

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

Nelson to school, only to face that endless torment I've had to endure for the past two months.

The words "fag," "queer," and "homo" shoot through my body like the pain from a belly flop at swim practice. It needed to be stopped, and there's only one way I knew best. The solution of the simplest form and highest effect was the Emotional Wall. Within a few days the very same shell that had protected Kyle when he was asked to shower alone, that had helped Jason endure his homophobic teammates everyday after practice, was protecting me every day from every one and their wisecracks and backwards faces. Wishing there was a real GSA meeting that I could attend to receive real advice on how to cope; I'd pick up my fresh copy of your fine words and begin reading about the troubles of the threesome.

Thank you for being my wrecking ball, Alex. I live every day using the three figurative weapons that Nelson, Jason, and Kyle had represented so clearly: tolerance, courage, and acceptance. With these three skills I was able to break down that wall and start letting in the people I cared about most. "The "locker thing" had happened after December break. Someone scratched "queer" on Kyle's hall locker. Kyle repeatedly asked the school administration to repaint it, and they did nothing. Finally he got fed up. One morning he marched to school, and beneath the word QUEER he spraypainted "AND PROUD!" Armed with your masterpiece *Rainbow High* I know that given the opportunity, I would have guts to do something like that! Something that amazing, to just come out to the whole world, the whole high school, the whole family, and just say "I like boys."

I find that the boys and girls who utter the words "fag," "queer," "fruit" no longer bother me. It's almost as if your dear Nelson has leapt off of his perfectly written chapters and absorbed himself into me, to walk in my shoes through the cafeteria with his head held high and his courage higher. I see the people around me, who laugh with me and care for me, and no longer shun them away with a hard wall of excuses and lies like I would have instinctively done before using my secret weapons—the weapons that you have given me. The three live inside of me, battling the outsiders who dare threaten their fleshy haven and attend to their home with the greatest of care and handling. It would never have been this way without the examples and ways shown by you through the wonderful rainbow people. Thank you.

My name's Robert Garcia, and I am 14 years old. I am on the school swim team and in the school band, as music is one of the most important influences in my life. In my spare time, I enjoy listening to my favorite band, The Postal Service, and spending time with my friends. I entered this contest in hopes of reaching out to other GLBT youth to let them know that they are not alone in the struggle against a hateful world. In the future, I plan to become a pediatrician.