

MASSACHUSETTS LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE 2023

HONORS LEVEL I

Dear Meg Medina,

The summer breeze blew softly against my curtains, making my windchimes clink together lightly while the sweltering summer heat was making me sweat. I was very bored, and had no idea what to do. My mom came into the room telling me I should do something. When I informed her, I had no idea what to do, she walked out of my room, leaving me utterly confused. When she arrived once again, this time, she was carrying something in her hand, and I knew at once what she was holding. The previous day, I had been at the town's public library choosing books for the new school year. She had chosen this book for me, but I wasn't really interested in reading it. Finally, she coaxed me to open the book, and start reading it out loud. The book turned out to be about a girl who lived in Florida, and her life. As I continued to read out loud, I glanced out of the window, and was surprised to see that the blue sky was plunged into evening pinks, the birds were nesting on trees, and the clouds floated above the horizon. It was a perfectly normal summer evening, a marvelous summer evening even, but something had changed. Sometimes, I take things for granted, and forget the power of things that some people aren't lucky enough to have. This warm summer night may have been the first time I read your book, *Merci Suarez Changes Gears*, but like an ocean, the impact was only ripples in the beginning, in the end it became an ocean full of waves.

Books can change people, and I know that *Merci Suarez Changes Gears* did because I can relate to Merci. Merci's grandfather (Lolo) was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. My own grandmother has had difficulty remembering things as well. She is not diagnosed with Alzheimer's, but she has some mild symptoms. She used to never need lists, reminders, or help remembering crucial information. Now, she needs all of those things, and more. On a late October night, after my guitar recital (which my family attended including my grandmother), my family was going to go to her car to say goodbye, then my grandmother would eventually have to go home. She claimed her car was parked on the side of the road. But after searching for a car that clearly wasn't parked there, she wanted to check the other side of the road, which turned out to have no car either. She finally admitted she didn't remember where her car was. To most people, this wouldn't be a big deal, but to me it was. The fact that my grandmother could be on a path to forgetting her own name scared me. *Merci Suarez Changes Gears* helped me remember that in hard times, looking on the bright side of things helps you worry less, and I should enjoy these special moments I have with Meme now. Sometimes there doesn't seem to be a bright side because everything went wrong, and there's no hope. There's always hope, although sometimes it hides somewhere where you don't think it would be.

This book also changed my view on life because it helped me realize that family is everything. Family is something that will always stay with you. Family is always there to support you, and helps you through rough times. This book emphasizes that valuable

message. Merci's family was always willing to help Merci through all of her personal ups and downs. My family also supported me through times I felt alone, depressed, or scared.

Having this connection to Merci made me love this book even more. My family reminded me that you don't have to be perfect, but that's okay. The important thing is you try your best. Your book, *Merci Suarez Changes Gears*, also changed my views on my younger sister.

My sister and I may argue about silly things like remotes, and who practices piano first, but with small things like that, we will never enjoy life together. Even though we will have many more arguments, it is better when they aren't about silly things. Even though we may not always get along, we are family, and sometimes it helps to remember that. In the book, Merci has two younger cousins, and she is forced to look after them. They may argue, but they'll eventually make up. This book made me remember that even if Giada (my younger sister) was being annoying, and I lost my temper, I should make up since I know it is the right thing to do. It also reminded me that you should be grateful for the family I have, because even Lolo, although he was still alive, was a danger to himself. Family is something you shouldn't take for granted, because some people aren't lucky enough to have it.

I will always remember that warm summer night that I first read your story. I remember the way the wind rustled in the tall tree branches, the way the sun dotted the horizon making the sky pink and blue, and finally, I remember the sound of the crickets chirping in the night. I'll always remember the first time I read your book. This book reminds me of summers during covid lockdowns, cold cherry popsicles on a hot summer day, and hoping that eventually, better times will come. This book may be a book to some people, but to me, it's more than a book. Your book is a memory of better days, a motivation to do better, an inspiration to be kinder and more responsible. In some ways, Merci is kind of like me, trying to take on responsibilities, falling down, and having to stand up again, and being mature when people look up to you. Maybe one day someone will read this book hoping for a little inspiration, or motivation to do better, to find that this book will give them that, and more. This book changed me, and I know, it will always be there for anyone who needs some motivation or for someone who needs to reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

Sofia