentions**

Grace Miner, Grade 9, East Greenwich High School  
*Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger

Jennifer Riggin, Grade LaSalle Academy, Providence 9,  
*Stick Figure* by Lori Gottlieb

**Semifinalists:**

Rachel Cardarelli, Grade 9, LaSalle Academy  
 Peter Cienki, Bishop Hendricken High School  
 Gabby Gallone, Grade 9, LaSalle Academy  
 Samantha Kennedy, Grade 9, LaSalle Academy  
 Kailyn McCourt, Grade 9, LaSalle Academy  
 Audrey O'Neill, Grade 9, LaSalle Academy  
 Christien Palumbo, Grade 9, LaSalle Academy  
 Emma Parisi, Grade 9, LaSalle Academy

Harper Lee, *To Kill A Mockingbird*  
 John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*  
 Mitch Albom, *Have a Little Faith*  
 Lauren Oliver, *Before I Fall*  
 Wendelin Van Draanen, *The Running Dream*  
 Wendelin Van Draanen, *The Running Dream*  
 William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow"  
 Donna Jo Napoli, *Bound*

**Teachers & School Librarians Submitting Letters:**

Marc Bracato, East Greenwich High School  
 Benjamin Russell, LaSalle Academy, Providence  
 Michael St. Thomas, Bishop Hendricken High School, Warwick

**Level 1 Honorable Mention: Shaila Murthy wrote to Yann Martel**

Dear Yann Martel,

I just finished reading your book, *Life of Pi*, and it was one of the most interesting and inspiring books I have ever read. I could immediately relate to Pi in that I am also Indian, and I'm being raised Catholic. Although I do not practice Hinduism, I am familiar with some of the customs and celebrate some of them with my family. My Indian grandmother will occasionally tell me stories about the Indian gods, her favorite being Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. The first chapter made me want to find other ways I could relate to Pi's story.

Throughout the book, Pi talks about the relationship between animals. When Pi's father introduces goats to the depressed rhino, Peak, I was amazed that those two life forms could live peacefully together. I would have expected Peak to eat goats. Instead, Peak loved the goats and developed a wonderful friendship with them. But it was when Pi was stuck on the lifeboat with the Bengal tiger Richard Parker that I was most amazed and affected by this story. Here Pi was, stuck on a small lifeboat with a man-eating tiger! I couldn't really relate to that part, since I've never been stuck on a lifeboat with a tiger before, but the relationship that he had with Richard Parker really touched me. I could feel his need for companionship, just like the Rhino, Peak.

Sometimes I feel like this with my friends, like I am trapped on a small lifeboat, waiting for them to "attack" me for one reason or another. However, they don't attack. And they may feel the same way about me, waiting for me to "attack" them because of something they did or said. But I don't attack them either. We need each other. We each have skills that we must share to survive (especially in this deep ocean known as middle school). We respect each other. We train each other to our actions, so that we know how to react properly. We understand each other. We are in this together, and we are all getting something positive out of this relationship. This is why these sometimes difficult relationships must continue if we are to survive. But sometimes the journey comes to an end, and as a result, so does the friendship. It might need to come to an abrupt end. It is sad, but it is life. Not only is it the life of Pi, but it is also my life.

Thank you for helping me realize that relationships aren't always perfect. Because humans aren't perfect, relationships will have their ups and downs. At times, differences in the friendship may make you dislike the other person, but the connection between you both still remains. You can't leave them behind, and you really don't want to because you need each other. Thank you for opening my eyes to my friendships in the way I understand best – through literature.

Sincerely, Shaila Murthy

**Level 1 Honorable Mention: Jerryline S. Toetee wrote to Sharon Draper**

Dear Ms. Sharon Draper,

I never thought a book could change a person. That was until I read *The Battle of Jericho*. Before reading this book, I thought peer pressure was an easy thing to say no to. It was like I was living in a perfect black and white world. Everything was seen clearly because it was by right and wrong. When I was in elementary school, my teacher told us all we had to do to avoid peer pressure was to say "no." I learned from this book that saying no was not the case. A time saying no was easy for me when my friend told me to steal something. This didn't feel right to me so I said no. In my perfect black and white world stealing was wrong, so it was easy to say no to. My friend said, "Okay."

After reading this book my understanding of peer pressure changed completely. When everyone is doing something bad, or good peer pressure can get harder. For example when I went to the park, my friends were playing a game called Dare Devil. In this game, I would do dangerous stuff. My friends were jumping off the top of this really high slide. I was the only one who wasn't jumping, so they asked me to try. I said no but this time it was harder. They started calling me names. I went up there ready to jump. It was like my perfect black and white world had gotten some colors in it. When I was about to jump I remembered. I remembered in your book when Josh did the jump. Even though all his friends did the jump and were safe, when he did the jump he hit his head on a rock and died. I learned from Josh's mistake about risking my life for one stupid jump.

This memory gave me the courage to come down when my friends were calling me names. It didn't make me feel good but I kept replaying that scene in my head. That gave me the strength and the courage to tell them I wasn't risking my life for just one stunt. One of these situations was easier than the other. My first situation it was what was right and what was wrong situation. I knew stealing wasn't good and wasn't a part of the person I am. Some people might argue my friend didn't push me to do it. The point is, even if she did, I didn't believe in stealing. I have a strong conviction that if you want something you work for it. In my other situation it wasn't a wrong or right decision and that's what made it harder. In this situation, I had to choose what was best for me.

I really didn't think books could change people. I never really thought a book would change my life the way this book did. Because of this book I now know that the world isn't black and white but all kinds of colors. I have to pick the best decisions for me, not follow what someone else is doing.

Sincerely, Jerryline Toetee

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**Level 2 - State Winners and Semifinalists**

**State Winner:** Elena Serrano, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School  
*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Malcolm X and Alex Haley

**State Honorable Mentions**  
Jessica McDonald, Grade 8, St. Philomena School, Portsmouth  
*The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton

Mary Mullane, Grade 8, Aldrich Junior High, Warwick  
*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne

Niloy Singh, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School  
*Apollo 13* by Jim Lowell

**Semifinalists**

Andrew Bailey, Grade 8, Monsignor Clarke School  
Flora Baldwin, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School  
Ayla Barry, Grade 8, St. Philomena School  
Jaimee Benson, Grade 8, Scituate Middle School  
John Beretta, Grade 8, St. Philomena School  
Kaela Bergeron, Grade 8, Scituate Middle School  
Priyanka Bonifaz, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School  
Sydell Bonin, Grade 8, Portsmouth Middle School  
Elizabeth Carcieri, Grade 8, Winman Junior High School  
Ava Cardarelli, Grade 7, LaSalle Academy  
Amelia Castelli, Grade 8, Scituate Middle School  
Laura Clancy, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

James Dashner, *Maze Runner Series #3 The Death Cure*  
Emily Danforth, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*  
Bethany Hamilton, *Soul Surfer*  
Sara Shepard, *Pretty Little Liars*  
Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*  
Karen Hesse, *Out of the Dust*  
Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*  
Harper Lee, *To Kill A Mockingbird*  
Sharon Draper, *Out of My Mind*  
J.K. Rowling, *The Harry Potter Series*  
Cynthia Lord, *Rules*  
Shana Burg, *A Thousand Never Evers*

a concentration camp. Izzy is 87 years old, about my grandfather's age, which made me more aware that this terrible event didn't happen that long ago. His story of the Holocaust made the experience feel very close.

In your novel, I realized the similarities of Israel and Shmuel. Shmuel talks about how his family has to move out of their home and live in a small house with a family they do not even know. He talks about the train ride, and how dirty and crowded it was. Then he was separated from his mother and sent to live in a small hut with his father and brother. Shmuel's family was being treated like animals. His family probably thought that no one cared about them and that no one cared about what happened to them.

When Israel Arbeiter's family was rounded up during the Holocaust, he was about Shmuel's age. Izzy said, "It was October 26, 1942. The SS came to the town where we were and ordered everybody out. The young who could work, were separated. The very young and the elderly were put on the other side of the market-place." Israel ended up being separated from his family, just like Shmuel did. To be separated from family would be any child's worst nightmare; to have to move away from home because their family is in danger, and to have to live in a home shared by people who do not respect your privacy would be terrible. No child as young as Izzy or Shmuel should have had to go through something that terrible. Both of Izzy's parents were killed, and he lost two of his brothers. Izzy can still hear the sounds of children screaming for their mothers and fathers. And he still remembers the time when "he and other prisoners were run out of their barracks and shot down as they ran." He was the only one out of 87 people who lived. The horrors he witnessed have always stayed with him.

What I enjoyed most about your novel was the way you described the relationship between the commander's son Bruno and Shmuel had with each other. I was amazed at how similar their lives were, but also by how they were different. A lot of conversations made me laugh, but others made me feel empty inside. Bruno was such a healthy, wealthy boy, yet Shmuel was so weak, and on the verge of dying. Sometimes, Bruno sounded selfish by the way he boasted about his father and how he had such a fun life at his home back in Berlin. But he was also so kindhearted and generous to Shmuel. I was glad that they became friends because they both needed someone who they could talk to. I thought that the only way Bruno and Shmuel were connected was because of Bruno's father. He was in Bruno and Shmuel's lives every day; to love one and torture the other.

*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* made me realize that an event like the Holocaust can happen even now; such as in Syria; thousands there have been killed in their civil war. There are also terrible leaders like Hitler, too. Your novel reminds me that I should be grateful for my freedom.

As Israel Arbeiter summarizes, "We need to listen and think about that time when a cultured, civilized society made itself accessory to mass murder. We need to hold on to the idea that the darkest side of human possibility has no end date." Thank you for teaching me more about the Holocaust. You made me want to learn more about the history but also the importance of tolerance and acceptance.

Your reader, Mary Mullane

**Level 2 Honorable Mention: Niloy Singh wrote to Jim Lowell**

Dear Jim Lowell,

The book *Apollo 13* showed me the true science unraveling before my eyes. This book not only enhanced my knowledge but in many ways it is like my life. Every day this book digs me deeper into a never ending hole of knowledge and the wonders of science that are thrown at us. Yet we never seem to catch those wonders, rather we seem to throw away the idea and come back to it later when a fact relative to the subject has been announced. I constantly wonder about the mysteries and in fact I come up with random ideas, which I

center the next. Though it is fiction, your book, *The Outsiders*, conveys a sincere, genuine story, packed with feelings of love and pain. Your book truly changed me forever, and taught me a lesson I will treasure my entire life.

Previously to me reading *The Outsiders*, I was oblivious of the world around me. I ignored everything else and focused my entire effort into two things: school and sports. I thought I lived an average life since I go to private school and everyone's situations resemble mine. It is hard to comprehend poverty when at times your refrigerator is overflowing with food. I considered having to eat a bowl of cereal instead of a homemade meal living "rough." It was not until I read your book that I realized I am one of the last people that should be feeling self-pity, especially over one simple meal.

As I turned through each page, I felt greater and greater sympathy for the greasers. They are outcasts that are repeatedly harassed by rich people called "Socs." Johnny particularly caught my attention, being so traumatized by the Socs that he carries a six-inch pocket knife. At first I thought I connected with the greasers because I, too, go through difficulties. I remained believing this until I was a quarter into the book and it hit me. Yes, I have troubles I must face but at one time or another, they come to an end. The greasers, on the contrary, continually encounter hardships, worse than anything I can imagine. Many of the greasers do not even have parents and the ones that do, their parents are abusive or have a drinking problem. If I do lose everything else, I at least have a loving family. I realized I am not a greaser, but a Soc. I am the Soc who attempted to drown Ponyboy. I did not drown with my hands, though, but with my ignorance.

Now I know that ignoring things will not make them disappear. In the situation of poverty awareness, I presently try to donate what I can to help those who need it. These donations can service people in the sense of money, but also benefit their happiness. Receiving support from others raises their spirits and lets them know someone is there for them when times are bad. This philosophy of not ignoring has made a difference in my personal life, too. Instead of disregarding problems I have with someone, I assess the situation and attempt to resolve the tension between us. Furthermore, I use what your book has taught me to do my homework. Procrastinating or turning the homework away does not make it vanish. All delaying does is cause more stress so it is logical to do work ahead of time.

*The Outsiders* has improved what I do now and will positively affect the decisions I make for the rest of my life. Before just a self-centered girl, I have been changed into someone aware of my surroundings and ready to assist however I can. Though you may not have intended my interpretation of the book, you still impacted me in an unforgettable way. Thank you for all you have taught me. Through your powerful words I found that ignorance does not work because in the real world, things do not just disappear.

Sincerely, Jessica McDonald

**Level 2 Honorable Mention: Mary Mullane wrote to John Boyne**

Dear Mr. Boyne,

I am an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student at Aldrich Junior High in Warwick, RI. Part of what is required in our English class is SSR (Self Selected Reading). I chose your novel *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* because my parents watched the movie, which moved them very much and they told me that before I watched the movie, I should read the book first.

In our History class, we have only had brief discussions about the horrors of the Holocaust, and that time in history has always seemed very far away and long ago. Shortly after reading your novel, I read an article in the Providence Journal about a Holocaust survivor, Israel "Izzy" Arbeiter, and he retold the story of his life in

Grace Coutu, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax, Oh, The Places You'll Go, How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

Ian Coyne, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

John F. Kennedy, *Inaugural Address of 1961*, Speech

Cameron Crisco, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Joan Bauer, *Hope Was Here*

Joey D'Antonio, Grade 8, Scituate Middle School

Jim Valvano, *Don't Give Up...Don't Ever Give Up*

Catherine Darling, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Robert Munsch, *The Paper Bag Princess*

Sidney Davis, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Ken Follett, *Pillars of the Earth*

Kelsey Degnan, Grade 8, Aldrich Junior High

Ally Condie, *Matched*

Sophia DeRiso, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

J.K. Rowling, *The Harry Potter Series*

Sarah DiMatteo, Grade 8, Scituate Middle School

Cassandra Clare, *The Mortal Instruments Series*

Maura Driscoll, Grade 8, Portsmouth Middle School

Dori Hillestad Butler, *Truth About Truman School*

Benjamin Esposito, Grade 8, St. Philomena School

Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*

Liza Farnham, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Dr. Seuss, *Oh, The Places You'll Go*

Zoë Finklestein, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Ann Frank, *The Diary of Ann Frank*

Portia Gaitskell, Grade 7, LaSalle Academy

Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*

Kathryn Gallison, Grade 8, St. Philomena School

C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia, The Last Battle*

Lauren Grove, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Lauren Grove, *The Glass Castle*

Julia Gurzenda, Grade 8, Scituate Middle School

Roald Dahl, *The BFG*

Lilly Howell, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Lisi Harrison, *The Clique*

Delilah Johnson, Grade 8, St. Philomena School

Sonya Sones, *Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy*

Maxwell Johnson, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Jonathan Stroud, *The Amulet of Samarkand*

Gina Jouaneh, Grade 8, Monsignor Clarke School

Jodi Picoult, *My Sister's Keeper*

Steven Kavanagh, Grade 8, Aldrich Junior High

Rick Riordan, *The Red Pyramid*

Evan Kirby, Grade 8, Monsignor Clarke School

J.K. Rowling, *The Harry Potter Series*

John Kirkpatrick, Grade 8, Portsmouth Middle School

Lauren Hillebrand, *Unbroken*

Mariah Kmon, Grade 8, Scituate Middle School

Patricia McCormick, *Sold*

Jonathan LeJeune, Grade 8, Aldrich Junior High

Joseph Brushac, *Code Talker*

Wanqing Li, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Sharon Draper, *Out of My Mind*

Jodiana Lombardi, Grade 8, Scituate Middle School

David Pelzer, *A Child Called "It"*

Gregory Lucarelli, Grade 8, St. Philomena School

Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game*

Mariam Mabrouk, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Stephen Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

Kelcey Maher, Grade 8, Monsignor Clarke School

S.E. Hinton, *The Outsiders*

Kayleigh Maimella, Grade 8, Monsignor Clarke School

Nicholas Sparks, *The Lucky One*

Cailin McCaffrey, Grade 8, Aldrich Junior High

Becca Fitzpatrick, *Hush, Hush*

Julia Medeiros, Grade 8, St. Philomena School

Niki Burnham, *Royally Crushed*

Katelyn Medeiros, Grade 8, Aldrich Junior High

John Green, *The Fault in Our Stars*

Samuel Medeiros, Grade 7, LaSalle Academy

Mary Pope Osborne, *Magic Tree House*

Ian Mellen, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Rafael Nadad, *Rafa*

Ronald Minear, Grade 8, Aldrich Junior High

Andrew Clements, *Trouble-Maker*

Bryana Mullin, Grade 8, Aldrich Junior High

Ransom Riggs, *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*

Julia Murray, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Dr. Seuss, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

Jamison Naylor, Grade 8, Scituate Middle School

Kirby Larson, *The Fences Between Us*

Thao Ngo, Grade 8, Winman Junior High School

Darren Shan, *Cirque Du Freak: A Living Nightmare*

Luke O'Grady, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Jerry Spinelli, *Milkweed*

Cassidy O'Neal, Grade 8, Scituate Middle School

Lisa Shroeder, *Far From You*

Anessa Petteruti, Grade 8, Rocky Hill School

Kate DiCamillo, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tullane*

Nicolas Pezzullo, Grade 8, Scituate Middle School

Eoin Colfer, *Artemis Fowl Series*

Erin Piper, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*

Alex Pouliot, Grade 8, Aldrich Junior High

Patrick Carman, *Thirteen Days to Midnight*

Madalyn Redding, Grade 7, LaSalle Academy

Wendelin Von Draanen, *The Running Dream*

Dana Richardson, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Frank McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*

Emily Riordan, Grade 8, Aldrich Junior High

Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

Jenett Rodriguez, Grade 8, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts

Author Unknown, *What Makes a Dad*

Joshua Romano, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Jim Lowell, *Apollo 13*

Nick Salvadore, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School

Michael Scott, *The Magician*

Natalie Sangkagalo, Grade 8, Winman Junior High School

Jane Kelley, *Nature Girl*

Roth Santos, Grade 7, LaSalle Academy

Shel Silverstein, *The Giving Tree*

Ava Sheldon, Grade 8, Winman Junior High School  
Abigail Siegal, Grade 8, Rocky Hill School  
Aidan Sowa, Individual Entry, Homeschooled  
Tara Stein, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School  
Meredith Stewart, Grade 7, LaSalle Academy  
Holly Swanson, Grade 8, Scituate Middle School  
Kate Turner, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School  
Abigail Tutt, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School  
Torie Vieira, Grade 8, St. Philomena School  
Brendan Watson, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School  
William Yao, Grade 8, Barrington Middle School  
Gabrielle Young, Grade 8, Aldrich Junior High

Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*  
Brian Selznick, *Wonderstruck*  
Catherine Fisher, *Incarceron*  
Tony Diterlizzi, *Kenny and the Dragon*  
Gary Paulsen, *Brian's Return*  
Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*  
Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*  
Stephen Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*  
Lori Gottlieb, *Stick Figure*  
Mike Lupica, *The Underdogs*  
Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken"  
Stephen Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

were one of thousands of characters, nothing more. History could be terrible and could be meaningful, but was never personal or real. The slave's scarred back was a snapshot that I glued to my personal retelling of this longstanding story, and his back was part of the narrative. I never thought that he might have a name, a face, or thoughts in his time. I never thought he had a life.

Your life was incredible and undeniable, Mr. X. I read of your childhood and saw you as my own age and your opinions thereof, which I think is what first allowed me to view you as person. As you grew, I saw what led to your experiences, your reflections on them, and the experiences themselves, which were so far out of my little bubble that it popped.

Pop!

The scope of your life confounded my worldview. The fact that your experience contained so much, from a young adulthood of drugs and illegality to religious enlightenment and your controversial racial views, made me realize that the "characters" I dealt with weren't confined to one side of the good-evil rift like the cinematic icons. They were people with views that shifted and evolved, like mine have and will continue to do. I put down your book and looked to my shelf, where I started to see the historical figures in my textbook come to life and become people that lived the same reality that I did. I thought about the slave and his scarred shoulders, and, for the first time, wondered what his name was.

Your book did more, however, than allowing me to see history in a different, real light. I started to form my own opinions the values that you showed. I couldn't disagree more with some of the Nation of Islam's opinions about race, opinions which you yourself adopted and held onto until you neared the end of your life. I found myself reading your book and countering your arguments in my head. You tended to slip out of your chronology at points and share that which you found to be universally true, letting me accept my own truths in the process. I could see your opinions form as mine did, and as you started to argue them I found myself ready and able to argue right back. I don't agree with you, Mr. X – far from it. Your book changed my opinions by letting me change them myself, which I found infinitely more useful than adopting pre-made or prepackaged thought.

The image of the slave's back will never leave my mind. After I turned the last page of your autobiography, I did some research of my own to see if I could find some of the man's story. I emerged empty-handed, but with a heart full of sorrow as I realized that this man had a life as, if not more, full of turmoil as yours. It was a life that started as a baby, perhaps in Michigan, like yourself, perhaps in Louisiana, perhaps on the shores of another country, and grew into adolescence and adulthood like yours and mine. His life held an evil so deep that it could leave such painful scars. He is anonymous, faceless, but he is a man: a man with a story and a collection of moments that go further than any photograph could.

For this realization, and for changing my world, I thank you, Mr. X.

Thank you.  
Elena Serrano

#### **Level 2 Honorable Mention: Jessica McDonald wrote to S.E. Hinton**

Dear S.E. Hinton,

Discrimination. Prejudice. Poverty. They were all things I knew occurred yet seemed so distant as to be fictitious. Sure, the news channels endlessly flash headlines portraying these acts of cruelty affecting the lives of many. But it is hard to grasp the concept when reporters are so objective – no opinion and no emotion. Even the stories my dad constantly tells me about how he used to live in a "rough" city feel exaggerated. I cannot understand how any one of his high school classmates might have been in school one day and in a juvenile

#### **Teachers & School Librarians Submitting Letters:**

Dee Carlino, Monsignor Matthew F. Clarke Catholic Regional School, Wakefield  
Oneika Castro, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, Providence  
Jodi Cicchese, Rocky Hill School, East Greenwich  
Patricia Fedeli, Barrington Middle School  
Evan Gilroy, La Salle Academy, Providence  
Rebecca Limoges, Scituate Middle School  
Bonnie Olchowski, Barrington Middle School  
Pamela Principe, Saint Philomena's School, Portsmouth  
Melinda Ratcliffe, Aldrich Junior High, Warwick  
Monica Samolis, Barrington Middle School  
Keith Sanzen, Scituate Middle School  
Carol Shunney, Winman Junior High School, Warwick  
Monica Taft, Portsmouth Middle School

#### **State Winner Level 2: Elena Serrano wrote to Malcolm X and Alex Haley**

Dear Malcolm X,

I keep my text books on a neat shelf in a neat house in a neat suburb. Last year, I did the same. The text book was colorful and laid information out plain and simple – information like you, a fifty-word paragraph on a page too far into the hundreds to remember. American history from Washington to Bush Junior, independence to civil rights was laid out on its straightforward pages.

For me, history classes and their accorded books had driven home the horror of war and oppression. Death and destruction were laid out as if part of a horrific buffet, on an educational platter; we were shown cruelty without rose-colored glasses. The brutal poignancy of slavery and struggle were laid out in speeches on educational websites' videos and in images on our classroom's pull-down projector screen. I saw a slave's back, ratcheted with whip scars and open sores – an image I will never forget. I immortalized it, Mr. X; placing it in my head on a timeline of crystallized moments in an attempt to capture the horror. That man I saw had no name to me, and not even a face, but the cruelty of hatred etched permanently across his back, resting on his shoulders.

It wasn't until I read your book that I realized how warped my thinking was. I had come, inadvertently but undeniably, to see the horrors of history as not something real, but something more like a movie – a well-done, gut-wrenching movie, indeed, but not more in my reality than Jaws or Juliet. My life simply hadn't encompassed any of my textbooks words. I had built for myself a bubble of reality that kept my school, my home, and my family inside but left a lens that turned truth to semi-believable fiction through which I could see the rest of the world. In my neat house on my neat street, I read my neat textbook in which you