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YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE, INCLUDING HOW TO SUBMIT ESSAYS, CONTEST RULES, DEADLINES, AND A TEACHING GUIDE WITH ACTIVITIES TEACHERS CAN USE TO GUIDE THEIR STUDENTS THROUGH THE BOOK DISCUSSION AND LETTER-WRITING PROCESS AT [HTTP://READ.GOV/LETTERS](http://read.gov/letters)




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Books can change lives. **JOURNEYS** includes more than fifty powerful letters from young readers to authors revealing some of the ways this is true.

LEGACY: A NOTE FROM EDITOR CATHERINE GOURLEY

Letters About Literature began in the 1980s as Books Change Lives, a reading promotion program of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. In 1992, with the sponsorship of *Weekly Reader*, the program evolved into an essay contest for young readers using the letter format. At a time when the Internet was increasing in popularity and e-mail was replacing snail mail, launching a program that required students to actually pen or type their letters and then mail them might have seemed counterintuitive. Yet participation in the program soared from four thousand letters in its first year to more than ten thousand in its second. Over the years, with national funding from Target, the Library of Congress James Madison Council, and, most recently, Dollar General Literacy Foundation, the annual number of entries from young readers has exceeded fifty thousand.

Teachers, in particular, have valued the program's reflective writing approach. Each year, hundreds of teachers submit letters of their own, sharing with the Center for the Book how the program has changed the lives of their students and taken them to new places in their writing. Many children who do not necessarily shine at other writing assignments take ownership of this particular challenge of writing a letter to an author. They write about themselves in a conversational way, often revealing personal details. Many teachers have written that they have learned more about their students from this activity than from any other.

When we began compiling the letters for this collection, we faced the somewhat daunting but pleasant task of tracking down our winning essayists from years past. Our LAL "alumni," as it turns out, include quite a few teachers, editors, some writers — as well as young people who have chosen to follow careers unrelated to teaching or publishing. Without exception, when we contacted them, they remembered the program and the genuine feeling of accomplishment in having received state or national recognition.

"I've never gotten to adequately express my gratitude for everything that the Letters About Literature contest meant to me, and all the ways it's affected me since then," Martha Park, now a freelance writer and editor, wrote to us. *Journeys* expresses our gratitude to the hundreds of thousands of young readers and teachers who participated in the Letters About Literature program.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR THE BOOK

The Library of Congress Center for the Book promotes books, reading, literacy, and libraries, as well as the scholarly study of books. It was founded in 1977 and has established affiliate centers across the country and in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Center's mission is carried out around the world.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Catherine Gourley served as the national director of the Letters About Literature reading promotion program from 2004 to 2017. She is also an author of many nonfiction books about women's history and the principal curriculum writer for the Story of Movies, an educational outreach program. She lives in Virginia.