



WINNER, LEVEL 2
Aric MacDavid
Grade 7
Crittenden Middle School
Mountain View

The Misfits, James Howe

Dear James Howe,

When I was a little boy, I always thought life was simple, easy and everyone would always like me. I thought life was a happy and peaceful place. Being in that place made me think that anything could happen and everybody would be happy, especially me. Once I turned 12, I could see that I was dead wrong. Something unexpected jumped out at me like a thief who was lurking in a dark shadow. Your book *The Misfits* helped me see how life can still be a peaceful and happy place in spite of any problems or unhappiness.

Your book showed me something about my dad. Last year, my dad told my family he was gay. At first, I didn't understand why he didn't tell us this before he married my mom and had three kids. After reading about Joe and how he was gay, I understood that my dad didn't feel comfortable expressing his true feelings until last year. Just like Joe, my dad wasn't sure if people would still like him and treat him the same. Even though my mom and dad aren't married anymore, I'm happy for my dad because now he can be the man he really wanted to be and live the life he wanted to lead.

The Misfits also helped me see that even small things can make a difference. I realized this when the bully insulted Joe and the swear word he used gave him the idea for a No-Name party which eventually became No-Name week. This inspired me to pay close attention to what is happening around me. It also made me think about what life would be like without bullying. If no one was bullied, my father probably would have expressed himself much sooner.

I also realized that I really believe everyone should be treated equally. The main characters in your novel think of themselves as misfits. In the same way, people in real life think of themselves negatively when they are bullied. I have experienced this when I have been called short in the locker room and had my ears boxed, and also when I've been called bigheaded in math class. I've been called almost every name you can think of and it has made me feel discouraged. I have also seen people make fun of the person who is now my best friend because of his race. Once I got to know him, I realized he wasn't different from me on the inside. Everyone should be treated equally no matter their skin color or who they choose to be. Each person is the same on the inside and should treat others the way they want to be treated. Why some people can't see that is incredulous.

Your work has comforted me through a difficult stage in my life like a special blanket can comfort a little child. It answered many of my questions and brought some new topics to life. I connected with *The Misfits* very deeply, which got me hooked and made me think. These connections were not made just because the main characters are my age and in the same grade but because I could relate to what you shared about Joe being gay, about bullying and about making a difference. I know I can choose to ignore how people criticize me or make fun of me, and even if my life isn't perfect, I can still be happy and do something to make others happy, too.

Sincerely,
Aric MacDavid

Some of my interests are writing fictional stories, building Lego creations, reading on my Kindle, and playing and composing on the saxophone, drums, and piano. My aspirations for the future are to become a best-selling author of fiction and fantasy books. I also hope to attend Stanford University and major in creative writing (and maybe mathematics).

L E V E L 2



HONORABLE MENTION, LEVEL 2

Gisela Factora

Grade 7

Rancho Pico Junior High School

Stevenson Ranch

Stargirl, Jerry Spinelli

Dear Mr. Spinelli,

I was in fifth grade when I picked up your book *Stargirl*. I was superficial. I frowned upon people who dared to be different. If I did something differently than everyone else, I would automatically correct myself. I felt that being popular was important. I would do anything and everything to be accepted by my peers. In short, I was like a fifth grade Hillari Kimble.

I was afraid to be myself for fear that others would reject me. I had some of my own substance, but for the most part I was just like everyone else. I wore the same clothes as them, I listened to the same music, I watched the same shows, I did everything right. Yet for some reason, I wasn't popular, even though I'd hung out with popular kids when I was younger. I spent most of my time in fourth grade leading up to fifth grade trying to be popular, and ultimately failing.

I accepted this for the most part, but there was also a small, disappointed part of me. Then I read your book. At first, I thought that *Stargirl* was the weirdest girl ever and wondered why the students eventually accepted her, revered her. As I continued to read the book, I realized that I admired *Stargirl* and her defiance of popular opinion. I hated that she had given up being herself for being Leo's ideal girl.