

The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress in partnership with Target presents

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

a National Reading and Writing Promotion program for children and young adults.

Sponsored in cooperation with
Wyoming Center for the Book.

participation guidelines

READ. BE INSPIRED. WRITE BACK.

THE CONTEST

Letters About Literature is a writing contest and yet it is much more! The letters we receive are windows of understanding what young people think about, hope for and fear. They are friendly and conversational, sometimes funny and sometimes painfully honest.

For Paul, a middle school student in Colorado, Charles Lindbergh's flight across the Atlantic as recounted in *The Spirit of St. Louis* helped him to rise above depression. For Lucas, a high school student in North Dakota, deliverance from drugs came after reading Jim Carroll's *Basketball Diaries*. Kristiana Gregory's description of Cleopatra rolling herself in a rug in order to meet the Roman emperor Julius Caesar seemed a little foolish to nine-year-old Analyssa from Illinois. She wrote to the author, "Why would you roll yourself in a rug when you could just go up and talk to him?"

How did a book surprise or inspire you? Exploring how and why you respond to the books you read can help you learn more about yourself—your hopes and fears, your secret desires and your not-so-secret disappointments.

To enter Letters About Literature, select a book that excited you. Then write a personal letter to the author and explain why. Do not summarize the book's plot. After all, the author wrote the book and already knows what happened. What the author doesn't know is how the book affected YOU. Here's another tip: don't write a fan letter. Instead of trying to impress, express yourself honestly. Just tell the author how his or her work somehow made a difference in your life. Then follow the How-To-Enter Guidelines on the next page.

COMPETITION LEVELS

The contest has three competition levels:

Level I—grades 4-6

Level II—grades 7 & 8

Level III—grades 9-12

STATE AND NATIONAL PRIZES

State Level.

The top essayist on each competition level will receive a cash award and a \$50 Target GiftCard. The first-place winners in each state will then advance for national judging.

National Level.

Two national winners will be selected on each competition level. Target will send the six national winners and their (two) parents/guardians to Washington, DC to attend the National Book Festival in Fall 2006. The national winners will read their winning letters during the festival and will tour sites within the nation's Capitol. Plus, each national winner will receive a \$500 Target GiftCard.

DEADLINE

Submission deadline for all levels is December 1, 2005. All state winners will be notified in March 2006. National winners will be contacted in April. See the How-To-Enter Guidelines on page 2 for specific submission details.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Download LAL lesson plans, blackline masters, assessment sheets and sample letters at the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress website: loc.gov/letters. You can also contact the program director at lettersaboutlit@epix.net. For more information, call (307) 777-5915 or visit us online at wll.state.wy.us/wcb/.

HOW-TO-ENTER GUIDELINES FOR LAL 2005–2006

Prewriting Discussion (Adapt for grade level)

First, REFLECT! Select a fiction or nonfiction book, short story, poem or speech (sorry, no song lyrics) you have read and about which you have strong feelings. Explore those feelings and why you reacted the way you did.

Second, CONNECT! Consider one or more of these questions when writing your letter: Did the characters, conflict or setting mirror your life in some way? What strengths or flaws do you share with a character or characters in the book? What did the book show you about your world that you never noticed before? What surprised you about yourself while you were reading this book?

Third, EXPRESS YOURSELF! A letter is less formal than an essay or research paper. Write honestly, using your natural voice. Remember that your purpose is to communicate, not summarize the plot or analyze the work's literary merits. Letters are conversational, friendly. But remember—your entry should not be a fan letter meant to flatter the author. Correspond, don't compliment!

Writing The Letter

Recommended length

Level I:	100 - 250 words
Level II:	250 - 500 words
Level III:	500 - 750 words

A Few Words About Organization!

Think of your opening and closing paragraphs as "book-ends" that hold the body of your letter in place! In your lead paragraph, don't tell the author your name or where you go to school unless that relates to the way the book affected you. Instead, begin with a question or an interesting but little-known fact about yourself or where you live.

Before-and-after is a great way to organize your thoughts. How did your thoughts or behavior change after you read the book? Was this change in you noticeable to others? How do you know?

Your concluding paragraph should sum up the key points or in some way mirror the opening paragraph.

Preparing Your Letter for Submission

All letters become the property of the Library of Congress.

Return address: Type or print your name and complete address (either home or school) in the upper-right corner of the first page of your letter.

Letter format: Type or print your letter. Please use ink and write neatly. If the judges cannot read your handwriting, they will eliminate your entry.

Entry coupon: Each letter must be accompanied by an entry coupon (see below). Staple the coupon to the last page of your letter. Do not use paper clips as they become separated during handling. Make a copy of your letter for your files as no letters will be returned.

Mailing envelope: Judges prefer entries in a flat 9x11" envelope. Important! Indicate the competition level—either I, II, or III—on your envelope. Use correct postage or your letter will be returned unopened!

Submission Deadline

Mail all entries postmarked by December 1, 2005, to:

**LAL 2006
Competition Level (Indicate I, II, or III)
Post Office Box 609
Dallas, PA 18612**

Teachers, please note:

- Mail class sets in one flat envelope rather than individual envelopes. Use one envelope for each level.
- Although we cannot acknowledge receipt of letters, we LOVE cover letters and this will ensure that you are put on the LAL mailing list for next year.
- Please do not assign the same book to an entire class as this misses the spirit of the program—identifying a personal relationship with an author and/or book. Likewise, rather than assigning the same opening paragraph or topic sentences, encourage students to express themselves individually.

Letters About Literature 2005 Entry Coupon

PLEASE PRINT. Use one coupon per reader, rather than one coupon for the entire class. **Staple coupon to the back of each letter.**

Name: _____ Age: _____ Home Phone (Optional): (____) _____

Grade: (Circle one grade only.) Level I: 4 5 6 Level II: 7 8 Level III: 9 10 11 12

Book/Story Title: _____ Author: _____

Home Address: Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

If submitting through a school or library, please complete the additional information below.

School/Library: _____

Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

School/Library Telephone: (____) _____ School/Library E-mail: _____

Teacher's name (Print): _____