

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

MASSACHUSETTS LEVEL I HONORS 2009

Dear Margaret Haddix,

I had been blind.

Not physically, but mentally. I only walked on paths concealed in shadows. I was safe, but without a voice. I stayed away from the kids who harassed others just because those outsiders were different. I kept my distance, not knowing I could stand up against prejudice and injustice. I was scared to be brave, but I didn't know it.

Then I read the *Shadow Children* series.

The books were standing against a recently dusted shelf and looked promising. That night while reading them secretly under covers, for the first time I realized that I was scared to fight injustice. I was hiding in a dark room. I was Luke.

Then I met Jen. Jen had unrelenting convictions for standing against injustice and she intensely wanted Luke to support her. When she died trying to earn freedom, Luke realized he needed to continue the fight. These books gave a call for action I couldn't ignore. This series became *my* Jen.

Throughout the books, I connected strongly with the characters, sharing their feelings and whispering encouragement in their ears – feeling scared as they were caught, panicked while they were being chased, and relieved when they made out and escaped. As Luke stepped forward to fight injustice, I learned that bravery doesn't just manifest. You need to choose it.

Now I know I need to stand up for what's right. At school kids started to harass a boy, calling him names like "black sissy." His expression burned hot with silent humiliation. But I spoke up, boldness and anger filling my voice, "Stop! You're being racist!" I was surprised at the courage of my words, and they seemed shocked as well. They stopped and shrank back. I've been going forward ever since.

I dreaded reaching the end of an incredible series but realized that though their story had finished, mine had only begun. Now I've stepped out of darkness, into light, and now I see the world with new eyes. Now I know I can make a difference.

Thank you for this gift,

Ariele

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