

*I play the trombone and cello and am hopeful to attend the Julliard School of Arts to become a professional musician who plays in the Hollywood Studio Symphony Orchestra. I love to read and write as it allows me to explore different universes. I enjoy singing in the Sacramento Children's Chorus and playing girls lacrosse.*

L E V E L T W O



**Teresa Castillo, Age 13, Grade 8**  
**Marina del Rey Middle School**  
**Los Angeles, CA**

**Dear Mr. Pelzer,**

It touched my heart and made a great impact in my life. I fell in love with your phenomenal story, *A Child Called It*.

Now I see a whole other side of this very cruel world, thanks to your outstanding memoir. It opened my eyes, and made me see how young innocent children can get mistreated. You welcomed me into your rough childhood that truly touched my heart. It was as if I was in the story, and felt all your pain. I cried, and I felt your pain through every punch, torture, and tears you shed.

My mother and brother don't get along much. My mom may not hurt him physically, but she doesn't show him love. I have to go through that and I can relate to you. It hurts to see the two people I love the most in the world argue, not hug each other, or even say the simple words "I love you." Thanks to you Mr. Pelzer, you motivate me every single day to not give up, and see that my family is not the only unperfected people in the world. I'm comfortable and I don't have to hide that cops came to my house before and so have social workers. Now that I know that there are many others out there that have gone through that it relieves me. I would act as if my life was just as normal as my peers in elementary school, and sometimes even now. I was confused and didn't know if that's what happened to their family as well or if I was ever going to see my brothers again, or if it was my fault. I didn't know, honestly! I was just a young child and as confused as you were.

I am not the type of girl who loves to read, but when I was looking for a book that I was supposedly going to read, *A Child Called It* caught my eye. Little did I know I was going to be so interested in your childhood. Once I started reading, I just couldn't get my eyes off it and had to keep reading and reading wanting to find out what was going to happen to poor little David next.

You have made me a more loving and caring 13 year old. I can picture your amazing story, you not knowing whether this or that was happening because of your fault. Although your mom hit you, and my mom doesn't hit my brother, there's no

love involved. It's an important thing that every child needs in their lives. Love conquers all.

*My name is Teresa Castillo. I have a passion for writing to express my feelings, and that is why I decided to join the contest. I would like to fulfill my dream in being a successful journalist. My main goal is to encourage others to never give up in what they want most.*

L E V E L T W O



**Shannon M. Coey, Age 13, Grade 8**  
**Santiago Middle School**  
**Orange, CA**

**Dear Ms. Peters:**

My name is Shannon Coey, and I am an 8th grade student at Santiago Charter Middle School. After reading your novel, *Define "Normal"*, it had such a great impact on me and my eyes were opened to what people were really like on the inside. It was then when I began to wonder what normal really was.

Before I read your book, when I would see someone like Jazz, a total punker with black lipstick and outrageous hair and clothes, I would automatically think, "*That is definitely someone to steer clear from*" or "*Did they get dressed in the dark?*" The same goes for Antonia, a perfect student who is plain and washed out, and doesn't eat lunch with anyone but the teachers at school: "*How dull*" or "*She's probably not all that exciting to hang out with.*"

However, when I entered the chapters in which Antonia becomes Jazz's peer counselor and they realize that they truly have a lot in common, I started pondering about what I might have in common with the "punks" and "prisses" in the hallways.

Both Jazz and Antonia had mothers that they couldn't stand, teachers that gave them a hard time, and trouble with being accepted at school. Maybe the girl with the heavy eyeliner and studded bracelets is a total neat-freak at home. Maybe the kid with perfect grades and no friends stays up until 10:00 every night watching reruns of *Everybody Loves Raymond*—both just like me.

And so, when I finally finished reading your book, I found that there is really no definition to the word "normal." Although the dictionary defines it as "being the same as everyone else in appearance and personality; fitting into a standard," I found it incorrect. Someone could be completely "normal" on the outside, and be as different and weird as one person could possibly be on the inside, or vice versa, and still find similarities between themselves and others. Everyone has their own "normal," and everyone is different, but that doesn't mean that there is nothing in common between "punks" and "prisses," or "nerds" and "jocks." Your book showed