

Every poem or book you have written and I have read excites me to know that I am not the only person who feels the same way. Being proud of who I am and thinking everyone feels the same pride. But one particular book showed me that not all people feel the same way as I do.

*The House on Mango Street* is a book I will always feel a special bond with, and has shown me the way of life. As I read through the book, I start feeling what Esperanza feels. Even though Esperanza and I think and feel so differently, we connect. It surprises me how close I get to her. And as I analyze her thoughts and feelings, I say to myself, why does she feel this way? So ashamed to what she has, and what she is. And I say to myself, is it so bad to be Mexican? I don't feel that way. Or is it because so many people think down on us?

This has all made me reflect on who I am: an independent Chicana who has culture, heritage, background, beliefs, pride, and passion. With passion towards the Mexican art, for the greatest painters in Mexican history. Frida Kahlo, with her conspicuous self portraits, or Diego Rivera with his famous calla lilies. It shows passion and poise towards who they were, and shows a part of who I am, as well. I am not perfect but I do know where I came from, and will never forget. I am a Chicana, trying to make it in this world, a world where there are people who undervalue Chicanos. Many people might try to bring me down, might not approve of me, but I will succeed, I will keep my head up, and my pride will help me get there.

Your words have helped me recognize that. Your words of power, passion, and dignity. *Me sacas lo mexicana en mí.*

*I am an avid reader and especially enjoy the works of Sandra Cisneros, J.D. Salinger, Isabel Allende and J.K. Rowling. I enjoy playing soccer, traveling, and admire the works of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. I would like to be a writer of fiction one day.*

### L E V E L T H R E E



**Chandler Corallo, Age 15, Grade 9**  
**Half Moon Bay High School**  
**Half Moon Bay, CA**

**Dear Ms. Morrison:**

I never want to be a Pecola Breedlove. Yet, this is the reason why I'm grateful that you brought her into my life. She alone represents to me all of the fear and loathing that we as women have had to endure for centuries. I've experienced the world through her eyes and I don't want to revert back to that filtered vision again. It is

through this girl, this young girl, that I came in contact with the depths of self-hatred, the simplicity of desire, and most of all, my own sense of value and worth.

Pecola was born into adversities beyond her control: an ugliness she didn't ask for and life in an era trapped by ignorance and racism. However, it is Pecola's blind acceptance of these truths that have influenced me in a way that shall forever affect my decision-making for years to come. I don't want to be a Pecola Breedlove. Because of her, I won't willingly accept an unsatisfying fate. Ugliness and unworthiness shouldn't be defined by a media that meticulously works behind our backs to develop an idea of what they deem beautiful. The opinions of others should be irrelevant to how we view ourselves. Only we can decide how we feel and who we are. If all we do, as women, is conform to others' standards, we will drive ourselves to insanity as Pecola did. Your novel has driven this point home in my mind and ingrained within me a true sense of myself.

Love is not easily defined. I was shown the many sides of love through your novel: Love where you felt the warmth of it quietly reside above the page and love where the darkness of the text is enough to swallow you whole. I'm young, I haven't been in love, and yet I know I do not want to feel that second kind. That kind isn't really loving at all. Love is in your actions. The way in which you love determines your inner integrity. Miss Marie, Poland, and China were looked upon as scum in their town because of their chosen professions as prostitutes, yet these women were the only ones to ever show Pecola the brilliance of love. Their vibrant words of adventures long gone, generous actions, and affectionate praise were this young girl's only anchors. She could hold onto them and even though it wasn't tangible, this love belonged to her. It was not double-edged like the kind she experienced in her home, it was genuine. Although it wasn't conventional, this love was perfect. We as imperfect beings are able to produce one thing that is perfect and that is a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person.

Finally, it was through Pecola that I was able to recognize my own strength, and the strength of my mother, my aunts, my grandmother, my sister: generations of women who did not follow in Pecola's footsteps. They did not give in to blind acceptance, and all have learned to love—the sweet, gentle kind of love. Because of your book, I look at the women in my family with a new perspective. I notice the love and courage they put into their everyday tasks, and the challenges each one has had to confront. Their faces are worn and wrinkled from the unconditional love they have produced for years, but to me, they are beautiful, soft, and real. Women who refuse to conform, who refuse to stand down, and who live with passion are truly inspiring and should be held in the highest regard.

Pecola will always have a home in my mind because she has shown me parts of the world that I do not wish to be a part of. Her flaws of character have shown me who I don't want to be. Instead of losing myself, I want to see the worth of the people around me. I connect with young Pecola; I understand the ignorance of that age and the confusion of love, and through her I've seen the path I do not want to take to my adulthood. I'll go on living, challenging, climbing, and loving and I'll do it for

myself; a small part of me will also do it for Pecola. That small part of me knows that she is in my heart. I hope she's comfortable because Pecola is here to stay.

*I live in a small rural town on the coast just south of San Francisco. Although it is a small community, I've been fortunate enough to have had one inspiring teacher after another, dedicated to literature and writing. I am presently 15 and a freshman at Half Moon Bay High School. In my spare time, I enjoy listening to, recording, and playing music, sounds, and various background noise easily forgotten in the bustling activities of daily life.*

L E V E L T H R E E



**Robert Garcia, Age 14, Grade 9**  
**Pioneer High School**  
**Whittier, CA**

**Dear Alex Sanchez,**

Yes, I hear the whispers and see the black looks in the halls. “Is that him?” “Yeah, I heard he likes dudes!” “No way, he seemed too normal to be queer.” “I hope he doesn’t hit on me.” “Oh my god is he looking this way?” My mother has fallen into a state of deep abnegation and says if I were rainbow, I would be dirty—or “not normal.” Vainglorious boys glare at me like I am going to suddenly jump out at them the very moment they turn their backs toward me. Girls who listen to rap and wear too much makeup with not enough clothing ask humiliating questions with no real interest in the answer. When I try to formulate decent reasons as to why people are so hateful, so arrogant and sure of themselves that they really say those horrible things to another human being’s face without shame, I draw a blank. Instead, I find myself asking why am I so passive? When is my big break going to come, when I can bust out of the concrete block made out of my own fear of other people’s judgment to live my life and be what I’d imagine as happy.

Try as I might, I can never shake the words that were spoken to me by my best friend: “Robert...you are going to hurt.” I hurt a lot now. Losing so many people within such a small time period (two months), it hurts like when a friend moves, when you know that they are still in contact yet they start “forgetting” to write letters or emails and you begin to drip from their list of priorities completely. Plastic smiles and fake reassurances from my adult peers only make things worse when I try to look for the brighter side of things. When I fall asleep in front of my PC while doing Algebra 2 homework I can sometimes dream of a little less-than-perfect high school where everyone would be accepting; a perfect place without glares and fake smiles, without friends “forgetting” to call, and with flawless boyfriends and girlfriends with lots of affection. However, I awaken and find myself boarding 6:09am metro with