

LAL Nebraska Level I winner 2016
Conleigh Hemmer, Irving Middle School, 2745 South 22nd St, Lincoln, NE 68502
Teacher: Nancy Svoboda, Book: *A Friendship for Today* by Patricia McKissack

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Dear Patricia McKissack,

Before reading *A Friendship from Today*, I judged people before getting to know them. I would judge them on their opinion, without even considering why they felt this way. If their point of view were different from mine, I would not make an effort to include them in anything that I did. I would convince myself that this course of action was acceptable, which it wasn't. I now know that you can't just judge someone based on that their actions are. Maybe they are just putting up a façade to derail people from their real emotions. Your book has taught me that you never know what each specific person's situation is until you get to know them personally.

Many people are like Grace, with a rough life at home and just trying to fit in with the popular crowd and have friends. And others are like Rosemary, the one who tries to dig a little deeper and find out what makes someone act the way they do. Grace opens up to Rosemary because she makes an effort to befriend her and they become very close. Your book has taught me that if you make an effort to talk to someone or find out why they have the ideas that they do or act the way they do, you might find the part of them that is hidden, the part that is sad or injured. I learned from your book that if you want to find something good in someone, you will, and if you don't want to find anything good, you won't.

I you want to think badly about someone, you will. Rosemary wanted to find something good about Grace, so she did. Mr. Keggley, who didn't want to find anything good about Rosemary, cut himself off to seeing her intelligence and talents. He expected her to be an uneducated African American girl. When she wasn't, he couldn't acknowledge her skill and equivalence to white people. In my opinion, he did this so he wouldn't have to admit that she belonged in his school. It would mess up his preconceived picture of African Americans.

I think at least everyone has done this. I know I have for sure. I have tried to ignore people's talent because of what they looked like or how they acted. Before your book, I never thought twice about it. I never even realized what I was doing. Now I see how quickly it can escalate, even into something as horrible as race discrimination. Mr. Keggley didn't care that Rosemary was smart. He saw her skin color and made an assumption about her intelligence, or lack thereof. If her skin color had been different she would have been judged on her test scores, not on what she looked like. But Mr. Keggley couldn't stop Rosemary from succeeding, no matter how hard he tried. That is because Rosemary never stopped working to improve herself.

Imagine what our world would be today if Martin Luther King, Jr. hadn't spoken out about racism. We would be an even more hateful world with a more blatant difference between white people and African Americans. Discriminatory actions would rule over our county.

More than anything else, the thing I took from your book is that everyone is equal. Whether your life in California or Nebraska or East Saint Louis, we are all the same. Maybe not the same color, but the same heart grows in each of us, and all of those hearts are the same color. I have learned that closing yourself off to people because they don't look the same as you has

happened lots of times in history, more than anyone wants to admit. And no one wants to repeat the terrible things that have happened in the past.

To be able to move forward in this nation, I think everyone needs to put their prejudice aside and start to learn what it means to love people. That's what your book has taught me, that if you can put your differences aside, our world would be much better off. Now the question is: How do we do that? I believe that each person has a different answer.

Before, my answer was probably something ignorant and not well thought out. Now, after reading your book I have figured out an answer. You don't need to put aside your differences. You need to look them square in the face and acknowledge that everyone is different, and that everyone is equal.

I can't change the man to my right, or the woman on my left. I can't change them, but I can change how I think about them. That is my solution to acceptance.

Sincerely,

Conleigh Hemmer