

LAL Nebraska Level III Winner 2016
Colette Mahr, Chadron High School, 901 Cedar St. Chadron, NE 69337
Teacher: Willy Uing, Book *Wintergirls* by Laurie Halse Anderson

Colette Mahr
Chadron High School
431 E Sixth St
Chadron, NE 69337

Dear Mrs. Anderson,

Your novel, *Wintergirls*, has been simultaneously the rudest and kindest wake-up call I have ever received. At a time in my life when I considered giving up, your book taught me that there was value in the world and in myself.

Mental disorders are relentlessly difficult because in order to battle them you must also battle yourself. Unfortunately, I had to learn this from experience. In middle school, insecurity slipped into my life. I was suddenly uncomfortable in my own skin, my own body, my own mind. I was increasingly cruel to myself. In my obsession with what I thought was perfection, I destroyed who I really was. Despite overwhelming love and stability at home, internally I was unraveling. My situation deteriorated for a long time. I had no words to describe what was happening to me, or the wisdom to save myself.

And then I discovered *Wintergirls*. Your story gave a voice to everything I had felt for years, and everything I was going through. The loneliness that overwhelmed me dissolved. Someone understood the internal battles I fought. Your book taught me that I was not an island in a sea of people who didn't understand. You opened my eyes to a much larger world in which I was not the only inhabitant, and other people shared my experiences and struggles. After being stuck in a very dark, self-centered world for a long time, this provided me with a bright light and connected me with life in an entirely new way. For the first time, I felt like my emotions and thoughts were valid and real. Because of your story, I was not invisible: my struggles and pain were recognized by someone. *Wintergirls* also showed me that my disorders did not have to define me.

Your novel showed me, without fanfare or gentleness, exactly what would happen to me if I continued to relentlessly bully myself. Your book's cruel honesty made me realize two essential things: that my problems were unavoidably real, and that I still had hope. If your book had never shown me that surviving these battles was possible, I may have given up. Saying your book saved my life would be an overstatement. Instead, this book forced me to begin saving my own life. Your book helped me realize that I am not helpless, and that I am capable of fighting these battles and winning. In short, your book taught me that the world has hope, regardless of how dark it seems sometimes. *Wintergirls* forced me to realize that we have to acknowledge both the good and bad in life in order to improve our situation and have hope for the future.

Thank you for showing me that there is more to my life than the constant battles I fight with myself. Because of your novel, though I still have a long ways to go, I'm beginning to see a future in which I can enjoy myself and the life I am so lucky to have.

Sincerely, Colette Mahr