

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

me that no matter how different you are, you are your own normal and there is always someone that shares something that you have, even if it is the person you least expect. Thank you, once again, for opening my eyes up to what “normal” really is.

Hi! I'm Shannon Coey. I love to be with my friends and family, draw, paint, and play with my new dog, Lilly. My 7th grade English teacher entered me in this contest a year ago, and I was so surprised to find out that I had placed at the state level. I hope to attend New York University in the future, because I hear they have a great theater and arts program.

L E V E L T W O



Aubrey Sara Kaye, Age 13, Grade 8
Las Colinas Middle School
Camarillo, CA

Dear Ms. Funke,

I first ‘met’ you in literature when I read *The Thief Lord* in fifth grade. I still recall how, during my book talk, my fellow students’ eyes widened with excitement over Prosper and Bo’s adventures. Now, as an eighth grader on the verge of high school, I have been captivated by your *Inkheart*, which has widened both my eyes and my perspective on life.

I am a voracious reader, desiring to taste all the wonderful books this world has to offer. Therefore, when I saw *Inkheart* on display in my school library, I promptly checked it out based on my previous enjoyment of *The Thief Lord*. Little did I know that I would travel on a fascinating journey within myself, as well as with the characters of your book!

Primarily, I identified with your characters Meggie and Dustfinger. Meggie’s passion for books is very similar to my own. Printed volumes have often been my companions, my windows on to a myriad of worlds, and the keepers of my fondest memories. *Inkheart* acquainted me with a friend who has also loved reading since she was tiny. Her parent, like my own, introduced her to the unique magic of a printed story.

Dustfinger mirrored my feelings of “not belonging”; of not always blending in with the people around me. I can relate to his desire for a different world, where life is less rapid, free from the relentless noise and glaring lights of our modern cities. In addition, I have discovered that we are all constantly searching for our own “story,” for a place where we can truly be content. This journey may take us through strange lands and introduce us to a broad cast of characters, and sometimes, we may not find what we are longing for. Of course, this doesn’t mean that we will ever stop searching. Before *Inkheart*, I thought that I was alone in this quest.