

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

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

Letters About Literature is a national reading and writing promotion program.

The Illinois Letters About Literature state competition is sponsored by Jesse White, Illinois Secretary of State and State Librarian, the Illinois Center for the Book, and the Illinois State Library.

Participation Guidelines for Readers

Books have wings. You can't see them, but they are there just the same. On books' wings, readers can soar to new places where they meet intriguing characters and experience exciting adventures. But a book's wings can also help a reader rise above difficult situations so that they see the world — or themselves — with new understanding. Has a book touched your life in a personal way? If so, we invite you to enter this year's LAL competition. Have you ever felt the power and lift of literature?

How to Enter

First, determine your competition level. Letters About Literature welcomes entries from all readers — reluctant as well as enthusiastic — on three Levels of Competition. Entrants must be at least 9 years old and fall into one of the following categories:

Level 1 — Grades 4–6

Level 2 — Grades 7-8

Level 3 — Grades 9–12

Second, reflect and connect! Select a fiction or nonfiction book, a short story, poem, essay 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 during or after reading the author's work. Consider one or more of these questions when writing your letter:

- Did the characters, conflict or setting mirror your life in some way? If so, how? If not, why not?
- 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? Why was this work meaningful to you?

Your letter need not answer all of these questions, of course. These are just starting points to spark ideas.

Third, write a personal, reflective letter (not a fan letter or a book report!) Express yourself! A letter is less formal than an essay or research paper. Write honestly and in your own voice, as if you were having a conversation with the author. Those are the best letters to read and the most fun to write! Keep in mind these two tips:

- Correspond, don't compliment! Your letter should inform rather than flatter the author.
- Do not summarize the book's plot! The author wrote the book and knows what happened. What the author doesn't know is how the book affected *you*.

Our judges do not count words but we do have recommended lengths: Entries for Level 1 should be no less than 100 words and no more than 400 words. • Entries for Level 2 should be no less than 300 words and no more than 600 words. • Entries for Level 3 should be no less than 500 words and no more than 800 words. Please refer to the Contest Entry Guidelines in Rules #4 of the Official rules found at www.lettersaboutliterature.org for complete information on how to prepare your letter.

Fourth, submit your letter by December 12, 2009, using the required entry coupon. (See next page!)

STATE AND NATIONAL AWARDS

LAL awards prizes on both the state and national levels. Each state center has its own panel of judges who select the top essayists in the state. State Winners will receive a \$50 Target GiftCard and additional prizes, and then advance to the National Level Judging.

On each competition level, a panel of national judges for the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress will select **six (6) National Winners** (2 per Level of Competition) and **twelve (12) National Honorable Mention Winners** (4 per Level of Competition). The National Winners will receive a \$500 Target GiftCard, plus each will win a **\$10,000 LAL Reading Promotion Grant** for his or her community or school library so that others can experience personal relationships with authors and the stories they tell. Additionally, the National Honorable Mention Winners will each receive a \$100 Target GiftCard and a **\$1,000 LAL Reading Promotion Grant** for the community or school library. The community or school library selected for the National Winners and National Honorable Mention Winners is at the Sponsor's sole discretion. Refer to the National Level Judging in the Official Rules for more details.

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. A Purchase will not enhance your chances of winning. MANY WILL ENTER, FEW WILL WIN. Open to legal residents of the 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands enrolled as a student in grades 4-12 during the 2009-2010 school year, 9 years or older as of 9/1/09. Contest Starts 8/1/09 and ends 12/12/09. Void where prohibited. Subject to Official Rules found at www.loc.gov/loc/cfbook/letters.html.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR ENTRIES

RETURN ADDRESS. Print your name and complete return address (either home or school) in the upper right corner of the first page of your letter. Letters without a return address and adequate contact information will be disqualified.

ENTRY COUPON. Each letter must be accompanied by an entry coupon (below). Staple the coupon to the last page of your letter. Should you win a state or a national prize, your State Center for the Book will contact you using this information, so be sure your coupon is complete and legible!

MAILING ENVELOPE. Entries should be mailed in a flat 8x10" envelope or larger. Please indicate the competition level — either 1, 2 or 3 — on your envelope. Your Entry must be postmarked by December 12, 2009, (and arrive at LAL Central no later than December 22, 2009).
Mail to:

Letters About Literature
Competition Level (Indicate level 1, 2, or 3)
P.O. Box 609
Dallas, PA 18612

ASSESSMENT. All entries will be judged on the following criteria:

- **Content** (the writer's achievement in addressing the contest theme).
- **Writer's Voice** (the writer's style and originality of expression).
- **Exposition** (the writer's use of language skills, organization and grammar).

Each criterion will be scored on a scale of zero (0) to five (5), where five (5) is excellent and zero (0) is not fulfilling the judging criteria.

OWNERSHIP. All letters become the property of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. Please make a copy of your entry as no letters will be returned.

NOTIFICATION & CONTACT. State Centers for the Book will notify state winners on or about 3/21/10. The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress will notify National Winners and National Honorable Mention Winners on or about 4/30/10. www.loc.gov/loc/cfbook/letters.html. For program updates, please refer to the LAL website, www.lettersaboutliterature.org or e-mail us at lal@epix.net

Note for Teachers Submitting Class Sets:

- When mailing class sets, please include a cover letter that lists the names of each child who has written a letter. Mail class sets in one flat envelope rather than individual envelopes. Use one envelope for each level.
- 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.
- Visit www.lettersaboutliterature.org for free teaching materials, including lesson plans, assessment checklists, writing samples, plus teaching tips from our many LAL teachers who have participated in the past.

Letters About Literature 2009-2010 Entry Coupon (cut & staple to letter)



PLEASE PRINT. Often our failure to contact you is due to incomplete or illegible information on the entry coupon.

Name _____ Age _____ Home Phone (optional) (_____) _____

Grade (circle one grade only): **Level 1:** 4 5 6 **Level 2:** 7 8 **Level 3:** 9 10 11 12

Book/Story Title _____ Author _____

Home Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Parental Signature
(required if submitting as an individual entry): _____

IMPORTANT! If submitting through a school or library, please complete the additional information below:

School/Library: _____

Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

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

Teacher/Librarian Contact: _____ E-mail: _____