

# Massachusetts Letters About Literature Honors, Level III | 2011

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Dear Lois Lowry,

I remember the day I first started reading *The Giver*. I was in the waiting room at the dentist's office with my brother, and I hadn't brought a book to read, so I was dying of boredom. My brother was working on some homework, and he had with him a book that he was reading for his own entertainment. He gave it to me to borrow, just to pass the time until our little sister was done with her dentist's appointment, and I said, "Okay." My brother never did get that book back until the next day. I read the whole thing in one afternoon; I was utterly obsessed with it. Right from the first page, it got me thinking, "Could this really happen? What if it did?" And I tried to imagine a world without color or emotions or freedom of choice. My own thoughts, provoked by the words in the book, amazed me. I was thinking more deeply than I ever had before.

About a week later, I read the book again. As I read, I envisioned the people, places, and things in different ways than I had the first time through. Wonderfully unsettling images came to mind. *The Giver* sent my imagination plunging into a secret world of robots and rules and a disturbing lack of human differences. I envisioned the characters as having wide, unblinking eyes and monotonous voices that were almost taunting in a way, like they were hiding something beneath a veil of fear. In each character, I saw a living, breathing human being wearing a costume. There was a certain tension in every scene of the story, as if each human longed to shed that costume and transform into an individual. I felt the pain of human suffering, of wanting something that you cannot have. I felt that the character Jonas had a longing greater than all others', a longing to have real feelings and to experience something more than what society had to offer. In my mind, the people and places were creepy enough to send shivers down my spine. For me, *The Giver* described what the future of the human race will be like if we are not careful. The events of the story were symbolic of what human society is leaning towards: alikeness, organization, order, and unchanging, unending happiness.

Our society pressures those who are different. While reading *The Giver*, my eyes were opened to what humans could evolve into: programmed machines that all act the same and dress the same and look the same. From time to time, everyone dreams of paradise and perfection. Wouldn't it be marvelous to exist in a utopian society? But a human's idea of perfection would be a place where everyone is accepted and everyone is equal. In order for that to happen, we'd all have to be exactly the same, and if it was decided that we all should be the same, what would happen? Would we all be identically perfect? Or would we all be identically evil? There would be no right and wrong, no choices, no love, and no hatred. It sounds beautiful at first to live in a utopian world, but *The Giver* taught me that there is no way to sacrifice all the badness of the world without, in turn, sacrificing all that is good. I now understand why bad things happen: so that good things can happen in return.

The reason why this book affected me the way that it did is that I am the most stubborn perfectionist you'd ever meet. Every day I dream of perfection, and so *The Giver* was a rude awakening for me. I would not want to live in the world in which the story took place; it sounded perfectly awful to me, as it would to many people. But I sat down and thought about it. I asked myself, "What is perfection? What is it exactly?" And every definition of perfection that I could come up with was unmistakably pertaining to a society like the one in *The Giver*. And I came to a sudden realization: perfection is unattainable. I never understood why until I read *The Giver*.

I believe that the world of *The Giver* is a possibility. I believe that such a place could exist in the distant future. In examining the world around me, I see people headed in that direction by longing for alikeness and everlasting bliss. What people do not see is that, without great suffering, you cannot have great joy. That is why everyone should read *The Giver*. It is one book that has forced me to think about life in incredible ways, and to come up with thoughts that I never knew were lurking in the back of my mind. It helped me to notice both the greatness and the twisted ways of life as we know it here on Earth. I make a point of reading *The Giver* at least once a year, because I love thinking the thoughts that the story plants in my head, and I learn something new each time I pick up the book. When I start trying to convince myself that human perfection is a possibility, I pick up the book and I learn all over again that it just can't be. I feel refreshed, like a new person, each time I finish the book, and I use my renewed knowledge to set reasonable goals and expectations in my life. I am a better person when I am reading that book. So thank you, Ms. Lowry, for writing *The Giver*. It has changed my life for the better.

Sincerely,

Juliana

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