

**West Virginia Center for the Book**

*Letters About Literature*

West Virginia Center for the Book  
West Virginia Library Commission  
Culture Center  
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East  
Charleston, WV 25305  
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## Special Notice

The response to this project is so great that the West Virginia Center for the Book will publish only the essays receiving Top Honors, Honors, and Honorable Mention Awards. The letters appearing in this publication depict the students' writing as it was submitted for judging. All attempts were made to keep the grammar and spelling true to the students' submissions, with the exception of necessary corrections to titles and authors. The order of appearance does not reflect students' scoring. Names are withheld by request or in the event that documentation permitting the release of a student's name is unavailable.

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## Level I

### Top Honors

Dustin Jarvis-First Baptist Christian School

“The Picture That Thrilled the Nation” by J. Campbell Bruce

Dear J. Campbell Bruce,

I loved your story “The Picture That Thrilled the Nation,” and it really got my attention when I read it. I especially liked learning about how the picture was taken of these men raising the flag. It was a very exciting story, and I could imagine myself right there with them. I had never realized the importance of this event until I read your story. It is amazing that just 24 hours after the picture was taken it thrilled millions of Americans. It scared me a little when reading of the way the photographer fell off a ramp and could have been crushed. I was surprised to learn that he had covered several campaigns and even made D-Day landings.

Your story gave a lot of information that I didn’t know. It isn’t surprising that the picture inspired many poems, painting, statues, and a 75-foot-high copy of the scene in bronze. I enjoyed reading how the photographer climbed an extinct volcano but reading of the flag raising was even better. It’s very impressive that the picture he took was even compared to Washington crossing the Delaware. I laughed a little when you said, “He became the world’s most photographed photographer.” The story about this picture has caused a great deal of gratitude in me for Americans that serve their country selflessly.

Sincerely,  
Dustin Jarvis

### Honors

Anna Dyer-Hurricane M.S.

*Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry

Dear Ms. Lowry,

Your book, *Number the Stars*, made a very large impact on me when I was in the 5th Grade. I was going through rough times then, and your book lifted my spirit in many ways. As I started reading I got more and more interested. The rest of my life’s problems seemed to drift away. I have always been interested in World War II and the Jewish religion. The words that you had written inspired me to learn more about the Holocaust and pay more attention to those who suffer in other countries. It gave me a feeling as if my problems and suffering weren’t really as “horrible” as I had the impression of. I remember praying the night I had finished book about so many obstacles that were obtaining me. My thoughts were swirling in so many directions, and this book helped me conquer them.

One character that made an impact on me was Kirsti. I realized that she in the middle of something very big and challenging,

yet she was such an innocent, young girl. She reminded me of myself. I plan to name my child Kirsti, and I hope that she will find a deeper meaning in life, such as the way your book foretells it.

When I read about Kirsti’s aunt “dying” I had to read over the chapter many times. When the Nazi soldiers came into the house I got very scared. I was very relieved when they finally left. As the people got their coats and scarfs on from the casket I knew that moment had to stand for something, but I couldn’t figure it out. That moment still spoke to me, as if to say I needed to give to and help more people who are in need of things. Personally, it told me that I had too much and others needed what I had.

The time when the girl is running quickly to give the basket to her uncle, to me, symbolizes bravery. It made me stronger and braver after reading that. When she got through it and made it home it made me feel as if I could finish anything.

I am now a 6th grader, and I have reread your book because I knew it would get me through another stressful time. Middle School. It was sad when the book ended but I had learned knew things I had skipped over before. Now, every night, I look up at the sky and count the stars. It puts a delightful smile on my face and a gleam in my eye. This book brought great joy to my life

Your reader,  
Anna Dyer

### Honors

Lilliann Welch-St. Joseph the Worker G.S.

*Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds

Dear Phyllis Reynolds Naylor,

Animals are a lot like people. They live in the same world as us. People need to give them the same amount of love. Animals are not created by God to be abused and hurt.

When reading your book *Shiloh* with my classmates, I was wondering what it would be like to have a dog of my own. I would like to be like Marty. Marty was a very kind and hard working boy. There are many ways you can live your life.

Reading *Shiloh* helped me realize that there are people who may not be nice or kind to animals. There may be a reason for that, and if you take the time to understand them they may need your help too.

Because I read your book, I know that I should love and treat animals kindly. I hope one day to have my own dog to have as a best friend that will always be there for me like *Shiloh*.

Sincerely,  
Lillie Welch

**Honorable Mention**

Ashley Burger-Spring Mills M.S.

*Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White

Dear E. B. White,

Your book *Charlotte's Web* has inspired me greatly. Charlotte gave me courage. My favorite part is when she saves the pig with the words of wisdom she put in her web. I was truly touched by her and what she did for Wilbur. That makes me want to help and do things for others.

Charlotte was a true friend to Wilbur and everyone. She set a good example to others. That's the kind of person I want to be. She is intelligent courageous, and very brave. She has no selfishness at all, all she does is care for other people. Charlotte makes them come first, not herself. She is a wonderful little spider, and does a lot to help. She knows the true meaning of friendship, which is to help others, always be there for them never let them down. When life has a little bump in the road or a problem like somebody getting hurt she is there to help. Charlotte is there to do what needs to be done.

When Wilbur is in danger Charlotte is there to do what she can. She wrote words in her web such as terrific and some pig. She reminds me of my sister, my sister would do anything for me. This book is a great inspiration to me. I want to be a person just like Charlotte.

Sincerely,  
Ashley Burger

**Honorable Mention**

Ryan Burks-Mercer E.S.

*Sidewalk Story* by Sharon Bell Mathis

Dear Sharon Bell Mathis,

I think there is a lesson about friendship in your novel, *Sidewalk Story*. I think Lilly Etta truly knew the meaning of friendship because of all the things she did for Tanya. To be a friend, you have to be caring, loyal, and noble. When you are a friend to others, they will be friends to you.

To be a friend, you will be caring to your friends. I can't imagine how it would be to be evicted. I am so sorry to any family that has been evicted. Also sometimes when people get evicted, some people don't even care. I think you should at least give a little bit of money to help them. They lost their home you still have yours. Your character, Lilly Etta, showed that she was a caring friend with her actions.

To be a friend, you will be loyal. When you say you will do something for a friend, you mean it. Your character Lilly Etta told Tanya that she would try to get her house back for her. She was able to do that and this showed she was loyal. A friend of mine would ask me to call him after school, and I would tell him that I would.

But I kept forgetting to call him. Now, I know that was not being loyal; I did not do what I said I would do. In the present and in the future, I will try to be loyal to all my friends.

To be a friend, you have to be noble. The dictionary definition for noble is having greatness of character. Lilly Etta showed great nobleness with her actions. She did not yell back when her friend Tanya yelled at her. Instead, Lilly Etta just talked to Tanya and did not get angry with her for yelling. That is how I try to be not just with my friends but with everybody!

Your novel, *Sidewalk Story*, shows the real meaning of friendship. The real meaning of friendship is to show kindness, loyalty, and nobleness. I think it pays to be a great friend because when you're a great friend something good will happen to you and your friends.

Yours truly,  
Ryan Burks

**Honorable Mention**

Regan Cochran-Mercer E.S.

*Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson

Dear Katherine Patterson,

*Bridge to Terabithia* has helped me to see things beyond how they look. I have learned how great friendship really is. I relate to the characters May Belle and Jesse. I am a little sister like May Belle is to Jesse, but I think a lot like Jesse.

I can relate to the character May Belle. She feels just like another fish in the pond to her brother. Her brother Jesse won't let her play with him and Leslie at Terabithia. Because May Belle is younger, Jesse doesn't seem to appreciate her. When my brother plays games with his friend, he will not let me play with them. He doesn't even ask if I want to play! When my brother acts like I don't exist, that's when I feel like just another fish in the pond.

However, I also can relate to the character Jesse. Jesse and I are alike by how we think. Jesse sometimes does not understand Leslie. Sometimes I don't understand my friends. Now after reading your book, I realized you should not judge people by how they look. It's their actions you judge. Sometimes, we don't really pick our friends carefully. Now after reading your novel, I pick my friends not by how they look, but by their actions. This leads to great friendships.

*Bridge to Terabithia* brought joy to me. It showed me things I needed to know to make good friends. I wanted to read the novel when my brother first brought it home last year. The first page I read made me want to read on. All through the book, I wanted to express my feelings. Now I get to tell you: *Bridge to Terabithia* changed me!

Sincerely,  
Regan Cochran

**Honorable Mention**

Amanda Ervin-Spring Mills M.S.

*Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul 2* by Jack Canfield

Dear Jack Canfield,

When I read the story "A Friendship to Remember" by Veneta Lenord included in *Chicken Soup for the Pre-teen Soul 2* it changed my life forever. When I got near the end of the story I started crying so hard because I have never read anything so sad, but so so good at the same time.

I liked the story so much because I could relate to it. The part that really changed me was the note in the end.

That story helped me through the last year when my cousin died. She didn't write me a note like the one in the story, but to know that someone went through the same experience that I did helped me. The year that my cousin passed away I just kept reading the story over and over again. It seemed to be very comforting and helpful for me to reread it.

Thank you for writing that book because if you hadn't I would have had a hard time coping with her death.

Sincerely,  
Amanda Ervin

**Honorable Mention**

Mckenzi Olonko-Mercer E.S.

*Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry

Dear Lois Lowry,

Your book, *Number the Stars*, taught me some horrible things the soldiers were doing to the Jewish people in Denmark during World War II. I wish there was not a single war or a group of people ever being mistreated for what they look like or for their religion. Your book taught me how important it is to be brave, helpful, and trustworthy to family and friends or anybody in need.

First, *Number the Stars* showed me how important it is to be brave. Annemarie risked her life for her friend. She also stood up to the soldiers. I try to be brave against people who are mean to others. If a bully is picking on someone, I will try to be strong and stand up to that bully.

Second, your novel taught me how important it is to be helpful to people in need. Annemarie and her family helped her friend Ellen and her family to get to Sweden. Annemarie also helped her mom when she fell and sprained her ankle. Recently, I helped my friend. She was walking over a grate when she fell into the twelve foot hole beneath it. We tried very hard to get her out and after a lot of panic, we got her out. I felt good that I was able to help my friend. Last, *Number the Stars* taught me how important it is to be

trustworthy. When Uncle Henrik dropped the non-smell hanky that was to be used to keep the dog from smelling and discovering the Jews, Annemarie offered to take it to him. Her mom trusted her to get the hanky there on time. I am trustworthy when I am given something to do. I try my best to do it perfectly.

In conclusion, your novel *Number the Stars* taught me a lot. I probably would have been too scared to do anything to help the Rosen family when the soldiers came through Copenhagen. But the Johansen family was brave, helpful, and trustworthy and helped their Jewish neighbors and other Jewish people escape to Sweden. This novel showed me the importance of showing courage, kindness, and faithfulness.

Sincerely,  
Mckenzi Olonko

**Honorable Mention**

Nathaniel Rader-Davis-Thomas E.S./M.S

*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* by J.K. Rowling

Dear J.K. Rowling,

I am ten years old and enjoyed reading your second book *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. The method of your writing had me very excited! I did not want to stop reading and would advance to the next chapter. This book was perhaps more of a mystery thriller than about basic spells and potions. It left me guessing who or what was attacking the students. One student was being blamed, even though he didn't do anything wrong. This made me think of times I was accused for things I didn't do. I have learned to keep on trying and not give up. The truth will come through at the end while solving the problem.

Some strengths I shared with the basic characters were loyalty and friendship. Also, the characters solved problems using their ideas and listening to each other. I also have done this with my classmates. While reading I'd ask myself, "How would I get through situations without help from my friends?"

I admired how this book labeled a good vs. evil theme. This book showed that the world also can be filled with evil and good. I am motivated to believe there is more good in our society.

There was a character in the book that others judged first without getting to know them personally. This character has mirrored my life because sometimes I judge others before getting to know them better.

In closing, this book was meaningful for me because the characters faced many challenges and overcame each one together. I need my friends to support me through good and bad times. Read this book.

Sincerely,  
Nathaniel Rader

**Honorable Mention**

Sinead Tobin-Fairmont Catholic G.S.

*Belle Teal* by Ann M. Miller

Dear Ann M. Martin,

I haven't really had any major catastrophes in my life so far, except my older sister crashing one of our cars into the curb while driving to school. It was raining so the car skidded a bit on the road, but we weren't hurt. We had to get a new car. But in your book *Belle Teal* the main character had a lot of problems. Her grandmother was losing her memory and her mom had to get a new job. There were two new kids in her class: a stuck up young girl named Vanessa, and a shy, African American boy called Darryl. I knew about how they had segregation back then, but I never imagined it would be like it was in the story. Poor Darryl was treated horribly and so were the other two colored kids at Belle Teal's school.

I just couldn't imagine treating humans like that just because of the color of their skin. I mean, I knew that colored people had to drink at separate water fountains and go to separate schools, but your book made me realize that African American people were treated much worse than I thought. I'm glad that you wrote that book because it opened my eyes to the world that African American people lived in back then. I'm glad that they fought back with people like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. If it weren't for them, we might still live in a world full of prejudice and people judging others based on the color of their skin. I know a lot of African American people who are all my friends and I don't know what I would do if I wasn't allowed to be friends with them. I just couldn't put them out of my life.

Thank you for writing your book. It helped me realize so many things.

Sincerely,  
Sinead Tobin

**Honorable Mention**

Gabriela Tournay-Weirton Heights E.S.

*Fudge-A-Mania* by Judy Blume

Dear Judy Blume,

When I read *Fudge-a-mania* it helped me to be more helpful. It also helped me to be braver, but most importantly is that it helped me want to read more.

Just like Peter started to help more with Tootsie by changing her diaper, it has inspired me to help more with my baby sister, Juliana. Now whenever I get home from school, I am either putting her in her clean clothes or feeding her milk.

The other thing *Fudge-a-mania* has helped me with is to be

braver and stand up for myself. Peter defends himself from Sheila. I will do that too.

But the most important thing above all is that *Fudge-a-mania* makes me want to read more. After I heard this story it felt like someone was clearing my mind to keep focused on *Fudge-a-mania*. I have learned a lot from every paragraph of this book.

*Fudge-a-mania* has helped me to be much more helpful. It also helped me to be braver. The most important thing above all is it helped me want to read more.

Gabriela Tournay

**Honorable Mention**

Savannah Ward-Weirton Heights E.S.

*Letters Home from Yosemite* by Lisa Halvorsen

Dear Lisa Halvorsen,

Before I read *Letters Home from Yosemite*, I didn't care about wildlife. I did not know we had national parks with a lot of wildlife. Also, I didn't care about the outdoors.

When I read *Letters Home from Yosemite* it changed how I think about wildlife. At first I did not care about wildlife, but now I do. Now I care about white tailed deer, big bobcats, and black bears.

While I was reading the story, I started to really like learning about the U.S. national parks. I would like to read more about Yosemite. I now know it contains lots and lots of wildlife, and to lock up our food so the animals don't get it, especially the grizzly bears.

Also, I learned that I like the outdoors. Now I go outside, and now I care about what's on the patio. I like to go in the yard now. That is how it changed my life.

I had very little interest in the outdoors and wildlife. Now I care about them. Also I learned a lot about our national parks. I want to read a lot more about them. Please write more about our parks.

Savannah Ward

## Level II

### Top Honors

Elijah Stull-Taylor County M.S.

*The Hazelwood High Trilogy* by Sharon Draper

Dear Sharon Draper:

You have taught me the will to forgive and forget. You are an amazing author and an even better teacher. *The Hazelwood High Trilogy* has inspired me to find a way out of the darkness and into the light. The way you made each character have a different personality is incredible. I picture myself as Andy and Gerald. I could never picture myself as Rob or Tyrone.

I relate to those characters with my own experiences. My father abused me; well that's what Child Protection Services think. I also have been involved in death. I visited my grandfather every day when he was sick except one time I went to that stupid party. He died that one day I left; I could never forgive my self. I thought if I were there, I could've saved him maybe, and I wouldn't have to accuse myself.

When I read *Tears of a Tiger*, I didn't want to end up like Andy and kill myself. So I learned to stop blaming myself all the time. My father didn't abuse me; however, I was being a brat one school morning as usual. So he tried to whip me, but I refused. He grabbed my neck to pull me back; that was it. When I went to school, the teacher saw the handprint on my neck and sent me to the office where a police officer stood. He took my clothes off and looked at my body. When he was done, he sent me back to class. That afternoon my dad was arrested for child abuse and possession of drugs.

Then I started feeling guilty about sending my dad to jail until I read *Forged by Fire*. He was let out, and I forgave him. We were good for a year. Then I caught my dad doing drugs again. I don't tell anybody because I don't want to feel guilty again.

I cry myself to sleep every night praying, and the only thing that keeps my mind off it is your books. I am reading *Darkness before Dawn* right now. I hope to read all your books like *Double Dutch*. I may not have met you, but in a way you're like a mother to me. Sharon Draper, you have inspired me to help others and myself. I hope to meet you one day if it is ever possible. I am writing this to you to say thanks, and I am your number one fan. Every book you write is great, and it's like a medication for my soul and heart. I love you, Sharon Draper, for giving me the strength to make it through.

An inspired reader,  
Elijah Aidden Stull

### Honors

Maddie Gilson

*The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls

Dear Mrs. Walls,

I picked up *The Glass Castle* out of sheer boredom, I didn't know what a great surprise I was in for. It seemed like when I put your book down I would get pulled back in by the voices of your characters calling my name. There were a few times that I would start reading *The Glass Castle*, and get so drawn into the book that it would be into the wee hours of the night before I could stop reading and go to sleep.

My childhood has been nothing like yours, but that doesn't matter, I connected with you through your book. I understood what you were going through. When you cried I cried, when you laughed, I laughed. Your writing made me feel as if I was right there beside you the whole time.

By the time I had finished *The Glass Castle* I had changed as a person. I'm not sure that I can explain how, but I had definitely gained a new perspective on life. It frightens me to think that there were, and still are people that are as unfortunate as you were, right here in West Virginia. I mean I knew that there were unfortunate people around the world, but I guess I didn't understand that people could live like you did so close to home. When I think of the relationship that you had with your father it makes my eyes fill with tears. It was obvious that your father loved you, but when he drank the alcohol blinded him. I don't know where I would be at today without my father.

My dad is the best father that anyone could ever ask for, he has molded me into the person that I have become today. You grew up to be a wonderful person without a father to depend on and with a mother who didn't really care. I am sure that it wasn't easy for you and your siblings growing up, and I know that everyday was a battle. So I guess what I am trying to say is, thank you. Thank you for reminding me how important family is. Thank you for showing me that even if someone doesn't have the newest clothes, it doesn't mean that they are poor or even unfortunate. You are truly someone who shines on the inside and out, thanks for being an inspiration.

Love,  
Maddie Gilson

### Honors

Lexi Freeman-Taylor County M.S.

*A Child Called "It"* by David Pelzer

Dear David Pelzer,

Your story *A Child Called "It"*, made me realize that many children have a much worse life than I do. My parents drink, and

my mom gets angry easy when she drinks too much. My mom drinks a lot and takes her anger out on me and my two sisters through yelling and sometimes hitting. When my dad gets mad, he throws and slams things, and he yells a lot. My older sister Kameron and I try to keep my little sister out of it, but Kameron is leaving for college soon, and I don't know how well it will work with just me trying to help. Reading your book showed me I'm not the only one who has dealt with things like this.

I cried a few times while reading your book. Your story is the worst abuse story I have ever heard. I don't like going home because of my parents; I never know what I will find. After reading about your life story, I feel lucky that I don't have it that bad. I'm hardly ever home anymore. My parents made it hard to live a normal life. Many times they would be yelling or fighting while I was trying to do homework or concentrate on something important. I did my best to ignore it all though.

I was embarrassed to have friends over and to have them stay the night because of the way my parents were. Only a few of my close friends know what actually goes on in my life. Only one of them was there with me while my sister and I were in a fight with my mom. There was a lot of screaming, yelling, and crying. My mom had told us multiple times she was going to quit drinking, but it never happened. My sisters and I have lived with this since we were really little. I can't imagine how it felt to live with your mother. I always thought living with mine was hard, but yours seems almost impossible to me. You were very brave.

My parents don't talk to each other much. They don't even sleep in the same room. My dad hardly talks to me, but that's by his choice. It must have been very hard for you and your dad not being able to speak to each other. I bet it was rough for him to see what was happening to you. I don't know what I would do if things at my house ever got that bad. My sisters and I usually stay back in our rooms doing something and stay away from my parents. Sometimes we will go outside and play around but not very often.

I think it is terrible that so many people are abused. It may not be happening to them but maybe to a friend or a family member, but it is still hard on them. I believe it should never happen to anybody. No one deserves to have to live with being abused or knowing someone they love is being abused. I don't understand how anyone could do that to someone, especially to a little kid or baby. These people must be really sick to do that to their own children or somebody they should love. Your story has helped me get through living with my parents for a little while longer. They have recently gotten better with their drinking, and they don't fight as much. I hope things keep getting better with their drinking by the time I have to leave, so maybe my little sister won't have to deal with all of this like Kameron and I did.

Sincerely,  
Lexi Freeman

### **Honorable Mention**

Kylie Angus-Taylor County M.S.

*Cut* by Patricia McCormick

Dear Patricia McCormick:

I recently just finished reading your book *Cut*. It has inspired me in many ways. This book, I'm sure, has touched many lives. I do not cut myself, but I've known people who have. I personally thought that cutting yourself was very messed up. Now that you have written this book I have a different outlook on it.

My best friend cuts herself. I never really understood why. She had told me that she was stressed and upset about things, and that is why she did it. She explained to me that her sister had been hurt in a car crash, and it had stressed her out. She also said that her boyfriend and her were fighting which made her upset. She never cut too deep but enough to feel the pain. This reminded me of Callie. I still did not think these were good enough reasons to cut herself.

Another one of my good friends used to cut herself She told me that she had no reason for cutting herself that it just felt good. This reminded me of Amanda in your book. They both liked the pain for no apparent reason. Before I read your book I was mad at her for doing such a thing.

Once I read your book I realized that my friends felt like they needed to cut themselves. It was their way of relieving stress. The pain made them feel better. It cleared their minds.

Your book helped me understand the reasons of their actions. I'm glad I read your book. Now I have an idea of how to help my friend. You are a great writer. Thank you for writing this book for people to read. You've helped me a lot.

A devoted reader,  
Kylie Renee Angus

### **Honorable Mention**

JoHanna Barnes-Taylor County M.S.

*Cut* by Patricia McCormick

Dear Patricia McCormick,

Your book *Cut* has inspired me to stop cutting myself. I found out that Callie and I are very alike in many different ways and very different too. Some of the things that Callie and I have in common is that we both feel scared at times, unsure of our next move, and aware of our surroundings. Sea Pines (Sick Minds) reminds me of my adhd doctors' office. There are always people crying, yelling, shaking, screaming, and some people don't even remember how they got there.

I started cutting myself last year when my family and I went to Florida to help my sister. We ended up having to bail her out of jail for assault with a deadly weapon. Long story short, it was really hard for me around; that time, my parents started arguing and yelling at each other. When they would argue they would throw stuff at each other. That's when it really got bad for me.

When I read your book it made me realize that I can find other ways to express my fright, confusion and hate. When one of my friends found out what I was doing it, he was really concerned. So he helped me out with it until I was clean for two weeks; then I knew I could do it. Your book has inspired me to stop cutting myself and made me think of myself in a different way.

Sincerely,  
JoHanna Barnes

### **Honorable Mention**

Jasmine Grossman-Taylor County M.S.  
*Coming Back Stronger* by Drew Brees

Dear Drew Brees,

The first thing I would like to say is "Thank You." You've been such an inspiration to me and many other young people around the nation. You have helped me deal with hardships in my life that I thought I could never get through. Your book, *Coming Back Stronger*, has changed the way I see everything. I was a huge fan of you before I got your book, but after reading it, I learned so much about you and what you've been through than I ever could've guessed. It made me realize that we can bounce back from anything, no matter how tough it may seem. What has happened to you, and to the Saints, is a perfect example of this. I have dealt with obstacles in my life as well. It's people like you who give me the strength and support I need to keep going.

Like you, I've had to come face-to-face with adversity, too. I've been a Saints fan ever since I can remember. I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana and lived there for about eight years. The best memories of my life were created there. Then in 2005, Hurricane Katrina came. The storm happened a month before my ninth birthday. It was the most difficult thing my younger sister and I ever had to go through. My parents' jobs were transferred to a much smaller town, Grafton, West Virginia. I felt like I was starting my life all over again. I haven't seen my friends since we moved, and didn't even know if they all made it through the storm without losing their homes or their families. I knew my life would never be the same again. I have never really felt like I fit in at my new school, like it just wasn't meant to be. To this day, I still feel like part of me remains in New Orleans. I can relate this to the time you were released from the Chargers. You talked about how you felt alone and it seemed like no one had faith in you. I felt the same way. However, if it weren't for your shoulder injury, you would still be with the Chargers, and never would have become a Saint. You wouldn't have won the XLIV Super Bowl,

be nominated as the Super Bowl MVP, or gotten the opportunity to meet the extraordinary people of New Orleans. I think about what you said about how God knows what he is doing, even if it seems like things can't get any worse. You also talked about a person being able to look back after a challenge and realizing that if those horrible things wouldn't have happened, his/her life might've turned out completely different. If I never moved to West Virginia, I wouldn't have made the amazing friends that I have today. Whenever I'm sad, people will say things like, "Don't worry, it will get better," but I never actually believed them. It was different when you said it, though, because you weren't just saying it; you lived it.

Like I said in the beginning, I am a huge Saints fan. Not only do I like them for their outstanding players and coaching staff, but also I believe your team is nothing less than a miracle. Theirs is a remarkable story that I will never forget. I think that everyone can relate to it. To think that the Superdome was once severely damaged and flooded, yet the Saints came back and played that very next year, and ended up winning the Super Bowl just five years later, is truly incredible. I think it is an inspiration to everyone. The Saints have shown that no matter the odds, if you work hard, persevere, and never give up, you can live the impossible.

In your book, you often talked about how the people of New Orleans gave so much to the Saints and yourself. I think it worked both ways. The football team brought hope back to the city; gave them something to believe in. Every game they won gave the people and extra boost of faith. Your charity, the Brees Dream Foundation, showed the country that you're not just any old football player; you are also a good person. I went to Lusher Magnet School for about a month, and thought it wasn't in very good shape even before the hurricane. What you did for their athletic department definitely meant a lot to the kids there.

Your book also changed the way I saw the game of football. When I watch a football game, all I really think about is my team winning. It doesn't matter how or when; I just focus on the outcome. Seeing a quarterback's point of view really changed the way I thought about things. How every second counts, every decision matters, any mistake could mean losing... Those are a few of the things that you said were running through your mind throughout the game. Knowing that in one small slip you could be letting your team down, the hundreds of people in the stadium, and thousands of viewers on television is a lot of pressure on one person. I never used to think about it that way. I also admire your mentality of "play by play, one game at a time." This is also a good life lesson: if one looks too far ahead in the future, he/she might stumble on the way there. After reading your book, I changed the way I thought about things; play by play, one game at a time.

I enjoyed reading your book and I feel like I really got a lot out of it, too. I hope you write more in the future. Before reading it,

I constantly found myself thinking about what my life would be like if I still lived in New Orleans. Your book has shown me that everything happens for a reason. So, I was actually meant to be here in West Virginia ever since I was born. I just didn't know it yet. God didn't put me here by accident; I have a purpose to fulfill here. It will find me in the future, and when it does, I'll be ready. *Coming Back Stronger* changed the way I saw life and its hardships. I learned that no matter what comes your way, you must absolutely never even consider giving up, but fight back and push yourself to try harder. The only thing worse than being knocked down is not getting back up. Who knows, maybe you'll come back even stronger than before.

An inspired fan,  
Jasmine Grossman

**Honorable Mention**

Sarah Morris-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

Dear Harper Lee,

Your book has educated me on segregation in small southern towns during the 1930's. The Civil War was clearly over but the deep hatred for blacks was not. Many white people in the south hated blacks because when slavery ended so did their rich lifestyles. Segregation seemed like their way of getting even because they lost the war on slavery.

The novel also showed me another side of segregation-White people being punished for helping black people. Jem and Scout were segregated because their father defended a black man who had been accused of a serious crime. Most white people would have hung Tom Robinson without a trial and convicted him on the color of his skin. I believe that Atticus was a very righteous person who strived for everyone to have equality in the courtroom. I also admire the high self esteem Jem and Scout had when they were constantly talked about. Being the gossip of the town they still tried to keep their heads high and kept their fists down. I would also like to have Scout's personality and spunk. She was always willing to stand up to anyone who bad mouthed her family and even though people disapprove of the way she acts her confidence is still at the utmost highest. This is clear when she has to stand up to her prejudiced aunt and cousin.

The character who I most admired was Calpurnia. After all she had been through she was very open- minded. She didn't hate whites although it probably would have been easy for her to. She took good care of the children and defended them and held her ground with people like Lula. She worried about them and their faith taking them to her church when Atticus was gone.

Since reading your book I believe my views toward different ethnic groups have changed. It doesn't matter what skin color you have or where you come from. It also doesn't really matter

which religion you believe in. What is important is that you are a good person and you deserve the right to be treated equal as everyone else. I once heard someone say God is colorblind. I think Atticus was colorblind too.

Zely,  
Sarah Morris

**Honorable Mention**

Danielle Nelson-Moundsville M.S.  
*Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Curtis

Dear Christopher Curtis,

Your amazing book *Bud, Not Buddy* inspired me to start writing my own personal short stories and novels. I was astounded by all of the categories that this book could fall under. It's a comedy, romance, drama; it's even a little scary. I cried when I read about Bud's tragic life. It made me think of how great my life is and how much I appreciate what I have. At the time that I had been reading your book, I had been going through a hard time myself. I was taken away from my mom right in the middle of the book, and I read it while I found somewhere to stay. It kept me together when life seemed very difficult. I read it in fifth grade, three years ago, and I still remember many of the words from various sections. It warmed my heart when Bud and his dad found each other, and he was super glued to that piece of paper with his dad's band on it. That showed how much he loved his dad and wanted to find him.

I have told a few friends about your book. One of them actually bought it a month ago, and she has enjoyed it also. We both especially like the part where Bud rode the train and then walked for miles. What an adventure. What an adventure! I wish I had the guts to do what he did. It might not have been a true story, but it felt so real. The saddest part, I thought, was when Bud slept in the bush in the winter and cried about his dad. I can't bear to think of an innocent child having to go through all of that, but then the ending made it all worth it.

Everyone should read this book; it is definitely a long one, but if it were any shorter, no one would understand it. There was not one line that wasn't important. Please tell me when the next one will be published. I can't wait to read it.

Sincerely,  
Danielle Nelson

**Honorable Mention**

Nick Peyatte-John Adams M.S.  
*My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George

Dear Jean Craighead George,

*My Side of the Mountain* literally changed my life. Ever since

I first read the book in fourth grade I've loved the outdoors. I used to sit inside, play video games, and watch television. But, now I love going outside and stay out there for hours and hours, especially in the summer.

I really took a lot of pointers about survival and camping from the story. I've been asking my parents a lot now I could spend two or three days just out in the woods. I also understand some of the reasons he left his home now. Some of those reasons make me think about going and living on my own in the forest. I really wanted to, but I talked myself out of it.

I've noticed that so many things could be used to survive after reading what he used. I had no idea that you could smoke out a tree and live in it. Even though this is a fiction novel I know that it's possible to live in a smoked out tree because I researched it. As soon as I heard it in the book I researched it. Ever since that day I've always wanted to live in a hollowed out tree on a deer skin bed.

When I got finished reading the book I was surprised to find that I felt really good. I just think that hearing someone else run away like I do sometimes, made me feel better. I'm extremely glad that my teacher introduced me to the *My Side of the Mountain*. I have no idea what I would be like if I never read the story. I would probably be a nerd that's cramped up in his room all day playing video games. But, I read the book and now I'm successful and I'm an athlete and I just feel good. I have *My Side of the Mountain* to thank for all of this.

#### **Honorable Mention**

Brandi Watts-Crum M.S.

*The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne

Dear John Boyne,

In your book, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, Bruno is a nine-year-old boy who is growing up in the mixes of World War 2. I've read many books about the holocaust, but yours is the one that inspired me the most. In the story you list that Bruno has an older sister, and I am an older sister. I have two little brothers, and I would be torn apart if anything would ever come to happen to them. We use to quarrel, and say stuff we didn't even mean, and when I read this book it touched my heart in many different ways. It helped me understand that my brothers are special to me, and I should appreciate them in every way. To this day I now appreciate my brothers and we haven't been in a fight since I read about Bruno and his sister. I couldn't imagine not living with my brothers; I would give them my life to live instead of ruining and ending theirs.

To begin with, me and my brothers often go to the park and act out this book, as if we were living in World War 2. We've shown our mother and she went straight to tears. She let us know that we are siblings and we should always respect one another no matter

what happens. My brothers and I now take up for each other, and we never let anyone come between us. We are blood brothers and sisters, and nothing can change that.

Above all, in promises from one another, we'll be alive forever. Nothing will come upon us that we can't take on, and we will appreciate one another as if we were living in World War 2. My brothers are my world, and this would probably never have come across my mind if it hadn't been for me reading your book.

In the long run, thank you, John Boyne, for creating such an extraordinary book, and publishing it to allow people to read such a powerful book. If it wouldn't have been for this book and me realizing my brothers were special to me, we would still be fighting to this day. I am glad I found this book and I am glad I took the time out to read it and take in every word. This book sat on my heart and mind like a fly stuck to a web, and I shall never forget it.

In all thanks,  
Brandi Watts

## **Level III**

#### **Top Honors**

Mikalyn Murphy-Sissonville H.S.

*Unbearable Lightness* by Portia de Rossi

Dear Portia de Rossi,

Very few books have had a powerful impact on me. Although I have read various books that have stuck out in my mind, I could never have chosen one that really spoke to me. When I heard about *Unbearable Lightness* over the internet, I immediately knew I had to read it. I never thought a book could impact me like that- impact me enough to make a life altering decision.

Last year, I woke up and decided that today would be the day I changed my life. I had decided that I was going to live a "healthier" life style. I hated the way I looked; I was less than 5'3 and weighed 127 pounds. At the age of just 14 I knew I was on track to obesity. Every time I looked in the mirror, I cringed.

That day I cut out all snacks and drank more water. Well, that's how I started out. As days progressed I wasn't seeing progress on the scales or in the mirror, so I decided to exercise more and eat only twice a day. Eventually that led to cutting out any drink other than water. I didn't see the point on wasting calories on a liquid that tasted good when I was perfectly happy with water.

Around Christmas time I was excited to see family I hadn't seen for a while because I wanted to see what they said about my trimming down. When we arrived, everybody raved about how much weight my brother had lost and only one or two people

commented on my loss. I felt as if I had failed even though the number on the scale had reduced. It seemed pointless because when I looked in the mirror I still looked the same.

I now had absolutely no energy and all my free time was consumed with exercising. When Christmas break came around, my parents became concerned about my eating habits. They told me I was too skinny and needed to eat more. I thought that they were taking things out of proportion because when I looked at myself, I saw the girl I was two months before. Soon their worry became frustration for my lack of cooperation in eating. My parents started forcing me to eat more and exercise less. When I finally stepped on a scale, I weighed 103 pounds. I was proud of my accomplishments, but I couldn't be happy because the worry I saw in my family. I felt like I had to surrender, a true failure in my mind. After many months of increasing what I ate, my family seemed much more at ease.

Since working on recovering from my eating disorder, I have had one relapse in which I lost about five pounds in less than two weeks. I thought no one understood what I was going through until I cracked open the book *Unbearable Lightness*. Everything you wrote described exactly how I felt through the highs and lows of my weight. You helped me understand that I may have lost a few things, but I also gained many things. Many things that I never would have realized I had gained. I gained self confidence and a healthier life style. You also showed me that I put my life at risk and I could have died if I had stayed on the same track.

As soon as I read your moving book, I made the decision to never care what the number on the scales said, it is just digits. Today I still look in the mirror to see the girl I was a year ago, but I know that's not what others see. You helped me see that skinny does not always mean pretty. *Unbearable Lightness* affected me on so many levels I can't explain it. I want to sincerely thank you for changing my life.

Thank you, Portia de Rossi, for writing *Unbearable Lightness*. It took courage for you to share your story of struggle. Your courage could have possibly saved my life. I hope to never have a relapse again because of you. It has occurred to me how much this experience changed my parents and me, and I can't let that happen again. I will never diet again. I have a bright future ahead of me and *Unbearable Lightness* has given me the strength to wake up every day and be not only happy, but thankful for the size I am. Thank you.

With appreciation,  
Mikalyn Murphy

### Honors

Notashia Baughman-Richwood H.S.  
*Our Town* by Thornton Wilder

Dear Mr. Wilder:

Senior year of high school has so far been a rollercoaster of stress, and this small taste of what life is like after high school is bittersweet. Between choosing the right college and filling out numerous scholarships, not to mention the mighty pile of homework, I hardly have a minute to breathe. This dreamy, breeze of a senior year I have heard about all these years is turning into a nightmare. Occasionally, in my vain attempts to conquer my never-ending list of things to accomplish, I lose something I've only recently obtained—the ability to just stop and look around.

Months ago while still in my eleventh grade English class, I read your play *Our Town* and realized that I had been overlooking things that should be very important to me. I couldn't remember the last time I walked outside of an evening and gazed at the star-strewn sky, nor could I remember last when I thanked my mother for just being there for me. When had I given up my life of simplicity in exchange for one of complexity? When had I stopped living in the moment and longing for the next? I had let the high-paced lifestyle of American society find me in the heart of West Virginia.

I want to thank you for writing *Our Town* in a way that it can become my town. I live on the outskirts of Richwood, West Virginia, a small town set of the river banks of Cherry River and named so for the lumber industry. It is my own Grover's Corners: it has a Main Street and a drugstore, and kind people as well as those who are troubled. Although city living and its rush is seeping in and changing my generation's views of life, older citizens remain steadfast to old traditions; my family is no exception. I have a very large family, who are very fond of keeping traditions alive, such as making molasses and apple butter. For the longest time, I felt distance from these activities, as if I didn't belong or was embarrassed to belong. However, after reading your play and discovering the importance of the tie between family members and the love for one another, I began to appreciate the traditions my family wants to keep alive. Also, I realize now that without the companionship of another individual or group, such as my family, how could my life surmount to anything enjoyable?

Time is underestimated, and I'm here to say I was guilty of this injustice until I read *Our Town*. I then began to appreciate every second and not take any for granted, because each one is fleeting. What really drove the point home for me was the scene in the cemetery; Emily Webb's reaction when she returns to her twelfth birthday shook me to the core. My heart ached for her as she pleaded with her parents to acknowledge her and everything around them that they were missing. This is a perfect example of our behavior today; there are so many things we miss because we are always trying to take the next step as quick as humanly possible. Even the scene where George lies on Emily's grave while she's saying that the living doesn't understand is powerful. Instead of mourning over death, celebrate the life left to live. With this new philosophy, I now see things I wouldn't have normally cared for, such as how a bee pollinates a Mexican sunflower or

the way a colorful morning glory glistens with dew drops in the early light. Taking a second for what it's worth has taught me lessons in life I would have otherwise disregarded.

Even after my epiphany regarding your play, I still find myself overwhelmed by society's standards. Whenever I start to get stressed out, I've learn the best way to remedy it is to walk outside and take in the swaying of the trees in the wind or the rays of sunshine kissing my cheek. These moments of solitude have led me to realize that I can be successful and still live a simple life.

Notashia Baughman

### **Honors**

Andrew Peterson-Elkins H.S.

*Rant* by Chuck Palahniuk

Dear Chuck Palahniuk,

Lately I've been feeling general teenage apathy. Not toward one particular thing; toward everything. Two years ago, if a friend would ask me to take a walk with them I would agree with little to no hesitation. Now, I hate walking, I hate friends, and everyday, I feel less and less like a human being. That I, until I read your novel *Rant*.

Because everything seems to annoy or irritate me, I've found two things that don't. Those are punk rock and reading. In a book, I get to meet new people that I have nothing against. It seems that anybody I know around here, With the exception of about four or five people, either has a problem with me, or I have a problem with them. It's probably my fault, seeing that I find the worst in people first, rather than the best. Most of the time, it gives me blurry, uneducated biases against people. When that happens, it's pretty hard to make friends.

Sometimes I find myself wishing I was someone else, just so I could escape this harsh reality, even if it's just for a minute or two. Don't get me wrong, I like who I am, and I try to tell myself that I shouldn't worry about what others think, and that if they're not my friend, then it's their loss. But when I fail to take my own pep talk to heart, I just feel like nobody's words, advice, or pep talks will ever do a thing for me. It appears I was wrong.

While reading *Rant*, I came across a quote that would single-handedly changed the view of myself, my family, and my friends. "Some people are born human; others spend their entire lives getting there." At first, I just took this at face-value. For the longest time, I didn't enjoy reading, and when I did finally like it, I still never really took quotes, or anything, to heart. However, after a long, hard day of school, I decided to read. I didn't have a bookmark, and I had totally forgotten what page I was on. So, I flipped to what seemed to be in the general area of where I was, and started reading. What I was reading sounded familiar, and I knew I had already read it. I didn't care, though. After only about

two pages, I came across that quote again. When I was reading that day, I hated myself, my parents, my friends; everyone. Then I read the quote again. And for the first time since I was in middle, something meant something to me.

"Some people are born human; others spend their entire lives getting there." These words gave me hope. Suddenly, it didn't matter that I felt inhuman, because I would feel normal someday. That made sense to me because I then realized that anything I do won't matter five or 10 years from now. 10 years in the future, I'm sure I'll meet people that I actually like. After reading the quote again, I also got the courage to talk to my mom about my issues. Now, that's something I don't remember doing since the third grade. And after talking to her, my father, and both of my older sisters, I realized that they all went through this too. However, I explained my scenario in greater detail than I'm explaining to you, and the all agreed that I'm going through 10 times worse than they did. However, between your quote and the fact that they all got over it, I believe I can get over it too, and with the help of inspirational punk rock, I'll never fall back into the same feelings. (At least I hope not.) Also, I can finally talk to my family again if I have any problems, which has helped me a lot lately. Let me thank you for bringing back faith toward my family. If I hadn't read this book, I'd still only talk to my mom if I needed a ride somewhere. Now, when she's done giving me that ride, I always tell her that I love her.

Thank you,  
Andrew Peterson

### **Honorable Mention**

Adam Bowles

*A Separate Peace* by John Knowles

Dear Mr. Knowles,

As a naive and confused adolescent, I am more familiar with the challenges of coming of age than I would like to be. Thankfully, your novel has helped me on my way to maturity. To the average reader, *A Separate Peace* is a book, nothing more than a series of symbols strewn out across an expanse of pages. To me, however, *A Separate Peace* represents much more; hidden within the text of this book I found a brother, a friend, and most importantly, myself.

Much like me, Gene Forrester is a precocious, intelligent, and insecure teen. Unsurprisingly, I felt a brotherly connection to Gene. Gene and I even thought the same way; I would often pause for thought during reading only to find my exact thoughts later on in the chapter! I laughed both for and at the Devon schoolboys and I felt triumph when Gene and Finny jumped the tree for the first time. Unfortunately, I shared Gene's vices as well as his virtues. Like Gene, I can be intensely jealous; I hate to be outdone or bested. Even so, I was surprised and disappointed in myself when I realized that jealousy would have motivated me to

make the same selfish decisions as Gene. Would I have knocked Phineas out of the tree? I don't know. Probably. This realization scared me—was I really that immoral? Seeing the consequence of Gene's actions helped me uncover my jealousy and warn me to never act upon it.

As the novel wore on, I felt increasingly detached from Gene and more attached to Phineas. Finny, unlike Gene, brought out the best of everyone—including me, the reader. Finny was energetic, innocent, and sincere. Finny's altruism really struck me. In sharp contrast to Gene, Finny was never jealous and always kind to everyone. The most remarkable aspect of Finny's character was that his kindness was unfailing and indiscriminate. Finny found something to value in everyone; I, I am ashamed to say, did not.

In my mind, I made a connection: Gene is who I am, and Finny is who I should be. Ever since I closed your book four months ago, I have made a daily effort to be kind like Finny. Recently, I've had to challenge myself to remain unselfish. Last week, for example, my best friend informed me that he had forgotten to write down a crucial school assignment. Because my friend was also my main competitor for valedictorian, I had a choice to make. I thought to myself, "Do I let him fail or give him the assignment?" The Gene in me said let him fail. Fortunately, I had grown beyond this. With no more than a few seconds of consideration, I gave him the assignment. Like Gene, I had learned that grades shouldn't be more important than friendship.

Thank you for teaching me. Without Finny's example, I may have chosen the same path as Gene. In your book, Gene uses Finny to find his path to maturity. Much like Gene, I have grown up in the presence of Phineas.

Sincerely,  
Adam Bowles

#### **Honorable Mention**

Ariel Churchill-Robert C. Byrd H.S.

*House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski

To Mr. Mark Z. Danielewski

"No one ever really gets used to nightmares," but you helped me understand mine.

I found *House of Leaves* while listening to music on Annie Danielewski's website. I heard the voice of a man, reciting, not singing. Strange. "What is this?" I wondered, as I listened to you narrate the scene in which Johnny discovers the beauty of "dark languages" over the auditory backdrop of a song about understanding, I became curious and somewhat entranced. As I further explored her website, I found several links to you and *House of Leaves*.

After reading a few titillating summaries of the novel, I decided I

had to have it. I ordered the book from Borders for twenty dollars and some change, and set off on my exploration.

Exploration must be the right word, since it is so evidently the focus of the novel, and readers are, in fact, required by the myriad footnotes and allusions to explore even beyond the book itself. Thanks to you I discovered Dante's *Inferno*, not to mention the definitions of some, to put it lightly, obscure words - phillumenist, for example, or one who collects matchbooks.

As Johnny becomes more invested in Zampano's work throughout the progression of the story, so did I come to depend on my turning of the pages. Unlike Johnny, however, my obsession did not spawn craze or paranoia. I felt liberated instead, even as the characters lost themselves in both their intrinsic and extrinsic labyrinths.

Plenty of us have been accused of running from our problems, of trying to escape. Certainly we all have unique experiences in our search for "self" and identity. As a teenager these issues are particularly relevant to my life and the lives of my peers, but I believe anyone of most any age can relate. The metaphor of the ever-changing labyrinth is a perfect illustration of the ways we all struggle, independently and uniquely, in our efforts to define ourselves. Could the dimensions of the house, greater inside than out, be a statement on the deceptive nature of external perceptions? Could the echoes and disorientation have something to do with our efforts to understand each other's "dark languages,"?

There is a passage, you know the one, in which you analyze the etymology of the word "uncanny," or "unheimlich," in German. "Un-homely," you also describe it. Though few things in literature, it seems, are ever to be taken literally, I found great value in a literal interpretation of this passage. The whole book deals with how we relate to our environments. Moreover, it deals with how events in our lives change our perceptions of the spaces we occupy. I have lived in my city for more than a decade; I've lived in this state forever. This summer I encountered events in my life which permanently altered my view of this town, Clarksburg. It became un-homely, uncanny, unheimlich. As Johnny reads Zampano's manuscript, his level of comfort in his dwelling is diminished until he is a stranger even in his own home.

"No one ever really gets used to nightmares." Well, I might not have gotten used to mine, and your book might not have made my town any more familiar, but at least I understood why I felt removed. Johnny felt it too, felt it first, so maybe I wasn't quite so alone. Maybe I was even ready for it when it happened, since I'd witnessed his [in]ability to deal with the unfamiliar. On second thought, maybe it is slightly less "uncanny," for your descriptions. Thanks to you I have the tools to understand my own "un-home." I'll keep exploring.

Thank you,  
Ariel Churchill

### Honorable Mention

Danielle Coffinbarger

*A Summer to Die* by Lois Lowry

Dear Mrs. Lowry,

In mid-April of this year, my first boyfriend broke up with me for apparently no reason. I later found out that he no longer considered me 'valuable'. I was heart-broken. I felt horrible about myself. In my eyes, I was no longer talented, attractive, funny, or smart enough for anyone. I downgraded myself to a point where I thought I was a useless burden to everyone. I tried to escape to music and reading, the two things I had always turned to in the past, though now I doubted the written word since I had been lied to consistently through it. Somehow, I knew that those two things would never change, and would never have opinions of me. That need is what led me to read your book *A Summer to Die*.

Meg Chalmers was a lot like me. We both wear glasses, are oddly proportioned, have strange talents, and didn't think highly of ourselves. We were always comparing ourselves to people who were something we weren't but wanted to be, had our future all planned out, and were afraid of failure. To be honest, I almost put your book down several times because it made me consider parts of myself that I had locked away into the deepest recesses of my heart because I was afraid to face them. I saw me every time I turned a page. However I cannot begin to express to you how glad I am that I didn't give up on your book.

At first, I didn't like Meg, but the more I thought of her as me, the more I realized it was myself I didn't like. I had never regarded myself as someone who was like Molly: beautiful, confident, organized, popular, and light-hearted. I was none of that. I was plain-old-boring Danielle. I did plenty of things worth praise, but I never gave it to myself. I was called beautiful hundreds of times, but it never occurred to me that it meant anything. Then when I read your book, it did. Especially after I finished the last chapter and Will Banks told Meg, told a fictional version of me, that she had been beautiful all along. At that moment, everything hit home. I grasped the idea that everyone who said those things had been honest. They really thought those things about me. One of the reasons why what Will Banks said to Meg meant as much as it did to me is because Will reminds me of my Pappy. He is someone I have admired my entire life and who I love very much as well as someone I could see saying those exact same words to me.

I finally figured out that just because someone you loved doesn't think you're pretty enough, or that you're good enough, doesn't mean it's true. Not only had someone I had treasured told me that, I had as well. It is like the two plus two equals five philosophy. If you say it enough times, eventually you believe it is true, even though it may not be.

Having a fictional character that was a lot like me travel a similar path made me realize that I was worth so much more than I thought I was. As Meg Chalmers bloomed into who she really was, so did I. It just takes some of us longer to open up than others. Somewhat like the flower, the Fringed Gentians, who save their beauty until they show it at the very last moment to give a small glimmer of hope through the long, cold, boring, gray days of winter. It took me a long time to realize my self worth, to fully emerge from my bud, and if it weren't for *A Summer to Die*, it would have taken even longer.

Thank you.

Danielle R. Coffinbarger

### Honorable Mention

Eric Coffinbarger

*World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* by Max Brooks

Dear Mr. Brooks,

When I started *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*, I didn't like people. Humans were selfish creatures that destroyed each other and the Earth. Since we are practically useless in the ecosystem, why were we not extinct? I found the answer in your book.

My former dislike of human beings can be attributed to several factors. The first is my sensitivity. I couldn't (and to some extent still cannot) handle the atrocities of war, genocide, and other man-made horrors. In the beginning of your book, governments use the war as an excuse to blame or kill old enemies. Private Citizens leave people to die, steal, kill for supplies, and even personally murder their own children. Then something else entirely started happening. After the Great Panic was over and people got out of a purely survivalist frame of mind, they started working together. People were assigned jobs, security forces were organized, and supplies were dropped to isolated survivors. The best of people was starting to come out.

Should it really take zombies to bring out the best of us, though? Do we need to be on the brink of complete destruction as a species to help a fellow man? I found that if I looked at the world and tried to not notice the bad things, good things that people do every day began to shine through. It's up to us as individuals to join the ranks of those people, just as the people in *World War Z* flocked to help other countries after the United States had been liberated.

Another of the aforementioned reasons for my feelings toward humans was man's treatment of those who are helpless, like children or people with special needs. I used to hate, with the fullest meaning of the word, people who physically or emotionally abused animals, children, etcetera. A problem arose with my logic: aren't you just as bad as those who hurt and hate if you hate? Maybe those "bad" people just do these things

because they are permanently hurt inside and can't handle it. Maybe they are like the "Quislings" in your book, the people who start to act like zombies because they're so damaged by what they have experienced.

Unfortunately, our world isn't as black and white as the world in *World War Z*, divided between "good humans" and "bad zombies". The bad guys in our world are hard to see and sometimes may not even exist at all. One could say that Nazis were bad guys and most likely not receive any objections to your statement. Did that make the six year-old girl in the Hitler Youth Program evil? Was the young man wearing the Iron Cross lying injured in Russia the epitome of what you shouldn't be as a human being? Maybe there is no such thing as an evil person, only people that do evil things.

The final reason for my dislike of people came from feelings of betrayal. Throughout my life, I have seen many people who are generally kind and caring become manipulative and sadistic. The worst part is when this happens to someone you're close to, or when you lash out at friends and family. I sometimes say nasty things to my sister and at times I am far from the son I should be. Here lies what I think is the true horror of *World War Z*: the zombie in each of us, the soulless "killing machine" that hungers for the pain of all life. This flesh-eating ghoul attacks strangers, spouses, parents, friends, and when it has finished it leaves the true us, just like the survivors in your book, to clean up the mess.

Toward the end of your book, the humans who have survived the Great Panic and the ensuing war with the dead have to make a choice. Do they stay hidden and wait for their enemy to rot away, or do they fight to reclaim the planet? The American President stands up and tells the other world leaders that they have to fight for their world, to prove that as a race they could do it. This scene was very moving for me. Not only was I emotionally involved in the book and at certain points about yelled out loud "Run!" or "Shoot!", but this scene defined for me what the Human Spirit is. It is our belief not in our deities, our government, or our military, but in ourselves to overcome the greatest obstacles and fight for a better tomorrow. It's the voice inside a single mother's head that drives her to work without sleep to feed her kids. It's the spirit that makes the hospital patient with a serious medical condition overcome his sickness because he knows his family needs him. Finally, the human spirit is what drives us to fight off the evil inside of us and show love and compassion to our fellow man.

Thank you for writing your book.  
Eric G. Coffinbarger

### **Honorable Mention**

Jonathan Gladysz-Robert C. Byrd H.S.  
*Do Hard Things* by Alex & Brett Harris

Dear Alex and Brett Harris.

The book you brothers wrote, *Do Hard Things*, was a book that makes a person look inside himself and question the way they live. The fact that this book brings on these questions is what makes it a life changing book in my opinion. You two did a wonderful job in connecting to other teens in the way you communicated through your writing. Being a fellow Christian the biblical references in this book sold me on your ideas. I, as a teenager, found the book very appropriate for the modern times. I also found it easy to connect to, and understand, the message you were trying to convey.

Your book inspires teens to "break the mold of what society thinks teens are capable of." Modern day teens are only expected to drag their way through high school, going to parties every weekend and never having to fend for themselves. In your book, you challenge teens to not only refrain from this behavior, but to "accomplish great things." In your book you compared teens of past generations to this one, and it made me realize just how little is expected of us in today's society and that a change is needed.

The idea you presented that more is achieved when we are babies than as teens was another eye opener. As babies we have more courage to try difficult things than we do now as teens! The success rate for babies accomplishing these things such as walking, talking, reading, and so on, is also much greater than us teens attempting far easier things. The reason for this is that babies are expected to do these things, however teens are not expected to do anything more than the bare minimum.

You two talked a lot about being courageous and taking advantage of every opportunity presented to you. Going outside of your comfort zone is when some of the greatest growth can occur. You said that taking that first scary step is essential in doing hard things. Taking that first step is something that I have tried to put into action in my own life and it has made a difference in not only my life but in the lives of others. I have realized that without taking risks, good things can never happen, and having this attitude encourages me to want to take that "scary first step."

Alex and Brett, your book is simply inspiring in so many ways. From school work to our walk with the Lord, you challenge us to maintain a much higher standard. This book can truly turn this generation around and change a mediocre teen to a outstanding achiever. This book excites me and causes me to want to make a change. Teens just need to take that first scary step, do hard things, and read this book!

Sincerely,  
Jonathan Gladysz

**Honorable Mention**

Name Withheld-Musselman H.S.

*A Child Called "It"* by David Pelzer

Dear Mr. Dave Pelzer,

Life as we know it has never been something to call easy. We all have our hardships in life, some more than others, but for the most part they make us stronger. Your book really touched a soft spot in my heart. I see myself as being a very tough person. I'm not the type to show too much emotion to anyone for anything. Although, every page I turned, I got more and more attached.

As I read, so many memories started racing back to me that it honestly scared me. Towards the second chapter, in my head I began to change the characters. My friend became you in the book, her dad became your mom, and her mom became your dad. When we were little her dad treated her like a princess. As we began to grow up, I suddenly saw a change. Everything revolved around her brother, and whenever she was to get attention it was always negative. The punishments she would go through weren't nearly as severe as the ones you had to undergo. I can remember lying in bed at night and hearing her dad yell at her. I never saw anything that seemed to be something that she should receive punishment for.

My friend always got good grades, did her chores, and even did things without being asked. My mom would always say that I should act more like her. My friend was just such a good person that to me it made no sense that she was getting punished all the time. At first I thought she was just getting yelled at, but it was more than that. She would come to school with bruises and cut lips and she'd never tell me why. I always wondered if her dad was doing it. I could never ask her, out of fear she would think I was making fun of her. For the longest time I wouldn't say anything about her physical condition because she always seemed cheery.

After a while things just seemed that they were getting worse. I decided that if she really believes I'm her friend she will tell me what's wrong. Like I expected, she told me what her dad was doing to her. Her pain truly broke my heart. I'm a very tough person and I kept my emotions sealed at all times, until that moment. I honestly didn't know how to act. All I could do was cry with her. We thought together for a long time that day on how we could help her stop what was happening. She told me that her mom wasn't really in any position to do anything about it because her dad was in charge. That really hurt me because I always thought parents work together on everything.

I have never in my life read a book that related so much to a serious situation in my life that it scared me but encouraged me to read on. As I got to the end of the book I realized that help was what we needed. I decided to tell my mom. We were both very scared because we were not sure of her reaction. Although it was the scariest thing I've ever done, I'm proud of myself. The situation my best friend was in could have seriously hurt her. Thanks to me, I saved her. She's no longer living with her parents. She's with her grandmother and couldn't be happier. I see her just about every weekend. We've always said that we wanted to write you a letter for influencing me to help her through her struggle. I can't even imagine how her life would be if I hadn't spoken up. Thanks to your book, I won't have to. I got my best friend back, found my soft spot, and found my favorite, most life changing book.

Sincerely,

Name Withheld

**Honorable Mention**

Hannah Williams-Musselman H.S.

*Take Three* by Karen Kingsbury

Dear Karen Kingsbury,

I was at the beach for a week, and took all four books of the *Above the Line* series for my mom and myself to read on the shores of Topsail Island. Before I had even picked up *Take Three* in Life Way Christian Bookstore, I felt a connection to it. I skimmed through *Take Three* just the other day; it was as if a powerful gust of wind came at me with full force, shaking out my hair and leaving all my senses tingling with refreshment. I was immediately taken back into the story like the day I read and finished it.

You see, I have changed greatly in just the past six months. The person I used to be my first year of high school is one that I do not necessarily like. If you listen to Christian radio, you may have heard Reliant K's song "Who I Am Hates Who I've Been." That song relates to me just as this series did. Reading through the pages of trials, friendships, and heartache of *Take Three* made me think about my life, my past, and my biggest life change. Andi is an older version of who I was on track to become. I was not quite at her level yet, but the feelings behind her actions mirrored my own feelings. I did not want to follow all of the images and guidelines that had been laid out before me. People had been calling me "innocent" for years and years. I wanted so much to show them it was not true. I did not have to be so innocent! I needed to show them I was not the little, smart,

good girl. Though, I will admit now, it was a wretched life, even if I only lived it for eight months. I was not losing friends, but the friends I had did not know the true Hannah Williams. My fake self was portraying something that was not me, and my fake self was getting all of those friends. I convinced myself that if I wore a mask to show something that seemed pleasing to the people, that I would find people wanting to be around me.

Andi was more desperate for that “bad girl” image than I, but we both wanted the same thing. We both longed for love. We looked for it in ways of the world, though. Andi sought beer, parties, and Taz. I wanted a boyfriend, the latest “cool” language and jokes, and any friend I could make. We stepped off the lighted path of following God and took the twisted, dark path of the easily fallen of the world. However, as I sit here today and type up this letter to you, I must say that my life has transformed. It turned around into Bailey’s shining, Christian fire last May. I have rediscovered the teachings I learned in church between now and the past fifteen years. I have been reminded that my past is gone and forgiven, and I know that God is not one to go against His promise to forgive. I have been looking for love in all the wrong places. I know that now; I know that all of the love possible was always one prayer away. All of the belittling words that could have come out of my mouth before have been erased and replaced. The few days when I feel like I am leaning back away from the Glorious One in heaven still come over me, but it is never long before confidence is restored and I am proclaiming my love and faith in Jesus Christ.

Some people would like to say that the miraculous stories of the lives in books like yours would never come true in reality. I would like to tell you, and anyone else, that this is a deceptive lie I’ve heard one too many times. It is a lie that Satan only wishes to believe, but I stand as living proof for all to see that complete transformations of a single person happen.

Andi’s and my life as wanna-be girls of the world back into the bright-eyed daughters of the Most High could and did happen. Thank you for the encouraging reminders of James 1:2 and Jeremiah 29:11. This book has helped me not to forget too much about my past so it can remind me that I do not want to go back to that point. For a “Recovering Andi” like myself, those verses help keep me pressing my feet against the soft dirt of God’s lighted path.

Your sister in Christ,  
Hannah Williams

## Coordinator

Karen Goff

*2011 Letters About Literature Booklet* by Young Writers

Dear 2011 Letters About Literature Writers,

As digital natives, born after the introduction of digital technology, you all took on a major challenge in entering the Letters About Literature contest. Letters probably seem old fashioned to you. However, by entering this contest, you have joined many, many authors who got their start in the writing world by writing letters. In the days before email and texting, letters were the primary means of communication. Pioneers wrote letters, soldiers wrote letters, mothers wrote letters. Letters took days, sometimes weeks, to arrive at their destinations. Often it was like waiting for the next chapter in a book that has drawn you in and holds your attention.

The letter format wasn’t the only challenge. Instead of writing on what the book was about you had to write about what the book, or story, or poem, meant to you, how it changed you. You had to share true thoughts and feelings and that is not easy.

C.S. Lewis, author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, once said that “We read to know that we are not alone”. Each year, Letters About Literature entries confirm that statement. One of you told an author that her books were “medication for my soul and heart”. Others wrote about the pain of missing friends who moved away, of the pain of missing relatives who died. You wrote about bullying and the struggle to fit in. You wrote about discovering courage, about gaining appreciation for your siblings, about discovering yourself. You wrote about all these things because you already knew or just discovered the truth that Dr. Seuss declared in *I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!*, that “The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn the more places you’ll go.”

This year 631 students from West Virginia were among almost 70,000 students nationwide who wrote Letters About Literature. After reading all those letters the national screeners selected 7,000 letters for state level judging; 154 from West Virginia. I know that some of you wonder if “Notable Mention” is a big deal. Your letter was among the 10% nationwide selected for state level judging. So the answer is “Yes. It IS a big deal”.

Congratulations to all of you; to those who were able to attend the Awards Ceremony and to those who weren’t; to those who got Top Honors and to those who got other honors. Congratulations to those who entered and whose entries did not get selected for statewide judging. Please don’t ever stop reading.

Sincerely,  
Karen Goff

## Level I-Notable Mentions

Alexandra Backel-St. Joseph the Worker G.S.  
*Just Grace* by Charise Mericle Harper

Trevor Barber-Bluefield I.S.  
*The Ghost of Fossil Glen* by Cynthia DeFelice

Christopher Billings-Mercer E.S.  
*Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson

Maya Dalton-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls

Ryan DelSignore-Davis-Thomas E.S.  
*Stone Fox* by John Reynolds Gardiner

Emily Hayslett-Hurricane M.S.  
*Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White

Name Withheld-Davis-Thomas E.S.  
*Coraline* by Neil Gaimen

Eryn Johnson-Hurricane M.S.  
*The Cage* by Ruth Minsky Sender

Sara Kush-Weirton Heights E.S.  
*Junie B. Jones First Grader at Last* by Barbara Parks

Dominic Mazur-St. Joseph the Worker G.S.  
*The Love of Baseball* by Dan Schollossberg

Branden McGee-Davis-Thomas E.S.  
*Ghosts Don't Go to School* by Debbie Dadey & Marcia Thornton- Jones

Skylaar Mease-Bridgeport M.S.  
*A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens

Shelby Morris-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*Twilight Series* by Stephenie Meyer

Gracie North-Confidence E.S.  
*Grandfather's Journey* by Allen Say

Nicholas Paul-St. Joseph the Worker G.S.  
*Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

Dylan Pauley-Confidence E.S.  
*The Reptile Room* by Lemony Snicket

Samantha Pearl-Warwood M.S.  
*Percy Jackson and the Olympians* by Rick Riordan

James Todd-St. Joseph the Worker G.S.  
*Curious George Feeds the Animals* by Margret Rey

Jocelyn Wyne-Bridgeport M.S.  
*Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder

Anna Williams-Bluefield I.S.  
*My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George

Name Withheld-Crum M.S.  
*Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer

Cheyenne Woods-Bridgeport M.S.  
*Venola in Love* by Cheryl Ware

## Level II-Notable Mentions

Seth Anderson-Moundsville M.S.  
*Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls

Justin Anselene-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*Frindle* by Andrew Clements

Name Withheld-Davis-Thomas E.S.  
*Officer Buckle & Gloria* by Peggy Rathmann

Kristen Barlow-Taylor County M.S.  
*Winners Never Quit!* by Mia Hamm

Chris Barnes-Davis-Thomas E.S.  
*Calvin & Hobbes* by Bill Watterson

Name Withheld-John Adam M.S.  
*Friction* by E.F. Frank

Anna Bissett-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*Kimmie66* by Aaron Alexovich

Kaitlyn Browning-Crum M.S.  
*A Walk to Remember* by Nicholas Sparks

Krissy Burdick-Harpers Ferry M.S.  
*The Voyage of the Jerle Shannara: Morgawr* by Terry Brooks

Christopher Carvillano-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*Bronze Bow* by Elizabeth George Speare

Danielle Cook-Moundsville M.S.  
*The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch

Ben Costello-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

Sabrina Dahlia-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher

Name Withheld-Davis-Thomas Elementary M.S.  
*Why Water Matters* by United Nations

JonBenet Dunn-Moundsville M.S.  
*Forged by Fire* by Sharon M. Draper

Andrea Eddy-Moundsville M.S.  
*A Child Called "It"* by David Pelzer

## Level II-Notable Mentions continued

Morgan Finley-Crum M.S.  
*The River* by Gary Paulsen

Kristen Frohnapfel-Moundsville M.S.  
*Every Soul a Star* by Wendy Mass

Sierra Frosch-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

Name Withheld-School Withheld  
*Charlie St. Cloud* by Ben Sherwood

Constance Gerstle-John Adam M.S.  
*The Half-A-Moon Inn* by Paul Fleischman

Rachelle Green-Taylor County M.S.  
*Almost Home* by Nora Raleigh Baskin

Katie Hageboeck-John Adam M.S.  
*My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult

Name Withheld-Moundsville M.S.  
*If I Have a Wicked Stepmother, Where's My Prince*  
by Melissa Kantor

Name Withheld-Davis-Thomas E.S.  
*The Girls* by Amy Goldman Koss

Kimberly Johnson-Crum M.S.  
*The Last Song* by Nicholas Sparks

Name Withheld-Harpers Ferry M.S.  
*The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages*  
by Leo Buscaglia

Cara Laswell-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*Pretty Little Liars* by Sara Shepard

Sarah Lemley-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher

Noor Malik-John Adam M.S.  
*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

Annalyse Mann-Crum M.S.  
*Immortal* by Gillian Shields

Name Withheld-Harpers Ferry M.S.  
*My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult

Keisha Marks-Taylor County M.S.  
*The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins

Destinee' Maynard-Crum M.S.  
*Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls

Name Withheld-Davis-Thomas E.S.  
*The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* by Ann Brashares

Name Withheld-Moundsville M.S.  
*The Last Song* by Nicholas Sparks

Megan Moyer-Taylor County M.S.  
*Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli

Krista Newsome-Crum M.S.  
*Ramona and Beezus* by Beverly Cleary

Cassie Oltman-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*The Story of a Girl* by Sara Zarr

Name Withheld-John Adam M.S.  
"Our Deepest Fear" by Marianne Williamson

Lindsay Peters -Taylor County M.S.  
*Blubber* by Judy Blume

Christina Potter-Harpers Ferry M.S.  
*The Last Song* by Nicholas Sparks

Alexandra Ross-Taylor County M.S.  
*Cut* by Patricia McCormick

Kyle Sandy-Taylor County M.S.  
*Heat* by Mike Lupica

Sofia Sansalone-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*Dead is the New Black* by Marlene Perez

Sabriyah Shahbandy-John Adam M.S.  
*The Sweetness of Salt* by Cecilia Galante

Name Withheld-Taylor County M.S.  
*A Child Called "It"* by David Pelzer

Avery Towns-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*The Next Place* by Warren Hanson

Edward White-Athens M.S.  
*They Call Me Coach* by John Wooden

Margo Willis-Harpers Ferry M.S.  
*Thunder from the Sea* by Joan Hiatt Harlow

Taylor Woodbury-Fairmont Catholic G.S.  
*House of Night* by P.C. & Kristen Cast

Kirsten Woods-Crum M.S.  
*Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Curtis

### Level III-Notable Mentions

Hannah Atkins-Sissonville H.S.  
*The Fire Within* by Chris d’Lacey

Jonathan Barnett Elmore-South Charleston H.S.  
*The Travel Team* by Mike Lupica

Katelyn Belle Cottrell-Wirt County H.S.  
*The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks

Ayla Butcher-Magnolia H.S.  
*A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket

Kaitlyn Caswell Sissonville H.S.  
*The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini

Lauren Cline-Magnolia H.S.  
*The Last Song* by Nicholas Sparks

Shelby Combs-South Charleston H.S.  
*Angels and Demons* by Dan Brown

Name Withheld-Wirt County H.S.  
*For One More Day* by Mitch Albom

Brittany Dickerson-Sissonville H.S.  
*Fallen* by Lauren Kate

Tiffany Dingee-Sissonville H.S.  
*The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini

Name Withheld-Wirt County H.S.  
*The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins

Melanie Eubank-Richwood H.S.  
*The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger

Name Withheld-Musselman H.S.  
*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* by J.K. Rowling

Joanna Graham-Magnolia H.S.  
“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost

Joshiah Greaver-Robert C. Byrd H.S.  
*Left Behind* by Tim Lahaye & Jerry B. Jenkins

Mikayah Irwin-Elkins H.S.  
*Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery

Wesley Kafka-Robert C. Byrd H.S.  
*Artemis Fowl Chronicles* by Eoin Colfer

Name Withheld-South Charleston H.S.  
*Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli

Name Withheld-South Charleston H.S.  
*Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch

Kalie Knecht-South Charleston H.S.  
*The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss

Harry Koval-South Charleston H.S.  
*The Sea of Trolls* by Nancy Farmer

Levi Lynch-Wirt County H.S.  
“Poems” by Robert Frost

Name Withheld-Sissonville H.S.  
*The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks

Name Withheld-Wirt County H.S.  
*Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher

Molly Mottesheard-South Charleston H.S.  
*Olive’s Ocean* by Kevin Henkes

Eleni Mullins  
*Just Who Will You Be?* by Maria Shriver

Myshna Napier  
*Call of the Wild* by Jack London

Derek Nelson-South Charleston H.S.  
*Eldest* by Christopher Paolini

Name Withheld-Buckhannon-Upshur H.S.  
*The Oedipus Cycle* by Freedom Writers

Name Withheld-Capital H.S.  
*Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury

Gina Paugh-Notre Dame H.S.  
*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* by J.K. Rowling

Kenneth Redillas-South Charleston H.S.  
*Tuesdays With Morrie* by Mitch Albom

Antonio Sanchez-Musselman H.S.  
*A Message to Garcia* by Elbert Hubbard

Cole Seckman-Magnolia H.S.  
*Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls

Samantha Shimer-Wirt Co. H.S.  
*Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher

Russell Short-Robert C. Byrd H.S.  
*Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen

Kirston Smith-Nicholas County H.S.  
*The Holy Bible* by Various Authors

Name Withheld-Wirt County H.S.  
*The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton

## Level III-Notable Mentions continued

April Spencer-Richwood H.S.  
*Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller

Zach Willhoite-Magnolia H.S.  
*Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls

Taylor Stamey-Musselman H.S.  
*Graceling* by Kristin Cashore

Rachel Williams-South Charleston H.S.  
*Seventeenth Summer* by Maureen Daly

Name Withheld-South Charleston H.S.  
*Just Listen* by Sarah Nessen

Kayla Wimmer-Princeton H.S.  
*Plain Truth* by Jodi Picoult

Name Withheld-Robert C. Byrd H.S.  
*The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde

Eric Young-Wirt County H.S.  
*Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen

Name Withheld-Wirt County H.S.  
*A Child Called "It"* by David Pelzer

## JUDGES

BELINDA ANDERSON  
West Virginia Author  
Asbury, WV

PHYLLIS MOORE  
West Virginia Literary Scholar  
Clarksburg, WV

JAY COLE  
Chief of Staff-Office of the President  
West Virginia University  
Morgantown, WV

JUNE ROBERTSON  
Program Director, WVPASS  
Education and the Arts  
Charleston, WV

EVA MCGUIRE  
Director  
Craft Memorial Library  
Bluefield, WV

CHERYL HARSHMAN  
Director-Paul Elbin Library  
West Liberty State College  
West Liberty, WV

## *From the Judges...*

### **Level I**

Belinda Anderson

Books change kids in ways that Tweeting and texting never can.

Imagine a book that has the power to make sixth-grader Sinead Tobin write, "I'm glad that you wrote that book because it opened my eyes to the world that African American people lived in back then. I'm glad that they fought back with people like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. If it weren't for them, we might still live in a world full of prejudice and people judging others based on the color their skin." Fifth-grader Mckenzi Olonko wrote to another author, "Your book taught me how important it is to be brave, helpful, and trustworthy to family and friends or anybody in need." Anna Dyer, a sixth-grader, wrote how a book helped her through a stressful time and "brought great joy to my life." Amanda Ervin, another sixth-grader, thanked an author for writing a story that "helped me through the last year when my cousin died. ... to know that someone went through the same experience that I did helped me. ... I just kept reading the story over and over again."

Novels about vampires and werewolves might seem like simple entertainment, but sixth-grader Shelby Morris found consolation in a character who, just like her, had to start a new school. And even a little spider named Charlotte can inspire a child: "Charlotte is there to do what needs to be done," Ashley Burger wrote. "I want to be a person just like Charlotte."

In an age when kids are glued to game consoles, imagine a book that could transform a fourth-grader: "I did not care about wildlife, but now I do," Savannah Ward wrote. "Now I go outside ... I like to go in the yard now." Lilliann Welch, another fourth-grader, showed amazing wisdom when she wrote that a book "helped me realize that there are people who may not be nice or kind to animals. There may be a reason for that, and if you take the time to understand them they may need your help, too." Sara Kush, a 9-year-old, revealed that she was making better grades because she was reading more.

Entertaining, comforting, life changing – that's the power of books.

## *From the Teachers...*

### **Level III**

April Petrovsky-Wirt County H.S.

I LOVE THIS TIME OF YEAR! Letters About Literature is such an awesome writing opportunity; I will use this prompt until I retire. Most students know immediately who they will write to and others "think" they can't possibly write a letter to an author. Then we brainstorm about possible authors and they have trouble deciding on one.

I appreciate the opportunity you provide for students to write letters to authors and reflect on books they have read. Students now recommend books for me to read, and I value their opinions. I'm glad you have to judge these letters and not me!

### **Level II**

Cynthia Garcia-Fairmont Catholic School

...I want to thank you again for this contest. I think it's a wonderful contest; it helps kids focus on the idea of what reading does for them and reminds them of the deep connections they can make with characters and ideas from books. We do this contest every year, and I think I would give them this assignment even if there were no contest, because I like the way it makes students think.

We really enjoy reading the essays on the web site and seeing what books students write about. I've used the material on the website quite extensively, and I think it is very helpful. This contest gives teachers so much valuable material to work with...

### **Level I**

Judy Hansen-Mercer School

...I teach a small group of fourth and fifth grade students who are accelerated in Reading/Language Arts. Although they are voracious readers, they often make no personal connection to the novels they read. This assignment forces them to react and respond. I truly believe that from this point on in their readings, they will look for the "aha" moment to which they can relate....

## From the Author...



Fran Cannon Slayton  
Author

2011 Letters About Literature  
Guest Speaker

## Biography...

Fran Cannon Slayton spent her childhood growing up in Manassas and Haymarket, Virginia. She was a mean unicycle rider and pogo stick hopper, and prided herself as an all-around terror on the kickball field. Other favorite pastimes included exploding caps (with or without the use of a magnifying glass), catching salamanders with her bare hands, and using them as bait when she went fishing.

In high school she played first trumpet in the Bishop Ireton-Saint Mary's Academy Symphonic Wind Ensemble, and lettered in four varsity sports (soccer, basketball, softball and field hockey – goalies rule!). In college she went to the Junior Olympics in fencing, played in the Award Winning Virginia Fighting Cavalier Indoor/Outdoor Precision? Marching Pep Band and Chowder Society Review Unlimited!!!, and graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Virginia with a double distinguished major in Psychology and Religious Studies.

After getting married to her college sweetheart and working on Capitol Hill for a couple of years, she went back to UVA's Law School where she set a personal record by playing on six different softball teams in one single semester. After law school Fran became a prosecutor, specializing in child sex abuse cases, and then went on to become a legal publisher and mild-mannered title insurance agency owner. After her daughter was born, Fran became a stay-at-home mom ("the best job ever"), author, and part-time singer/trumpet player in a rock and roll cover band.

### **You're a Virginian - what made you write about the state of West Virginia?**

I'm a first generation Virginian. But my mother and father, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and most of my cousins are all from the wild, wonderful state of West Virginia. Although I love my home state, West Virginia holds a very special place in my heart because of my frequent visits there when I was a child.

### **Is the setting in *When the Whistle Blows* - the town of Rowlesburg - a real place?**

You bet it is! And it's beautiful. It's where my father grew up. But sadly, when the train engines switched from steam to diesel in the 1940's and 50's, many jobs in Rowlesburg were lost forever - as they were in many railroading towns across America. And in 1985 a devastating flood swept through the town, taking with it many houses, memories, hopes, and tears. But although it's seen hard times, Rowlesburg is a tough old girl. She'll be around for a long, long time.

### **You're not old enough to have experienced the 1940's first hand - how did you research the era?**

Thank you for noticing how not old I am! Just like Jimmy, the main character in *When the Whistle Blows*, I guess you could say railroading is sort of in my blood. Not quite the same way as it's in Jimmy's blood - for him, the railroad is everything, and it's grounded in his everyday world. For me, it's more in the ether - a part of my family history that's always just been there; a part of Rowlesburg that I have always loved, but missed out on because I was too young to remember how it used to be. Writing this book helped me discover the Rowlesburg - and the steam engines - that I missed out on. It helped me connect with a grandfather and uncle I never knew. And I was able to do it all because my father, uncles, aunts and cousins were willing to share some of their wonderful memories with me. So a little advice to the elders: share your stories with the kids and grandkids. And a little advice to the kids: listen and wonder and make up your own truth from it all!

Information about the author is from her website: <http://francannonslayton.com>

Write about it...

Autographs...

Attach souvenir program...

*Although Letters About Literature honors students, we applaud*

## Parents and Teachers

*for the support and encouragement given to these developing writers.*

*Without your contributions and direction,*

*many of these letter writers would have remained undiscovered.*

*Thanks to all who participated not only this year, but also in years past.*

*For future competitions and news regarding  
the programs and events sponsored by*

### West Virginia Center for the Book,

*please visit our website at [www.wvcenterforthebook.org](http://www.wvcenterforthebook.org).*

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