

Centennial State Libraries Online

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New Study Shows Impact of School Libraries, Librarians, on Students

by Bonnie McCune, Public Relations Consultant, <mccune_b@cde.state.co.us>

Educators and parents agree children need good skills to succeed in school. But how do they gain these skills? A new study shows that strong library media programs are an important component.

AHow School Librarians Help Kids Achieve Standards-the Second Colorado Study,@just released by the Library Research Service of the Colorado State Library, Colorado Department of Education, demonstrates that student scores on standardized tests are 10 to 18 percent higher at schools with outstanding library media programs and staff.

Deputy Commission of Education Dick Elmer said, AWe are beginning to isolate data which enables us to determine the factors that contribute to higher student achievement on the CSAP (Colorado Student Assessment Program) test. I've always believed school libraries play a critical role in successful teaching. I'm not surprised they contribute to higher CSAP scores.@

The study found that CSAP reading scores are higher in schools whose library media programs are better staffed, stocked, and funded, and where library media specialists play a leadership role in their schools, collaborate with classroom teachers in the design and delivery of instruction, and utilize computer networks to extend the reach of the library media center throughout the school.

School library media specialists who are leaders meet regularly with their principals, serve with teachers on standards and curriculum committees, and meet regularly with their own staff.

Collaborative library media specialists provide in-service training and planning assistance to teachers as well as deliver information literacy instruction to students.

AHi-tech@library media programs utilize local or wide-area networks to make information resources available to students and teachers in classrooms, labs, offices-wherever learning is taking place.

The research took into consideration school differences such as district expenditures per pupil, teacher/pupil ratio, and community differences such as racial/ethnic and income demographics. The relationship between library media factors and test scores is not explained away by other school or community conditions.

The study was a follow-up to a 1993 study. In 1993, the Colorado State Library published AThe Impact of School Library Media Centers on Academic Achievement.@This first study demonstrated that quality library media programs led to higher student test scores. The replication and expansion of the study in 1999 also looked at Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) scores.

It corroborates the original findings as well as evaluating the role of the school librarian media specialist and the relationship between better school library services and better student performance. Similar recent studies for Alaska and Pennsylvania also support these findings. The study was conducted by the Colorado State Library and the University of Denver Library & Information Services Department.

For information on the study, contact Keith Curry Lance or Marcia J. Rodney, 303/866-6906, fax 303/866-6940, email <conner_1@cde.state.co.us>. Copies are available via interlibrary loan from state publications depository libraries statewide. For a variety of documents related to the study, visit the Internet at <http://www.lrs.org>. The University of Denver Library & Information Services Department will publish the complete study shortly through Hi Willow Publishing, P O Box 720400, San Jose, CA 95172-0400, 800/873-3043; <http://www.lmcsource.com>.

From the State Library

by Nancy M. Bolt, State Librarian, <nbolt@csn.net>

The Colorado State Library, the Colorado Council for Library Development (CCLD), and the Resource Sharing Board (RSB) have just completed our annual LSTA decision making process. You may or may not recall the complicated, but efficient, process we have put in place to decide how to spend our federal dollars.

When the Library Service and *Construction* Act became the Library Service and *Technology* Act, our advisory bodies recommended, and the State Library agreed, that we would use the majority of the money for large projects that reach many libraries or demonstrate an important aspect of library service. A smaller amount of money is allocated for local needs grants.

Statewide grants are submitted first to the State Library, then they are assigned to either CCLD or RSB for a preliminary critique. After revisions are made by the applicant, the projects go to a Stewardship Committee, composed of representatives from CCLD and RSB, a System Director, and me, the State Librarian.

This year we received five applications for statewide grants, of which four were recommended for funding to the Commissioner of Education. I'm very excited about the four grants and what they can accomplish.

FOUR FUNDED PROJECTS

Power Libraries

StewCom, as we affectionately call it, recommended a third year of funding for the Power Libraries grant. In past years, the focus has been on pairing High Performance Libraries with Mini-grant libraries, sending teams of a school librarian, a principal, and a teacher from a school trying to improve its library to a school with an established quality library. This year that model will continue

with some new twists. The two main goals this year are:

- Teach library media specialists and teachers how to collaborate and align information literacy with content standards through instruction by pairing high performance libraries with mini-grant libraries.
- Develop awareness among school administrators and teachers about the library media program's role in improving student academic growth.

New this year, the project will hire a trained staff developer to work with staff in pilot schools and to do workshops for school librarians, principals, and teachers on how to plan and maintain successful library media programs. The effort to build up collections in mini-grant schools will continue.

Keith Lance's exciting study (profiled in the April issue of *Centennial State Libraries Online*) tells us that leadership of the school librarian in the school is a critical factor in the success of the school library in the school environment. One of the foci of this project is to build that leadership.

State Wide Databases

A second project is the third year of funding for the Statewide Databases project. In the past, this grant has subsidized the FirstSearch contract statewide and provided first year funding for small school and public libraries. Thomas Powell has wandered around the state providing training in how to use FirstSearch at System retreats and one-on-one in a local library. Best of all, Tom is available to return to a library to help staff solve problems they encountered when they tried to use First Search on their own.

This second year of funding continues the training activities of Tom Powell, but switches the focus from FirstSearch to databases to be selected that meet specific needs of school and small public libraries. Grants for first year funding of subscriptions for libraries will still be available in the hope that the library will fund its own subscription in year two.

Historic Newspapers in Digital Times

This project will explore digitizing, indexing, copyright, and other issues relating to historic Colorado newspapers, and how to make those valuable resources accessible over the Internet to students, researchers, and other potential users. This project will serve as a research project to determine the feasibility and practicality of digitizing historic newspapers. These present particular challenges in digitization because of the varied and unusual type faces used. What is learned from this project will assist other libraries in defining the best methods of preserving local historic newspapers, the copyright issues involved, and the best methods for indexing the information in these historic papers. The project will work with the Pitkin County schools to incorporate the digitized historic newspapers into the curriculum in support of the content standards.

Resource Sharing System for ACLIN (ILL)

When I first came to Colorado to be State Librarian, I was told there were two things people wanted from a statewide automated network: they wanted global search of CARL (then prevalent in Colorado) and an ILL subsystem that didn't rely totally on OCLC. When we started ACLIN, I was told there were two things people wanted: a global search of all databases, regardless if the library was using CARL or Follett or some other system and an ILL subsystem.

It's been a long time coming, partly because the software we needed to accomplish these two functions literally did not exist. Finally with a Z39.50 national standard and OCLC Site Search software, we can finally accomplish global search (now called Abroadcast search@ for reasons I've never fully understood.) By the time you read this, you should be seeing the new ACLIN interface that allows you to actually enter the title of a book or a subject request and be able to search many libraries at once. But I digress.

With broadcast search in place, our new Network and Resource Sharing Director, Brenda Bailey, turned her attention to the ILL problem. Again, it is only recently that software exists to do what we want it to do. StewCom recommended funding to purchase and implement ILL software on the new ACLIN network. Increased state funding this year (\$70,000 added to the base) will pay the ongoing subscriptions for the Site Search and ILL software we purchase.

LSTA Evaluation

LSTA comes with a lot less paperwork than the old LSCA did. Instead of an annual plan each year, we only submit one five-year LSTA long-range plan. We do a shortened annual report that basically says how we spent the money. Our federal agency, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), only asks that we do a comprehensive evaluation after five years to show the impact of the federal dollars we have spent.

StewCom also allocated funds to get ready for the five year evaluation. We know that our investment of LSTA funds have had a positive impact on libraries in Colorado. The evaluation will prove it.

Watch next month for a list of the local needs projects that have been funded.

Corraling the West Through the Internet: Western Collaborative on Digitization Explored

by *Bonnie McCune, Public Relations Consultant*, <mccune_b@cde.state.co.us>

Leaders from cultural and educational institutions met recently in Denver to discuss access to cultural resources of the West. Representatives from state libraries, research universities, major museums, historical societies, and archives in 17 Western states addressed the concept of a regional collaborative to increase access to institutional collections and unique resources through digitization. The Colorado State Library, the Colorado Digitization Project, and the Bibliographic Center for Research (BCR) were the hosts of the Denver session.

"Many of the subject areas that libraries, archives, museums, and historical societies cover are of interest to people in all the western states. Increasing awareness of and access to these resources will benefit all of us," commented Nancy Bolt, Colorado State Librarian.

Small group discussions identified goals for the collaborative:

- *expand people's ability to use and interpret the new and different information available in digital format;
- * reduce or eliminate barriers to access, including geographic, physical, cultural, and gender barriers;
- * help people gain a better understanding of our common heritage and its role in influencing our future;
- * expand the user base for these special collections and unique resources; and
- * increase access to the resources, while preserving the original item.

Participants will establish several working groups to consider issues to provide multi-state, multi-institutional access to collections. Working groups plan to consider identification of collections at participating institutions, standards, legal and intellectual property issues, and structure of the collaborative.

"Libraries, archives, museums, and historical societies can play a critical role in increasing awareness and use of resources if we can identify ways to provide access across multiple states and diverse institutions. With the number of digitization initiatives already underway in the West, we have a good start. Now we have to see if by working together we can achieve the broadest possible access desired," concluded Sarah Michalak, University Librarian, University of Utah.

The group agreed to meet again this fall in Salt Lake City. The Colorado State Library has established a listserv for the project. Those interested can subscribe to the list by sending a message to majordomo@aclin.org that reads <subscribe westdigi>.

For more information on the project, contact Liz Bishoff, Project Director, Colorado Digitization Project, <bishoffl@concentric.net>, or Brenda Bailey, Director of Networking and Resource Sharing at the Colorado State Library, <bailey_b@cde.state.co.us>.

Prison Librarian Helps Families Connect and Learn to Read

Joyce Attebery, Librarian at the Four Mile Correctional Center Library in Canon City, knows that reading inspires growth in all areas of a child's life, whether spiritual, emotional, intellectual, or social. Attebery, in conjunction with the Prison Fellowship Ministries, developed a program to help bridge the gap between parent and child during the time of incarceration, and help the children learn to read.

Four Mile Correctional Center Library serves a population of approximately 500 male prison inmates. Some of those inmates are parents who have infrequent contact with their children. The program encourages fathers or mothers who are inmates to record a book on tape and send the tape and a copy of the book to their child.

Volunteer coaches help parents choose the story and practice reading, with an emphasis on reading slowly and with expression, varying the tone of their voice, and reading from the heart.

The program relies on monetary donations or donations of books and tapes from church groups, booksellers, publishers, and business. Parents are responsible only for the postage.

If you'd like to make a monetary contribution, send it to: Read to the Children Program, c/o Tony & Nadine Mahathey, 222 Arnold Ln., Colorado Springs, CO 80904.

To donate books and tapes, contact Joyce Attebery for suggested titles at (719)269-5388, ext. 3339.

Print-Disabled Kids Can Participate in Summer Reading

by Bonnie McCune, Public Relations Consultant, <mccune_b@cde.state.co.us>

The Colorado Talking Book Library (CTBL) has a Summer Reading Program for print-handicapped kids throughout Colorado. This program can work with other libraries=programs for these special-needs children, or as a stand-alone.

The exciting news this summer is that youngsters who read at least 18 hours in talking books, large print, or Braille will win the CTBL's version of an AOscar@called the ALibbys.@The statuette looks similar to the real thing and will designate each child who becomes a ACTBL Star Reader.@(Thanks to Moleville.com for making these incentives possible.)

Please spread the word to kids who need or already use the CTBL services. Children need to be medically certified as blind, visually or physically handicapped, or reading-disabled. The application is on the Web site at <www.cde.state.co.us/cdelib/ctbl.htm>. Fliers are also available for promotional purposes by calling 303/727-9277, <gross_1@cde.state.co.us>.

Note These Dates and Celebrate

by Bonnie McCune, Public Relations Consultant, <mccune_b@cde.state.co.us>

Capitalize on national promotions to commemorate the joy of reading. Some upcoming celebrations include:

September

- Library Card Sign-up Month
- Literacy Month
- International Literacy Day (8th)
- Banned Books Week (23rd-30th)

October

- Teen Read Week (15th-21st)

November

- National Family Literacy Day (1st)

National Young Readers Day (8th)
National Children's Book Week (13th-19th)
January
National Book Month

March
Small Press Month
Read Across America (2nd)

April
National Poetry Month
National Library Week (1st-7th)
Week of the Young Child (1st-7th)
International Children's Book Day (2nd)
World Book and Copyright Day (23rd)
Día de los Niños / Día de Los Libros (27th)

Valuable Resources for Seniors and Their Families

by Bonnie McCune, Public Relations Consultant, <mccune_b@cde.state.co.us>

The State Publications Library has prepared a list of selected resources for senior citizens. These include Web sites linked through the Colorado State government on issues ranging from consumer fraud protection to how to select an assisted living facility as well as print publications available from the State Publications Library. The list is available to downloading at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/download/pdf/seniors.pdf>, or contact the State Publications Office, 303/866-6725, <crocker_m@cde.state.co.us>.

Library News

High Plains Regional Library Service System has revised its Web site. They invite Web users and library staff to take a look at <http://www.highplains.org/>. Their goal is to make the site a real communications forum for their member libraries, and to also help promote things that partner RLSS, libraries, and organizations across the state are doing.

Lizbeth Bishoff of the **Bishoff Group in Evergreen** was elected treasurer of ALA for a four-year term beginning in July 2000.

Bishoff owns the Bishoff Group, a management consulting firm specializing in libraries and library-related organizations. She is currently the project director of the **Colorado Digitization Project**, a statewide collaborative involving Colorado's libraries, museums, archives, and historical societies, whose goal is to increase access to special collections. Bishoff is a member of the ALA Executive Board and ALA's Budget Analysis and Review Committee. She has been an ALA Council

member since 1994. From 1992-93, she served as president of the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services, a division of ALA.

"I'm very pleased to have been elected treasurer of the American Library Association," said Bishoff. "It is a very exciting time for libraries and ALA. We are important players in the global information community working to promote the role of libraries and librarians, promote the values of the democracy and intellectual freedom, and create an environment where librarians and others working with libraries can continue to learn and grow. In order for ALA to assure this continued role, the association must remain financially strong. As treasurer, I will work with members, leaders and staff to maintain our financial strength."

Boulder Public Library was named a winner of the American Library Association (ALA) Office for Literacy and Outreach Services (OLOS) 2000 Diversity Fair.

The Diversity Fair celebrates the extraordinary examples of diversity in America's libraries and demonstrates possibilities for other libraries in search of diversity-in-action ideas. Boulder Public Library won in the **People Discriminated Against** category.

Participants will share their diversity initiatives in presentations with conferees, utilizing a poster session/table talk format during the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago.

Letters About Literature Winning Essays

Letters About Literature is an annual national student writing contest administered by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress and the Weekly Reader Corporation. This program focuses on the emotional side of reading. In this competition, students are invited to write an essay in the form of a letter to an author about how the author's book had an impact on the child's life. National and statewide winners are selected.

The concept for Letters About Literature is based on research showing that students who read write better, and students who write read more. Nearly 20,000 fourth through twelfth grade students enter this competition annually. In 1999, approximately 800 Colorado students entered. The winning Colorado essays are published here. The essays were judged at two levels, Level I (grades 4 through 7) and Level II (grades 8 through 12).

LEVEL I - Grades 4-5-6-7

FIRST PRIZE

December 14, 1999

Dear Mr. London,

Reading your book *The Call of the Wild* made me think of team players, leadership, friendship

and the brutality in our world.

The main character, Buck, was a team player. He fought for leadership. He was loyal to his team and to his masters. He showed obedience and lived with their discipline. As a person, I know that sometimes you have to fight for causes you believe in. Team players work together to get things done faster or to win a game or a race. Sometimes I need to be loyal to my soccer team and give up other activities. As a team player I need to obey my coach and play hard with the team. Without teamwork we don't get much accomplished.

Friendship was important to Buck. Buck's best friend was John Thorton his last owner. John always took care of Buck and believed in him too. Friendship is important to me because without friends life would be miserable. Friends shouldn't hurt each other and should always be nice to each other. John Thorton was always good to Buck and they always worked together.

I was amazed at the brutality between the dogs and the way people treated their dogs in your story. When Buck killed Spitz I thought of the brutality in our world. There are murders, beatings, tortures, slavery, and abusive people hurting others daily. People act like animals. Obviously brutality hasn't changed since the time you wrote your book until now.

Your book has opened my eyes to the ways of animals. I never thought of dogs as wild animals. I also see that people can act viciously. But life is not all cruelty. Things can be good with friendship and teamwork. I really enjoyed reading your book.

Your biggest fan,
Brad Shepard
Fifth Grade. Teacher: Ms. Jean Murray
Ponderosa Elementary School
Aurora, Colorado

SECOND PRIZE

December 16, 1999

Dear Mrs. Hamm,

Although I have read many books, Go for the Goal had had the greatest impact on my life. I think your book encourages young girls to get active in sports, and setting goals for yourself are meant to be achieved. Many young soccer players like myself, look up to you and want to be just like you. Reading this book made me realize that everybody has unique features about themselves, and we all play the game of soccer differently.

When I step onto the soccer field, I know right away that I will do my best while playing the sport I love. The playing tips you gave have improved my game of soccer tremendously. I strongly feel that your book also teaches young girls that soccer is like an obstacle in life. Coming upon a defender is like forgetting your homework, and making you work harder to get through the situation, or around the defender. Scoring a goal is like getting an A on a test, or makes you do extra chores around the house because you are in a good mood.

Since I have been playing soccer since I was 5 and now I'm 12, I am very serious about it.

Becoming a better player on the field, and growing closer with my teammates has really made me very interested in reading how your soccer career started out. I think when girls read you're [sic] about your soccer history, they want their soccer career to be just like yours. However, I think that each person has their own life to live, and they should take opportunities as they come, and don't be afraid to dream about your future.

There is never a game where I don't make a mistake. Reading stories about you and other players on the National team making mistakes made me relax more. Since I am leading scorer on my team, a lot of pressure is put onto my shoulders when I go one on one with a defender or a goalie.

When I do make a mistake, I feel like a [sic] let a good opportunity to score go by. You teach girls that nobody is perfect, and everybody makes mistakes. I also learned that mistakes are meant to happen, and it is only part of the game. This book inspired me to practice more so that I will become as good as you.

In conclusion, reading this book has improved my soccer skills, and taught me many lessons about life that I will run into throughout my soccer career. It taught me never to give up, and to set a goal for yourself. I will never forget what a great impact this book has had on my life. These everlasting memories of the lessons, and soccer tips this book has given me, will never be forgotten.

Sincerely,
Amanda Kafer
Sixth Grade Teacher: Ms. Katie Gibbon
Erie Middle School

THIRD PRIZE

Dear Roald Dahl,

Your book, Matilda, has truly meant more to me than any other story that I have read. Most importantly, it changed the way I confronted problems.

I've learned so many lessons from Matilda. But the lesson that benefited me the most is acceptance of myself for who I am. It has helped me understand myself better and learn how to deal with situations that affect me. I've always expected perfection out of myself, and I've never understood exactly why. My parents have always supported me in everything that I've done, and they have never pressured me to be perfect. I've always felt like people depended on me to be successful in everything I attempt. I've always been pretty smart and have gotten good grades. That's why I thought that everything I did had to be outstanding for anyone to appreciate it. Like Matilda, I did have my enemies who made fun of my intelligence or the fact that I tried so hard. It might sound ridiculous, but I sometimes cried when I worked on a project or report. I was convinced that it was hopeless and terrible, even though I look back at it now and realize that my work was really good.

In fact, sometimes the desire for perfection overcame me to the point that I didn't think my best was anywhere close to good. This emotion didn't just confine itself to my schoolwork, but is also affected my social life, too. After soccer games, my friends and family would tell me I played good. But deep inside, I didn't feel like I made a contribution. If I thought of creating something artistic on my own, I would think the idea was stupid before anyone else could state their opinion about it. This problem followed me everywhere for a long time until I discovered Matilda. After reading Matilda, my whole

perspective changed. That's when I realized I wasn't alone and that there was someone who had similar problems to me. Even though it was a character in a book, it meant more than anything to realize that parts of this story were like versions of my life and problems I believed I had. Matilda was small, but smart enough to realize that she couldn't control what other people thought of her and that she needed to be comfortable with who she was. I began to realize that while you should always strive to be your best self and to do your best work, the most important thing is the effort that you put into things. You should always believe in yourself and all of the great things you can do when you think you can.

I think I became a better person and individual by reading this book. I have to admit I still battle with myself sometimes, but I'm very happy to say that I'm letting up on myself more each day. I have a lot to offer, even if I'm not perfect!!!

Sincerely,
Nicole Voss
Sixth Grade Teacher: Mrs. Jan McDonald
Lewis Palmer Middle School
Monument, CO

HONORABLE MENTION

Dear Mr. Terrell Davis,

TD Memories of Terrell Davis

A couple of months ago I was in the middle of something that was very confusing and very devastating. I had never experienced a death in my family. Now I think about my grandpa everyday and wonder why he had to die. When he died on October 4 he had suffered through almost three weeks in a coma.

I have known my grandpa all my life and miss him immensely everyday. He always had time for kids and loved all of his family. I always loved seeing him because he was so nice to us. Just like Terrell's father who was very strict on his children but loved them. Terrell, you loved being with your father and I enjoyed that same closeness.

When he died it hit me like a bomb. I was very upset inside and sometime couldn't concentrate on anything. Terrell, your dad's death was the same way. I know exactly how you felt. You inspired me, when I read this book, that no matter what life goes on and you have to live your life enjoying it with out somebody you care about.

Terrell you showed me what it is like to be in shape and to never give up. When you talked about your life and how you never gave up that told me to step it up a notch and do my hardest in everything I do. You had it really rough with your migrains when you were growing up. A lot of people doubted you as a kid and look at you now. I have always understood that I need to work my hardest in everything I do, but you helped me look at it with a different prospective. Now I can go out there and know that I did my best and not my second best.

I wasn't sure how to stay in shape, mind and body, until I read you book. It shows everyone what they can do to get in shape. Lifting weights, getting massages, and getting a lot of

sleep.

Thank you so much for giving people the story about your life and for giving me a new perspective on a lot of things in my life.

Your fan,
Cody Rushing
Sixth Grade. Teacher: Mrs. Jan McDonald
Lewis Palmer Middle School

HONORABLE MENTION

Literature Essay

By,

Lucy Bryan

[Dear Sharon Creech,]

In my classroom, I've always felt ignored by the teacher. It's not that he's not nice, he's one of the nicest people I know. It's because I'm not one of the best 5 students in the classroom, and so he doesn't really take me seriously. So I always feel invisible. I always thought that things could and would never ever change. That it was out of my control, and that it was really up to my teacher. Then I read *Chasing Red Bird*, and then I realized that it was in my control, and that it was up to me. After I read *Chasing Red Bird* I understood not that it was in my control, but how I could change, and make my teacher take notice of me. And so I did. I changed and became a very good student, and had a whole [sic] new reputation about my-self [sic]. Not only was it good to get paid attention to, but I felt a whole [sic] lot better about my-self [sic] and my work. I was really a whole new person.

But it wasn't just the good grades, or the attention, and it wasn't really anything [sic] to do with school that really helped me learn about my-self [sic] needs. In *Chasing Red Bird* Zinnie (Zinnia) felt that she needed [sic] to be alone to think out her problems. I had never done that before, well not really. I am a big people person. I love to talk to people, listen to people, and just be with people.

So I spent all my day with my friends. At school on weekdays, and at the mall and parks on the weekends. But after I read *Chasing Red Bird*, I realized what my life was missing; my time. I was around people so much that I didn't have any time to just sit and think. Think about the future, where I want to live, what I want to do for a living, if I wanted to marry, having kids. So I took a break.

After school I would go upstairs and just relax and think. And I after awhile I started keeping a diary. I felt much more relaxed after this, and a little more confident and stronger. I also became [sic] to appreciate my-self more after this.

Chasing Red Bird inspired me to spend time with mother nature. It made me realize that mother nature is a good place to just sit and think about life, and the problems of life. It's a calming place to be. Quiet and soothing. And just like in *Chasing Red Bird*, I started my own little project in nature. Of course it wasn't like a big 20 mile trail, it was something that I just liked to do. Something that I didn't have to concentrate on very much on; so I could still think. What I did was I would walk on our property, in the mountains, not on a trail, but in the meadows and or forest.

Some times I would look for animals, deer, beavers, foxes. But it helped to relax.

So, this is just how Chasing Red Bird affected and helped to change my life; teaching me that I have the power to make things happen, helped me to find and figure out my self-needs, and inspired me to relax and spend time in the outdoors. That is why I loved and immensely enjoyed Chasing Red Bird!

Thank you for taking time to read and consider my Literature Essay.

Weaver

Sixth Grade. Teacher:Mr. Brian Michael

Rick's Center
Denver, Colorado

HONORABLE MENTION

Dear Jon Krakauer,

When I finish reading a good book there is a strange sort of serenity that falls across the room and sends a shiver down my back. Once I read the last paragraph in your book Into Thin Air that serenity touched my heart and I went into deep thought.

I can't imagine being in so much misery that you would want to die. But you should be very thankful you didn't die. Your family and friends would have been devastated. My Grandmother died just this summer. My whole family was heart broken. My brother couldn't stop crying.

Your book made those awful memories come back. But it made me think, you coped with all the deaths of your friends, so I should be able to live my life now and not in the past with the weight of my Grandmother's death on my shoulders. Of course I will always have her warm and loving memory in my heart. But I should stop grieving about her sorrowful death.

Thank you for inspiring me to let some of the grief out and start over rebuilding fond memories to help block out some of the hurt.

I will never forget the tragedy that occurred that stormy night or the courageous people that died. Your book has truly inspired me to rebuild my memories and get rid of the grief. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Brittany Keeler

Sixth Grade. Teacher: Mrs. Jan McDonald
Monument, CO

HONORABLE MENTION

Dear Robin Cook,

Your book *Toxin* was one of the best books I have ever read. *Toxin* Really changed my life and I really connected with the story and the character, Kim.

It made me think long and hard about my future and what I wanted to be. I was thinking of becoming a professional athlete but I realized that the dream is not very realistic. After reading *Toxin* I now want to be a heart surgeon. Right now I am working very hard in school so I can get a scholarship to Stanford to be a heart surgeon or a doctor of some sort.

This book also made me think of how horrible *E. coli* really is, and how many people die from it. I used to think that *E. coli* was something like a bad stomach flu. This book might have saved my life because I used to think nothing of eating a rare hamburger. Now I always check to see if the hamburger is not as well cooked as it should be.

I also connected with Kim's persistence. When his daughter died of *E. coli*, he did everything in his power to prevent this from happening any more. When my grandmother died, I felt the same way. No one should ever go through what she did. I tried to find out everything I could about lung cancer. When I read most of the things I could find in the library, I went to book stores. I found out that she probably got lung cancer from smoking. I vowed never to smoke.

Sincerely,
Clint Cote
Sixth Grade. Teacher: Mrs. Jan McDonald
Lewis Palmer Middle School
Monument, CO

LEVEL II - Grades 8-9-10-11-12

FIRST PRIZE

Dear Mrs. Esquivel,

I do not live in Mexico, am unfamiliar with Latin American culture, and speak not a word of Spanish. Who would have guessed that in a book which relies heavily on all of these ingredients, I would discover inspiration so personal and powerful as to change the course of my life= I believe that some stories are universal because they are created not in the head, but in the heart. They touch audiences by igniting their inner candles. Your novel exemplifies the virtues of writing from the heart. It operates on a level of pure emotion, and inspires the human spirit.

My first experience with the kitchen took place when I was four years old. I wandered in, climbed up on the counter and opened a cabinet at random. I began to shut the door, but I was struck by an aroma both complex and beautiful. Intrigued, I reopened the cabinet and peered inside. Before my eyes was an entire world, containing its own memories and possibilities—and that smell! Just then my mother walked in and asked what I was doing with my head in the spice cabinet. Since then, I have wanted to be a chef, exploring the potential of the world I discovered that day. As I saw it,

cooking was an art form, a language of deep emotions and memories.

One year, some relatives offered a subscription to a magazine for my birthday. Without hesitation, I selected *Gourmet*. In each issue I read about the newest restaurants in New York and Paris and the revolutionizing of the frontier of modern cuisine. I pictured myself among them. Later that year I had my Bat-mitzvah. Since this is a ceremony which traditionally marks the beginning of adult life, everyone was asking me what I wanted to be. Easy question, right? But I began to notice that my family, particularly my father got this look on his face every time I spoke about attending culinary school or opening a restaurant. It was like he knew something I didn't that he would, regrettably [sic], have to tell me someday. Perhaps Tita saw such a look on mama Elena's face the first time she revealed her love for Pedro.

The next day I asked him about his attitude. After a moment, he started telling me about how he didn't want me to >waste my potential=. What was he talking about? >I'm not going to,= I told him, >I'm going to be a chef.= He shook his head. >I can't watch someone who could be something great=I just can't let you waste it in the back of a Denny's somewhere, cooking eggs for truck drivers at three in the morning.= I was taken aback. Denny's?! Truck drivers?! What about sculpting the face of the culinary world for the next millennium, what about New York, Paris? But the more I thought about it, maybe he was right. After all, how many people really made it to the top of any profession? Maybe I should try to have a >real career=, with business suits and briefcases and board meetings.

For a long time after that, I was unsure of who I wanted to be and what I was allowed to aspire to. I put cooking out of my mind and canceled *Gourmet*. I learned not to talk about the subtleties of cilantro, but the entrance requirements for Harvard. Then, one afternoon, my mom saw the film version of *Like Water for Chocolate* and came home raving about it. I was wary, convinced that my love of the kitchen was a weakness that should not be indulged. Several weeks passed and the whole idea was forgotten until I passed a bookshop where the new English version of the novel was on display. I couldn't resist. I opened to page one and began to read.

>The trouble with crying over an onion is that once the chopping gets started and the tears begin to well up, the next thing you know you just can't stop. I don't know if that's ever happened to you, but I have to confess it's happened to me, many times (p.1).= Yes, I thought, it has happened to me, I know exactly that feeling. I was transfixed, and could hardly look up from the book long enough to buy it. Like Tita, I spent much of my childhood in the kitchen. Reading about the passion in her life and how she expressed it through cooking reminded me of my love for the kitchen. The contrast between working in a greasy diner and creating delicacies [sic] from the soul had never been more apparent. I began to see that while my father was right that I would never be happy in a dead end job, he was wrong because that had never been my goal.

Tita's story taught me that my own heart was worth listening to, my aspirations worth pursuing. Even in the face of someone as repressive and terrifying as Mama Elena, she found that without being courageous enough to follow her true passions, her life would be incomplete. Her struggle struck a chord in me. I watched as she wavered between what she was >supposed= to do and the inner truth which manifested itself throughout her life. Inspired, I renewed my *Gourmet* subscription, and along with it my dreams. I confronted my father about his misconceptions and explained to him that unless I did the things which would light my inner candles, I would go through life in darkness, no matter how much external glory surrounded me. Since then, he has become increasingly supportive of my culinary pursuits, in fact, we're going to visit culinary school together soon. So what about the novel? All I can say is >thank you.= It turned my life around. Whenever I doubt the direction my life is taking, I begin to read, and am reminded that while our heads are useful

navigators, we must let our hearts choose the destination.

Sincerely,
Julia Kirsch
Eleventh Grade. Teacher: Mr. Lettes
Heritage High School
Littleton, CO

FIRST PRIZE

Dear Dr. Seuss,

The summer before entering high school, I received various pep talks from my older sister, Lindsay. She wanted me to feel confident and unafraid as I started this new stage of my life. On one occasion, we sat down together with a pile of your books, one of her favorite sources of wisdom, and I prepared to learn the ways of the high school world. We opened up *The Sneetches*, and she proceeded to read me the simple yet profound story. >The day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches/And no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches.= Lindsay told me that high school would be filled with all kinds of different people; some tall, some short, some outgoing, some shy, some very smart, some not so bright. She explained that all those things become insignificant if you can learn that people are people, just like >Sneetches are Sneetches.= Whether someone is beautiful, talented, or neither doesn't matter at all. As I embarked on my journey to Arapahoe High School, I found her wisdom that stemmed from your book to be absolutely true. If you look hard enough, you can find the good in anyone. >Off again! On again! In again! Out again! Through the machines they raced round and about again!= High school can be a pretty crazy place with so many kids trying to discover who they really are, but your story helped me to make sense of the chaos. Understanding the senselessness of the race to get a star on your belly has served me well, because it puts things like popularity, race, and social status aside. I have learned to look past those exterior distractions and focus instead, on others= hearts.

Also during my freshman year of high school, each student in our Bible study class constructed a special phrase or motto to focus on for the year. The purpose of the phrase, or >title= as we called it, was to help us concentrate on improving a trait or attitude in our lives. After making shirts which bore our mottos, we bravely wore them to school or some other public place to show our commitment to the title. Lindsay's shirt read simply, >Sneetches R Sneetches.= So this became her motto for the year; as she put it, >to accept everyone=stars or no stars, and love and serve them.= Lindsay was killed in a car accident that December. Since then, I have sat in Lindsay's special spot on the roof many times to read *The Sneetches* with her friends and mine. Partly it reminds us of her, and partly it reminds us of what she lived for. Though she died almost two years ago, her >Sneetches R Sneetches= attitude lives on in me and all those who knew her. On what would have been Lindsay's 19th birthday just a few days ago, some friends stopped by to bring us a few gifts, along with a homemade card printed on a copied page of *The Sneetches* [sic]. Two years after her death, your book is a living memorial to my sister, and the Sneetch stands as a symbol of brotherly love, and of a girl who showed it everyone around her. It is so easy to get caught up in the thick of thin things, but *The Sneetches* reminds me that how you treat people is what really matters in life. Just like the

Sneetches, if we can look past the »stars« that categorize us, we will see that deep in our hearts we are all the same. »No kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches.« Thanks for writing such a wonderful story!

Sincerely,
Emily Pond
Eleventh Grade. Teacher: Mrs. Boldman
Arapahoe High School
Englewood, CO

SECOND PRIZE

Dear Mark Twain,

Over my summer vacation, I decided to read your famous novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Before I opened the book, I regarded it with skepticism. It seemed too childish for a person my age. But I soon became engrossed in the experiences of Huckleberry and the rest of your characters. Although I had expected merely a children's adventure story, I discovered that your book dealt with a theme that affects me personally every day at home and at high school. I connected with Huck as his adventures exposed him to some of life's cruelties, as he struggled to become an honest person, and as he sought to find out what he valued the most in life.

When I was young, my life revolved around playtime and receiving privileges. I whined and cried and thought it was the end of the world whenever my mother refused to let me go out and play. But as I grew up, I encountered more and more real tragedies, and I learned that the world extended beyond my little kid games and catastrophes. In sixth grade my aunt died of cancer, and the news shocked me. I knew that people died all the time, but this fact had remained merely abstract until someone that I actually knew left the world. My grandmother's death last year also dealt me a major blow. We had been extremely close for as long as I could remember. As a little girl it had never occurred to me that we would one day have to say good-bye. Lately, the Columbine shootings changed my view of the world. Even though I did not attend the school, I had friends who did. The idea that two young adults could possess so much hate that they would take other kids' lives as well as their own horrified me. All of these recollections came to me as I read about Huck witnessing the violent deaths of Buck and his cousin. I could relate to his numb feeling of despair as he watched his friend die. Just like Huck, I came into contact with some harsh realities of life and found the need to adjust my views to fit these new experiences. I lost some of my idealism forever.

As a little girl, I could tell lies easily without any feelings of guilt. I believed that little lies could never hurt anyone, and that they became especially useful if they got me out of trouble. Like Huck, however, I matured and realized that one lie, no matter how small, could lead to a never-ending circle of lies and problems. Several times growing up I told »little« lies to make myself look better or to take the blame for something off myself. Those same »little« lies ended up either hurting someone I cared about or causing me more trouble than I would have had to deal with if I had just acted honestly. I admired Huck and his determination when he stated, »I got to tell the truth.« I know he fought hard against the urge to deny the truth several times near the end of the book, and I understood his struggle. He proved to me that more good eventually comes from telling the truth

than from taking the easy way out of tight situations. Since reading your novel, I have recommitted myself to honesty. No matter what the consequences, I know the truth carries more power than any lie ever could.

As I reviewed all of Huck's transformations during the course of the novel, I thought that his switch to nonconformity provided the most eye-opening lesson for me. Before I read about Huck and his incredible journey of self-discovery, I had always considered myself an independent person.

Then I encountered your amazing character and his resolution to trust only his own feelings and ideals instead of those of his society. Huck's momentous decision compelled me to think about myself and how I view the world. I realized that I had conformed to the ideals of society more than I had thought or wanted. I had tended to stereotype people, just as Huck originally stereotyped Jim.

Your novel inspired me to improve my behavior with this new outlook on life. I have decided to base my opinions of the people I see every day at high school only on my personal experiences with them instead of paying attention to gossip. I have resolved to live my life the way I want it, without influence from outside forces. The clothes I wear, the people I associate with, the activities I participate in, and the morals I uphold will only become *mine* when they come only from my personal opinions and first hand experiences.

Thank you so much for creating a character as intriguing and enlightening as Huckleberry Finn. Your insight into youthful struggles amazes me. Because of this wonderful story, I realize that every adolescent deals with the same challenges that I do, and that newfound knowledge makes it easier for me to approach my problems with confidence. I hope your novel will continue to affect many young people as positively as it has affected me. I know I will treasure Huckleberry Finn and its main character for years to come.

With Sincere Thanks,
Tamara Watts
Eleventh Grade
Teacher: Mrs. Boldman
Arapahoe High School
Englewood, CO

THIRD PRIZE

Ms. J.K. Rowling
c/o LAL 2000- Level II
King's College
The Graduate Reading Program
133 N. River Street
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18711

December 15, 1999

Dear Ms. Rowling,

My name is Mark Kohlepp, I am thirteen years old and in the eighth grade. I want to thank you for the wonderful book, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, and tell you how it has affected me and the way I view reading and writing.

After reading your first book, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, I noticed there were some residual side affects. I couldn't help reading the other two Harry Potter books: Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets and Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. I couldn't stop reading! Three weeks after I completed reading your three books, I had to read them again. Ms. Rowling, you have indirectly invited me to read other books and I have kindly taken that invitation.

Your books have had a profound effect on my just by my learning that authors can have an unexpected effect on society or a community. I've read that some churches think your books are about evil doings and that children should not be reading them. Some churches believe they are evil because it involves witchcraft and sorcery. Some schools and parents have voiced concerns. I have come to the conclusion that, yes, your books do involve witchcraft, but not in a harmful way. The witchcraft you write about is not intended to be evil in real life. It doesn't involve drinking blood or people using witchcraft as a religion. I believe you have written these books just for fun, not to be used as a way of life.

Additionally, your books have helped me understand why it is so important to have Freedom of Speech guaranteed to me by the First Amendment of the Constitution. Therefore, they were available to me to read because of your, the author's, right to have them published for public enjoyment. My Mom did not find the Harry Potter books offensive or subliminal for my age and allowed me to read them.

Mrs. Rowling, Harry Potter offered me an often needed break from the reality portrayed on TV's evening news. Because your books are very easy to get into, but very hard to get out of, they swept me away from all the Columbine problems. I believe Harry Potter took many children away from the Columbine news and perhaps accounts for some of the immediate success you have enjoyed as an author.

I've always enjoyed making up stories. Now that you've expanded my horizons for imagination, I am able to come up with even better stories than before. After reading your books, I really started to enjoy going to my literature class. I am better able to understand what my teacher means when she describes what the book meant to her and that books and stories are not always just to convey a plot--that they are trying to say something to the reader. When our teacher assigns us to read a book, I go home and I start on it right away. I no longer dread being assigned to do a book report. Last year, I did a career search paper for school and determined that I wanted to become an elementary school teacher and an author and I could easily do both with the same college degree. Your books have furthered my aspirations to be an author.

I think It's amazing that all three of your books, which are considered children's books, have been on the New York Time Best Sellers List at the same time for several weeks. I believe you may have set some sort of record in the publishing world. I saw you do a television interview and learned that Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone is being sold and read by children in other countries. You have

given me something in common with children in other lands.

There have been several newspaper and magazine articles published about the Harry Potter books. In reading these articles, I have learned adults and children are responsible for all three Potter books making and staying on the New York Times Best Sellers List. I have learned that when one author has three books on the Best Sellers List the other publishing houses grumble that one author should not be able to have three books on the Best Sellers List at one time. I have to ask, >Why not? From this I have discovered how competitive the publishing world can be.

Your books set me up for all kinds of feelings and emotions as I read them. You combined wizardry with monsters like werewolves, vampires, mummies and some other monsters which you created for the story. Some of these monsters scared me, some thrilled me, and some amused me. It did not matter what kind of monsters they were. All that mattered was that I enjoyed reading about them and their adventures.

Ms. Rowling, you have opened a door in my mind that has allowed me to be more creative and to not be afraid of using my imagination. In closing, I think it is interesting that you have written these books for children, but adults all over the country are reading and enjoying your books! My parents are reading your books. I am going to save each and every one of the Harry Potter books that you write so I can have something to pass down to my children. I want to share with them something that they can have as much fun with as I have had.

Thank you very much for your books and the impact they have had on me. I am patiently waiting for the fourth Harry Potter book to be released.

Sincerely,
Mark Allen Kohlepp
Eighth Grade Teacher: Ms. Susan Andrews
Develyn School
Golden, CO

PS: Indirectly, because I read the Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone and entered a literature essay contest, I was forced to learn the difference between affect and effect.

FOURTH PRIZE

Dear Elizabeth Koda-Callen,

I cannot thank you enough for giving me courage and hope. Your book, *The Good Luck Pony*, has occupied a place on my shelf for nearly ten years. It is not always easy showing bravery, especially as a young, naïve, inexperienced child. *The Good Luck Pony* teaches the lesson that bravery will not always come easily, but the rewards justify the struggle. Your book gives the gift of courage. Four years ago, I truly began to understand why you wrote this book. Just as the book says, >When I think of [it], I'm less afraid. [sic]

Midway through the sixth grade, I began to experience extreme pain in my lower ankle.

Thinking I just slightly injured it, I continued to play soccer and swim. Finally, when the pain became so unbearable, I agreed to visit the doctor. After several x-rays and an incredibly long time in the doctor's office, three men walked in and sat down. I sat in sheer silence as the doctors explained that a tumor in my ankle showed up on the x-rays. Tears began rolling out of my puffy eyes. I collapsed; both physically and mentally. My Mom took me home and I ran up to my room. I cried on my bed for at least an hour. For some unexplainable reason, my eyes wandered to my bookshelf where I saw *The Good Luck Pony*, which I had not read for years. I picked it up and began to read. Your book offered incredible solace that my family and friends could not. Just like the little girl who never wanted to ride the horse again, I almost gave up.

Over the next several months, doctors from across the country examined my x-rays and all gave the same diagnosis. It appeared that I had a cancerous cyst that started eating away at my bone. Chemotherapy and surgery became the topic of conversation far too many times. I lived in a state of depression and constant fear. At twelve years old, it can prove very difficult to visualize one's own mortality. I wanted to give up. I thought I might die. Even though the little girl certainly did not face death, she lived in fear. But, thanks to her mother, she began to regain her confidence in herself. Every time I picked up your book and read it, a little bit more confidence and hope became instilled in me. At a time when I felt I could trust no one, your book offered support. I could count on the fact that the little girl would overcome her fear. I decided that if this little girl could get back on that horse and face her fears, so could I. I had to.

My fear of what lay ahead began to diminish. I was no longer afraid to die. I tried to live every day to its fullest, because I never knew if I would see tomorrow. I may have exaggerated the seriousness, but for a twelve year old girl who had always lived a sheltered life, a confrontation with such a horrible situation proved traumatizing. Throughout the nearly year long ordeal, your book sat by my bed. When the pain became too much, physically and mentally, I opened *The Good Luck Pony* and began reading. It offered a sense of hope and trust in my family. Like the little girl, I began to open up to my parents. I had bottled up my feelings for so long, I had forgotten what it felt like to share my feelings. Just as the little girl, I used my parents as an emotional crutch. I truly don't believe that I would have opened up my feelings if I did not have your book to encourage me.

The morning that I had a pre-operation examination scheduled, I went up to my room and closed my door. I grabbed your book and began to read. I cried and prayed until we needed to leave. I was ready to face anything thrown my way. Call it luck or maybe the grace of God, but my surgeon opted at the last minute to take another x-ray of my ankle. When he didn't immediately return, instead of worrying like I would have done a year earlier, I remembered how much courage the little girl in the book displayed. I sat with my head and hopes high. Three doctors walked into the room just as they had one year earlier. But this time smiles radiated from their faces. The x-ray showed that my cyst had begun to shrink and did not appear to be cancerous. A million thoughts raced through my head. I didn't hear my parents or the doctors. All I heard were the tears of joy, the first I had cried in over a year, running down my cheek and landing on my crisp hospital gown. I literally saw my life flash before my eyes. Not what had already happened, but what would happen. For the first time in a year, I saw into my future and wanted to live. When I got home after a long night of celebration, I ran up to my room and clutched your book so tightly that my knuckles turned white. That night I slept with your book tucked under my pillow.

Ms. Koda-Callan, words cannot truly express how ingratiated [sic] I am to you. Four years after my ordeal ended, *The Good Luck Pony* still remains in the house. The book sits on my bookshelf next to Dickens and Steinbeck. Your simple children's book changed my life far more than

any classic novel possibly could. Everyday that I live, learn, and experience, I think of you and what your book has blessed me with. I would like to think I face the world with a new-found confidence that a scared twelve year old girl could not possibly be capable of. Both the little girl and I share something in common. We both got hurt, but with the help of courage and our families, we were able to face another day and truly live.

Sincerely,
Dana Litt
Eleventh Grade. Teacher: Mrs. Boldman
Arapahoe High School
Englewood, CO

HONORABLE MENTION

October 29, 1999

Ms. Sandra Cisneros:

I hope that I will be able to convey to you my high regard for your novel, *The House on Mango Street*; it greatly changed my perspective on life and on people around me. *The House on Mango Street* is an enlightening book that combines many different lessons and helps the reader to understand and put a correct perspective on many of the events that occur in the real world; it is a truly didactic story. When I began to read it, I did so because it was required in my English class; I finished it for myself.

The characteristic in your writing that impressed me the most is the simple wording throughout the book that successfully delivers a personal, inspiring and wise message of the importance of self knowledge and the necessity of action. In the beginning of the novel, Esperanza tells about her neighbors and culture and discusses herself. Throughout the narration, Esperanza summarizes the stories and emphasizes the lesson of hope, patience, and self-reliance that she learns gradually through her experiences. The story Esperanza tells of the neighbor, Marin, is an example of Esperanza's strong belief in self-reliance. "Marin, under the streetlight, dancing by herself, is singing the same song somewhere. I know. Is waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life (p.27). Through the diction used in this passage, one sees the hopelessness that Marin feels at her present state- she is off in her own dream world, and yet in her actual position at the same time.

Marin is a typical girl in Esperanza's neighborhood; she wants to belong in a different time and place, but she either does not know how to get there, or she does not have the strength to try. This passage is particularly significant in the representation of the basic theme of the novel- that of being self-sufficient and active in one's life. For Esperanza and for myself as well, this is important because it is the only way to truly live one's own life successfully and happily.

I feel as though Esperanza and I share many of the same ideals and beliefs. I cannot say that I am able to relate to all of the events in this novel, however I do understand many of them. Esperanza sees the people around her- her family, friends, and neighbors, and she knows that she wants to be unique- a true individual; that she will not live in the same neighborhood all her life, that she will "escape" and be successful in life. Her neighborhood is a metaphor for everything that stands

in the way of her achieving her goals, such as her poverty and hispanic heritage. Like Esperanza, I want to become the kind of person whom I admire. I want to leave behind the doubt and dilemmas in which I currently find myself. I know what ideals I believe to be important, and I know the type of person that I want to become. By learning from other people's actions, as well as my own, I am learning my aspirations and desires. I will not be like Marin and wait for the world to come to me. I will go after the world. And I will succeed.

The eloquently phrased dedication of the novel- >A las Mujeres; To the Women,= summarizes the struggle of women, especially those of minority groups, throughout the years and particularly, throughout this century. Esperanza expresses this struggle when she states,

I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting-I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate (p.88-9).

In this quote, Esperanza starts to take action in her struggle for success. In Esperanza's culture women do not rebel against their societal norms. The strong wording used in this passage, words such as tame and like a man, further the significance and rarity of Esperanza's actions, especially because she is a woman. Esperanza sees the fear of rebellion as the cause of her and other women's seeming inability to rise above their backgrounds and pursue their dreams. Women continue to fight for political and societal equality; however, the fight is slowly being won. I have not dealt with much gender discrimination and hope I never will, but I am aware of its presence and completely endorse the fight of all women. The House on Mango Street inspired me to act more independently, and I am sure that it will encourage many other young women to take control of their own lives as well.

Like Esperanza's aunt, Guadalupe, who listens to Esperanza's poetry and encourages her individuality, my Aunt Sharlene was an advocate of individuality. Shar was an equal opportunity coordinator at the Colorado Department of Transportation in Greeley, Colorado. Before Esperanza fully understands and gets to know her aunt, Lupe dies of a spinal disease. I understand the pain and sorrow of Esperanza because I have also lost my aunt suddenly. My Aunt Shar was shot and killed at work last December by an unruly, insane co-worker. Like Esperanza, I feel guilty for all of the unpleasant thoughts I have ever had about her. It is a strange feeling, to lose someone so quickly-sometimes I even forget that she is dead. I wonder when I will go over to her house for dinner some evening, and I remember the last time I saw her-I wish I would have told her what a wonderful person she was and how much I loved her.

The experience of unexpectedly losing a loved one taught me that one should never let an opportunity pass- if one arises, grab hold and take advantage of it. From this novel I do not know what Esperanza's deep thoughts are on this subject, but I believe I can infer that she, too, would confirm the rarity of opportunities and the importance of knowing and using one's capabilities and potential. Esperanza recognizes the situations of the other women in her neighborhood and this realization leads to her eventual "rebellion" against her society. Only by taking personal action and taking advantage of her possibilities can Esperanza ever achieve her aspirations

Through its simply stated wisdom, its relevance to today's societal struggles, and because of the personal connection I feel between myself and Esperanza, The House on Mango Street is an extremely important book to me. I sincerely hope that others who read this book will find the same inspiration to challenge their surrounding and to become better people, as well as find a personal connection, like that which I have found.

Callie Preheim

Eleventh Grade. Teacher: Mr. Lettes
Heritage High School
Littleton, CO

***Señora Cisneros, me encanta su libro- me enseñó mucho sobre la vida y por éso le doy gracia a Ud.

HONORABLE MENTION

October 29, 1999

Dear Ms. LeAnn Thieman,

I would like to begin by introducing myself. My name is Thuong Le and I am a junior in high school. For my sixteenth birthday, I received A Second Chicken Soup for the Women's Soul. I read your story »Safe Keeping,« that was published in the book. It overwhelmingly touched my heart to read such a story. Your words have helped me to realize how precious life really is.

Ever since I can remember, my parents have always joked about me being adopted. Sometimes I believed it, even though I know it's not true. Now that I've become a bit older, I know that my parents are my real, biological parents. Your story helped me realize that even if my parents were not joking about adopting me, I should always remember the love, patience, tolerance, and caring they have for me.

»Safe-Keeping« inspired me to be more open with my family, an act that I should always do because it would be the most I can do at the present moment. Jane reminded me of myself when she found out that her aunt Emma was really her birth mother. The fact that Jane kept asking to hear the story over and over again and the retelling of the story of how Emma and Mama left Ireland for the States was when I truly realized that there was someone else to share such memories. There, too, is a story that is told in my household of how they ended up in America from Vietnam. There are also stories about how life used to be over there. One day, I was at my aunt's house, and we were watching a home video, recorded in Vietnam. You see, my aunt visited Vietnam, and taped some of her adventures on film. Apparently she visited the grave site of my grandfather, her father. In Vietnam, the graves are above ground, and not underground like they are here in America. As I was watching the video, I noticed that at the gravesite, there was more than one »block.« There were two other ones, one big and one small. I never noticed the other two when I looked at pictures of the place, but now I did. I asked my mom who they belonged to, and she told me that it was my great-grandfather. She didn't tell me whose the smaller one was. I asked her repeatedly, but she kept ignoring me. Everyone who was there wouldn't answer the question. So I decided that it was there for decoration and I just forgot about it.

Later that night, my little cousin asked me, »Did you know that you had an older brother?« Then I responded yes because he was sitting next to me. Then she said, »No not him! Someone else.« That's when I was really confused. All my life I have known and lived with one brother and one

sister. There was no other brother. I eventually had the guts to ask my mom about it. I was angry at her, and that was probably the last time I thought I was adopted. My mom took me to another room and we both laid on the bed that was in there. She asked me about the question I had when we were watching the video. Then she told me who the small block belonged to. It belonged to my oldest brother. I was heartbroken for a number of reasons. I didn't understand why she waited so long to tell me. I didn't understand why I never knew, and why everyone else knew. I was crying too hard to ask my mom.

Your story reminded me of my story. What I have learned is that it doesn't matter who your real parents are or whether there is someone else in your family, just as long as you have love for each other. Although you are not Jane's birth mother, you have taken her as one of your own, and I applaud you and to all those people who are willing to do whatever it takes to give someone love. I also learned that being open and telling one another how you feel really helps strengthen a relationship. My mother and I are as close as ever, and thanks to your story, I began to appreciate the real meaning of life. I thank you for sharing your story with all of the world.

Sincerely,
Thuong T Le, 16 years old
Eleventh Grade. Teacher: Mr. Lettes
Heritage High School
Littleton, CO

HONORABLE MENTION

Dear Mr. Silverstein,

I recently read your moving poem "No Difference" [from Where The Sidewalk Ends]. The thought of treating every person as an equal is a term most people understand, but do not practice. I sincerely believe that the theme of your poem is part of the answer to our world today. The answer to help solve our differences. Because, in reality, we are all the same.

After the tragedy of the Columbine High School shootings in my hometown of Littleton, Colorado, everyone was looking for the answer to one question: why? The people of Littleton needed a finger to point, a person to blame, a reason. Many people concluded that Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris were "monsters". They accredited the killers' behavior to anything and everything possible- from the media to their own parents. The way people were dealing with this situation angered me to the point of tears. Didn't they understand that these kids were people just like themselves? In my mind, Eric Harris and Dylan Kelbold weren't monsters. They were two teenage kids who vented their rage and anger on April 20th, 1999 because they didn't feel that they were the same as everyone. They were two teenage kids who killed thirteen other people and then killed themselves. They were two teenage kids, just like me.

While other people felt anger towards them, I couldn't. I had lost two friends in the shootings, and I felt sad. I not only felt sad because I lost friends, I felt sad for Dylan and Eric. Sad because no one could "turn off the light" for them. No one could stop them from feeling like

outsiders- from feeling different.

April 20th reminded me of your poem. It reminded me that we need to start treating everyone as though we are all the same. At the same time, however, we need to recognize and appreciate the individuality of others. To me, turning out the light is not just a matter of ignoring the difference in each other, its about changing the way we view people. In light of the events that had occurred here in Littleton, I applied the poem to my own life. What I understood, which I don't think most people in my community did, is this tragedy should not teach us how to blame one another. It should teach us how to change ourselves.

When I went to the memorial for Columbine High School I placed a poster with >No Difference= written on it. To this day I cannot tell you for certain why I had the urge to do so. I know I wanted to spread your message to others. Perhaps people would use the poem to understand our world today a little better.

After reading the poem, I set a goal for myself: to stop judging people. I also started to change my views on people, things, and ideas. I know that I won't be able to change everything in one day. But if I can do one task each day that gives me insight and inspiration. I know that I will change. I think that if everyone could embrace this tactic, the world would be a lot less complicated. I've also learned that people who feel that they are >peanuts= in this world, the people who feel insignificant, need to feel like a >giant= sometimes. People need to feel that they are worth something and they have value in this chaotic world. I know how good it feels when people complement me or praise me. But what about the >peanut= who never gets praised= I've tried to go out of my way to reach out to those kids. Even if it's just a simple >hi=. I often wonder if someone had been there to reach out to Dylan and Eric if the outcome of April 20th would have been different.

Thank you so much for writing this poem. It reminds me everyday that we are all the same. We nee to put our differences behind us, and start making a change. If everyone in this world was forced to read >No Difference=, would life be different= Would the taunting, harassment, and violence all stop= I think so. And for the sake of everyone, I hope so.

Sincerely,
Jessica Terlecki
Eleventh Grade. Teacher: Mr. Lettes
Heritage High School
Littleton, CO

HONORABLE MENTION

To Mr. Charles Dickens, Esq.
Dear Sir,

>When you read a classic, you do not see more in a book than you did before; you see more in you than there was before.= As I am sure you know, Clifton Fadiman was right. The power in books allows the reader to broaden his horizons in ways that it is all but impossible to describe. That power is especially apparent in the classics, which by virtue of their longevity have acquired an aura of sanctity that has impressed as many parents as it has bored schoolchildren to tears. For me, however, the classics---especially The Pickwick Papers and similar of your works---have both expanded my horizons and inspired me to find my own way.

There has been a great deal written about your various works since you published the first of them in serial form back in the 1800's. I cannot lay a claim to the knowledge and experience other critics have used to describe your writing; all that I can do is show how your talent has affected my own life. In that arena alone, its affects have been almost immeasurable.

From the beginning, your works have helped me to establish a connection with others. In this decade of the e-mail message and the late-night chat room, too many people isolate themselves. For some, it grows ever more difficult to interact with others in social atmospheres and to find some connection between oneself and the friend of a friend of a friend that one has just been introduced to at a party. The gap is widening especially between teenagers and adults, and that is beginning to have disastrous effects. On the other hand, it was not too long ago that I was speaking with an adult, and she politely asked me what I had read. I mentioned *The Pickwick Papers* and watched her eyes light up with sentimental delight. "I loved that book!" she declared, and I had found at last something upon which we could agree wholeheartedly. I have discovered shared pleasures in that book and many others that you wrote, often in the most unlikely places. Persons of my own age, adults, parents, and teachers; they all partake in a love of those writings. I have found myself, again and again, arguing good naturedly about the characterization of David, or Pip, or Sam, or Oliver, or Nicholas, or Martin. The views of the person with whom I speak and the light in which their personality the characters provides me with a totally new way of looking at the worlds in your novels and has helped me to re-examine the world around me. It has also helped me gain friends, with whom if nothing else, I can always discuss books.

However, the greatest influence that you have had on me is in the words and the plots of his [sic] books themselves. As one who wishes to write someday, I find the worlds that you paint with your phrases fascinating. Some people find your descriptions too verbose and your language almost impenetrable, but I cannot believe that the characters, words, and plots of your books can be condemned for that flimsy reason. Did you not describe the world as you saw it? From your pen came the horror of poverty, the shallowness of wealth, the whimsy and eccentricities of a million people like the ones one sees on the street every day. Ralph Waldo Emerson said you were "a painter of English details." The details, however, do not simply belong to England; they can be found here in America as well, or in almost any country around the globe, and they will continue to materialize even as we cross the bridge into the twenty-first century. You plunge the reader into a world of debtors' prisons, orphanages, robbers' dens, banks, revolution, riots, schools, homes, inns, and the many roads that a person is able to wander throughout his lifetime. It is plain to me that you delight in the human race; even in your writing about scoundrels and evil doers there is a hint of pity and sometimes humor. The poignancy, amusement, and humanity of all the characters' words shines through with the love which you invest in them. The humanity and optimism of the extraordinary characters with which you people it; that universal appeal, those near caricatures of every-day folks that still seem fresh and poignant more than a hundred years after they first appeared in print, that world that does not disappear when the reader closes the book but is indelibly inscribed in the his memory: these are the things that most affect me about your work.

Your novels have given me a measure to reach towards in the future, introduced me to sides of life that I would rarely have thought on otherwise, and shown how a world of invention can mimic the real world and still go above and beyond it into the realm of legend. *The Pickwick Papers* and your other novels have set me on the road to the best of times, and their power and influence in my own life prove that great expectations were in me all along, even if I could never see them before.

I remain respectfully yours,
Keeley Esterhay
Tenth Grade. Teacher: Ms. Yael Abrahamsson
Cherry Creek High School
Englewood, CO

HONORABLE MENTION

(To Ms Patricia A. Mckillip, whose books have found permanent residence on my shelves and in my heart)

I was wandering aimlessly about the library a while ago, skimming covers, waiting for some book to catch my eye. All at once, down on the bottom shelf where I had to kneel to get a good look at it, was a book by this title: *Something Rich and Strange*. I recognized it as a fragment of Ariel's song in the *Tempest*, my favorite passage of that play. I took the book home without any further investigation needed.

For some time, I had been interested in the ocean. I had visited there only a few times, but my home was nestled in the mountains, far away from the tides and kelp. Even so, I decided that I wanted to be a marine biologist. I watched nature programs seeking out aquatic life. I thought about tidal zones and a whale's insulating blubber and the structure of coral polyps. I dwelt on the scientific interest of the sea. I believed my only reason, or justification, for moving to the ocean would be for a career of study. There did seem to be some vague, chafing fancies in the depths of my thought, but I didn't probe this buried part of myself, mostly because I was barely aware of its existence.

Then I read your book. My familiar surrounding shifted slightly. The imperceptible needs in my deepest self began to audibly murmur things *rich and strange* to me. Or they may have been whispering all along, but I never knew the language they spoke, and so I didn't understand their utterances. Your book seemed to speak in the tongue of the sea. I saw the mysterious, alluring waves and the tide drawn sands through those pages; I heard the voices of the gulls and the songs of the brine-washed wind, and I understood them. They resonated deeply with that inexplicable part of me. And as simply as that bond was forged, I fell in love with the sea.

Reading *Something Rich and Strange* (and all your other books after it) woke in me some slumbering impulse. Its words dredged up a half-learned, half-forgotten drive from a dark corner of my brain, from secrets running in my veins. I think I have ancestral yearnings buried in my DNA that long for wet green hills and grey waves thundering on the cliffs. All these strange parts of myself felt and answered the call in that book; the summons of the ocean. The reflection of the moon's face on gentle waves became my face; the tale of the mermaids that turned into manatees became my story; the old chanteys about storm and calm, love and loss in the watery depths became my song. I had stepped into myself, though I was yet unsure about what form I wore, for it seemed as blurred and uncertain as water itself.

Such a strong reaction may seem bizarre to some. But the power of words should not be underestimated. The words in your book had a wizard's power. You use a language that is simple and beautiful in its uncomplicatedness, but twist it artfully around complex tales in ways that can only be described as magical. You seem to swath ordinary objects in lovely mists of illusion and mystery,

then they are blown away to reveal something so startling I can't believe the commonplace thing had lain so long under my eyes, all the while hiding this breathtaking secret. This spell had been cast so lightly over all the sea and between my eyes, that I had barely noticed, until all at once, the scales (so to speak) fell from my eyes, and I was looking down an airy, light-filled bridge leading straight from the briny depths to my heart.

This bridge was deceptive in its frailty. I didn't know things forged of tales, illusion and beauty could be so immutable. The tide that filled my thoughts, still lingers in me. The sound, or possibly just the memory of the sound, of waves curling onto the shore is still in my ears, so ingrained that I wonder if it has always been there. But I never heard it until I found your book. This is an extraordinary power you have. I thank you for it. I found myself in your stories, and the gift of self is the greatest and most precious. Your book didn't just give me wings, it gave me sails, and a briny song to sing in a dark and wondrous world of water, myth, and desire.

Ingrid Morath
Twelfth Grade. Teacher: Ms. Debbie Bennett
Manitou Springs High School
Manitou Springs, CO