



Isoken Igbinedion, Age 15, Grade 10
Palm Desert High School
Palm Desert, CA

Dear Mr. Dorris,

My mother and I have never quite seemed to get along. I felt as if she did not understand or care for me. Some days, it just appeared that it would have been best if I had not been brought into this world and that not having a family would not be such a bad thing. Now I know what you're thinking. She is just another girl with problems just like anybody else. Who cares? Well, who cares is right. I certainly did not care. I felt as if I was in it alone, and nobody cared. Especially me. This summer, I was assigned to read your novel, *Yellow Raft in Blue Water*. I had no idea how greatly moved I would be with Ramona's longing for a true place in a family, Christine's plight of finding herself, or Ida's longing to discover her place and assert herself. The stories of these three women nearly broke my heart, causing me to change my perspective on the importance of a stable loving family and rethink my own situation.

At first glance, your novel seemed to confirm my accusations on how family life is strenuous and unneeded. As pages turned and time progressed, I came to realize that the lack of love in Ida's family was not due to the family in question, but to the unfulfilled need to find her place, and the resentment taken out on her "daughter" Christine. Just as Ida does, I judge the faults and cracks in my home as their blunder, never once thinking that it was me who needed to change, me who needed to accept myself before I could open my heart and my arms to my family.

Family is the clay that molds and shapes the ideas, morals, and the life of a person. Reading about Ramona and her love of escapism at once reminded me of myself. Just as Ramona clings to the love and tenderness of the letter she finds at Bearpaw Lake, I too have unrealistically clung to the perfect lives of families in many of the books I read. Each ending just like the other, in that everything is always perfect. Reading your novel helped me come to grips with the fact that life is not and never will be perfect. Accepting that living the best we can will bring the love and clarity Ramona and I so passionately desire.

I had never once thought to think of how each of my family members must feel, especially my mother. I have selfishly isolated myself from the joys of sisterhood and ancestry not once stopping to see that it is not about me and only me. A family is there to love and support each other. The lack of that support in Christine's family as a child is what causes Christine to look for herself in other people, influencing her disdain for reality and her promiscuous lifestyle. Christine never once stops to think

how her actions affect Ida and her brother Lee. She never once tried to view her situation in the eyes of her loved ones. Seeing the outcome of her selfishness made me want to change my narcissistic ways and slowly returned my hope and efforts to be part of my loving family.

Although little has changed in the development of the relationship between my mother and me, my attitude towards it has. I now try subsequently harder to understand her perspective and how she must feel. Treating her in an immature adolescent way is not the right way to approach our situation. Although Ramona barely finds peace with her family, she accepts her mother the way she is, in turn helping her find and reconcile with herself. The trials and tribulations we endure are the deciding factor of how our life shapes. The looking glass we choose to see through leads us down different paths of moral obligations, self-explanation. Someday I will be able to choose my looking glass and finally abandon my yellow raft, holding me back from the shorelines of life, love, and family.

I'm a Palm Desert High School Cheerleader and a very dedicated student. I entered this contest as an assignment for English and ended up enjoying it. In the future I hope to go to UC Davis and major in Business and Political Science.

L E V E L T H R E E



Zosha Kandel, Age 15, Grade 10
Nipomo High School
Nipomo, CA

Dear Chaim Potok,

I can't deny it: I gave into the oppression. Sure, it was self oppression, but no matter, it still kept me from my art. Sometimes the biggest bump in the road is your own foot. But after reading *My Name Is Asher Lev*, I realized something: if you just take the effort to pick that foot up a tad, it can take you far beyond that little one-way street.

I was always disappointed with my art. Sometimes I'd draw, and sometimes I'd paint, but it never turned out the way I wanted, really. His nose was always too big, or the sky was too purple; it just never was...right. After a point, I became too frustrated with my results, I gave it up. I would tell myself that I couldn't draw, and just leave it at that, believing it was just something I had to get over. And honestly, it was that way for a long time because that's how I made it, and that's how I wanted it.

But something changed. You see, during the week I spent in Asher Lev's life, there was a voice that called out to me, a long lost friend, and what hit me so hard was that I could understand exactly what that voice said. It was my art, calling me back.