

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

MASSACHUSETTS LEVEL III HONORABLE MENTION 2009

Dear Mr. David Levithan,

I'm not quite sure my head's screwed on properly.

That's what my mother always told me as I waltzed backwards through department stores, watched TV while doing a headstand on the couch, or slurped yogurt through a straw. In my youth I was always searching for new ways of doing things. I saw life as a kaleidoscope, just itching to be shaken, throwing everything into a new light.

New perspectives are everywhere. I find them when I open my eyes under water, when I look out the window of an airplane, when I listen to the harmony over the melody, when I watch my autistic brother. Most recently, Mr. Levithan, I found one in your book *In the Realm of Possibility*.

I first opened your book under the table in chemistry class. While subatomic particles charged across the whiteboard, I flipped furtively through this novel treasure, relishing the flowing patterns of text, lapping up the lack of formality. A story told in poems! Entranced, I discovered 20 high school students, each with their own voice and their own story.

Needless to say, I failed the next chemistry test.

The second time I opened your book, I was armed. With a pen in one hand and a bag of Twizzlers in the other, I squared my shoulders, determined to appreciate your tangled stories and intertwined characters. I hoped that by understanding your book I could commandeer your intriguing perspective. After much headache-inducing toil, I managed to establish who was who. Then each poem was a person, and your book was a group snapshot, the class photo you look back at six years later and wonder about each of the dusty, static faces. Your book is a moment in 20 different lives.

What would I look like in a moment?

What would happen if I was sorted into stanzas and tidied away into figures of speech? Would I resemble flowery prose? Or a haiku, short, sweet, and simple? Would I sing out in song lyrics or break the silence in jagged, unorganized free verse? Maybe I would read this poem, and after absorbing the personified, hyperbolized, rhyming, assonating, metaphorical version of my life, I'd shout "Eureka!" and suddenly know who I was. The essence of my character would be laid out before me in eloquent clarity. Perhaps, in a poem, the chaos of my life could be sculpted into something beautiful.

I wish you would write a poem about me.

Sincerely,

Jojo

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