2012 Minnesota Charter Public Schools Essay Writing Contest:

Winning Entries

Presented at the Minnesota State Capitol Building

May 9, 2012

Sponsored by The Center for School Change, Macalester College and The TCF Foundation

In conjunction with National Charter Schools Week
“Describe your favorite book and why?” (K – 5)

“Describe a book that helped change your life. Please explain.” (6 – 12)

(2012 essay prompts)

Students need more opportunities to share their writing, to compete and to be published. We also need more opportunities to share what’s happening in Minnesota Charter Public Schools. Those are the two major reasons why the Center for School Change (CSC), now at Macalester College, created the Minnesota Charter Public School Essay Contest in 2007.

Early each year, we send a prompt to all of Minnesota’s Public Charter School directors. Students are given until mid-March to write and submit their essay. This year, the Center for School Change staff and Macalester College student volunteers read, and re-read each essay looking for writing that address the prompt, is interesting, eloquent, humorous, creative, distinctive, insightful and/or compelling. We choose essays that are thoughtful and exhibit excellence. In addition, essays must be within the age-level word count maximum.

During National Charter Schools Week in May, we gather at the steps of Minnesota’s State Capitol and honor the winners. Students, teachers, administrators and family members from all across the state gather to honor and support these outstanding writers. Thanks to TCF Foundation for providing cash gift cards to the winners.

Each year we are amazed by the variety and thoughtfulness of the essays submitted. This book is only an example of the amazing work of Minnesota’s young writers. We invite you to read the winning essays and enjoy learning about how reading books can really help change student lives. Congratulations to the winners.
Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to:

- To the 1,857 Minnesota Charter Public School student writers who submitted essays and shared their stories and insights. You’ve reminded us that we can all learn by listening more closely to the voices of young people.

- The many educators, family members, and friends who support and encourage these emerging young writers, scholars and artist.

- Beth Topoluk and the TCF Foundation for providing financial support for the 2012 Minnesota Charter Public School Writing Contest. This event would not be possible without their assistance.

- Macalester College students Gabriella Gomez, Eric Van Gelder, Susann Puican, Hannah Johnson, Annie Gurvis, Marina Webbry, Madeline Brasunas and Hannah Gemrich for their help reading the many essays submissions and providing us with helpful insight.

- Anne Johnson, Facilities Support Manager at the Minnesota State Capitol for her assistance in planning for this event.

- Brian Longley, Director of Media Services, and David Reynolds, Technician of Media Services, at Macalester College for their assistance in providing us with the equipment needed for the event.

- The faculty and staff members at more than 30 charter public schools who encouraged students to participate in this contest and helped submit student essays.

With gratitude,

Center for School Change staff
I. FIRST PLACE

Rachel Ebony Walton, 1st grade – Friendship Academy

II. SECOND PLACE

Robert Htoo, 1st grade – College Prep Elementary
Kayla Johnson, 1st grade – Parnassus Preparatory School
Mariana Hermita, 2nd grade – Partnership Academy
Armya Williams, 2nd grade – Urban Academy

III. THIRD PLACE

Maleena Vue, 2nd grade – College Prep Elementary
Leif Newman, Kindergarten – Bright Water Montessori School
Dontrell Jackson, 2nd grade – Stonebridge Community School
Brooklyn Carlson, Kindergarten – Seven Hills Classical Academy
Paige Strickler, 2nd grade – Glacial Hills
Derek Salisbury, 1st grade – Cologne Academy

Grades 3-5

IV. FIRST PLACE

Musab Bashir, 3rd grade – Twin Cities International School

V. SECOND PLACE

Sneha Suresh, 5th grade – Eagle Ridge Academy
Grace Howard, 5th grade – Yinhua Academy
Koung Lor, 5th grade – Community of Peace Academy

VI. THIRD PLACE

Yusuf Mohamed, 5th grade – Minnesota International Middle School
Erica Olson, 4th grade – Seven Hills Classical Academy
Pranav Rupireddy, 5th grade – Parnassus Preparatory School
Annette Valles, 5th grade – St. Paul City School
VII. **FIRST PLACE**

Ayan Adan Issa, 8<sup>th</sup> grade – STEP Academy

VIII. **SECOND PLACE**

Houa Lor, 6<sup>th</sup> grade – Noble Academy
Aubrey Mercurio, 6<sup>th</sup> grade – Concordia Creative Learning Academy
Mali M. O’Neal, 8<sup>th</sup> grade – Laura Jeffrey Academy

IX. **THIRD PLACE**

Madeline Kadlec, 7<sup>th</sup> grade – Beacon Academy
Elizabeth Mae Carson, 6<sup>th</sup> grade – Eagle Ridge Academy
Jerry Kungu, 6<sup>th</sup> grade – Concordia Creative Learning Academy
Brooke Rayfield, 8<sup>th</sup> grade – Riverway Learning Community

X. **SPECIAL AWARD**

Paige, 11<sup>th</sup> grade – Wolf Creek Online Charter

XI. **FIRST PLACE**

Sam Mistry, 9<sup>th</sup> grade – St. Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists

XII. **SECOND PLACE**

Elizaveta Anderson, 11<sup>th</sup> grade – North Lakes Academy
Andrea Boe, 11<sup>th</sup> grade – Spectrum High School
Harrison Peabody Tiffany, 11<sup>th</sup> grade – Agricultural and Food Sciences Academy

XIII. **THIRD PLACE**

Caleb Rieck, 9<sup>th</sup> grade – Spectrum High School
Brooke Powell, 11<sup>th</sup> grade – Riverway Learning Community
Shundiin Green, 10<sup>th</sup> grade – Wolf Creek Online Charter
Luke Bjur, 10<sup>th</sup> grade – New Heights Charter
Jasmine Thompson, 9<sup>th</sup> grade – Rochester Off Campus
Evan Martinson-Packer, 11<sup>th</sup> grade – Academic Arts High School
Kao Soua Yang, 9<sup>th</sup> grade – Prairie Seeds Academy
FIRST PLACE
Rachel Ebony Walton, 1st grade – Friendship Academy

SECOND PLACE
Robert Htoo, 1st grade – College Prep Elementary
Kayla Johnson, 1st grade – Parnassus Preparatory School
Mariana Hermita, 2nd grade – Partnership Academy
Armya Williams, 2nd grade – Urban Academy

THIRD PLACE
Maleena Vue, 2nd grade – College Prep Elementary
Leif Newman, Kindergarten – Bright Water Montessori School
Dontrell Jackson, 2nd grade – Stonebridge Community School
Brooklyn Carlson, Kindergarten – Seven Hills Classical Academy
Paige Strickler, 2nd grade – Glacial Hills
Derek Salisbury, 1st grade – Cologne Academy
My Favorite Book

My favorite book is called “Dog gone It Stitch.” This is one of the many short stories that I enjoy. This story is about Lilo and Stitch. Stitch had to learn about jealousy and he had to learn that there was no reason to be jealous of a puppy that Lilo was in charge of taking care of for a few days. Stitch had to remember the meaning of ohana. Ohana means family and in a family nobody gets left behind. I wish I could have told Stitch that no matter what our family has to do they will always love you. I understand how Stitch felt because I remember feeling this way before. I had to learn that I was always going to be apart of my family and that they were always going to love me no matter what.
Jan and Stan

My favorite book is "Jan And Stan" because Stan is silly and Jan was silly too. They play soccer and I like to play soccer too. They really were colorful illustrations. It is a rhyming book. It teaches you about rhyming, thy sing a silly song. They make a snowman and then Stan make a silly snowman. They are so silly in the car. Grandma call Stan and Stan said woof woof. It is a silly book I never seen it before.
My favorite book is *Weird Parents* by Audrey Wood. This book makes me laugh. My favorite character is the weird mother. The funniest part of this story is when the Mother says "Bye-bye, honeycakes!" I also like when the Father says "How do you do?". I like it when the weird parents laugh out loud at the movie theatre. Sometimes my brother and I act this story out.
At the end of the story, the mom's hair was like lightning. My parents are weird too! I love weird parents.

The End

by Kayla Johnson
1st grade
Parnassus Preparatory School
I will persuade you about my favorite book called *Abuela*. I hope you like it. There is more excellent things in the book like it teaches you how to be nice. For example, *Abuela* kisses her daughter on her forehead and they hug. Another example why *Abuela* is my favorite book is because it teaches you how to talk in Spanish. For example, "*hola*" means hello or hi.

My last reason why I like the book *Abuela* is because it is funny because *Abuela* dressed up as a statue and smiled with her white teeth.

I'm done telling you all my reasons.
So I hope you read it and find it at the libraries and you'll find it.
My Favorite Book

My favorite book is "Green Eggs and Ham" by Dr. Seuss. A creature named Sam is trying to get his friend to eat green eggs and ham. First, his friend refuses. Sam tries many ways to get him to eat green eggs and ham. Finally, his friend gives in and he loves them!

This book is special because the rhyming words help me read. It also makes me hungry for eggs and reminds me of other strange foods my mother makes me try.

I recommend this to other kids because it will help them become better readers, and hungry too!
My favorite book is Rosa Park. Rosa parks fought for the right of African American. Even long ago African American had different drinking fountains. Buses were unequal too. Rosa Park said no and got arrested. Many African American including Martin Luther king Jr. were very angry. They were so angry they did not ride buses anymore. They refused to ride buses for 381 days. This let a new law. This made me lean to not tell people to move away in a seat and just sit with them.

By Maleena Vue
2nd grade
College Prep Elem
I like the book *There Was An Old Lady Who Swallowed A Bat*.

Why I like that books is that it is funny. *There Was An Old Lady Who Swallowed A Bat* reminds me of my Nana. I love when she burps because it is funny. But before that she has a full tummy that is it. I also like when she says "Trick or Treat."
Dontrell
Stonebridge Community School
2nd Grade

My favorite book is Martin's Big Words by Doreen Rappaport. Martin stood up for himself, but he didn't fight with his fist and he tried to make everything equal. He had a dream that black boys and black girls would be nice to white boys and white girls and play together. He talked with people and prayed with people and talked with people. In 1968 he got shot and he died. Today all people are in the same class together and they all get along.
My favorite book is

There's a wok it in My pok-it. I believes it be cus it has riming wrds in it!

and it's mad up wrds to and it has ril wrds.
My Favorite Book

of my favorites will always be listen!
Walk Two Moons

Romance? Loss? This book has it all. This is a story of a 13 year old girl who thinks life can’t get any worse. Or can it?

One reason I like this book is because I can relate to the characters. I can relate to Salamanca because I don’t like change. Another reason I can relate to Salamanca is because whenever I go to a new place I sometimes don’t feel like getting out of bed. I can relate to Phoebe because I “don’t notice the worth of water until the well is dry”, which means I sometimes never know how important something is until it’s gone.

I like Salamanca because she is brave, kind, willing, and can see the bright side of any moment. She loves nature, she especially loves blackberries. Neat freaks get on her nerves so easily.

Join Sal on the road trip that changes her life!

Grace Howard
Yinghua Academy
March 2012
5th
Have you ever wondered what life in the past was like? I love the book *I Had A DREAM*, because it’s about peace, caring, and acceptance.

The book *I Had A Dream*, told about the life of African Americans. This book remind me of my life because, if Martin Luther King had not cared for us, Hmong, African Americans, and the white would of have been separate.

In the past Martin Luther King fought for his family and the people in his town. In Martin Luther King’s town the white people didn’t care about them and they treated the African Americans like animals when they threw things at them, segregated the town and asked the African Americans to move away. Martin Luther King fought for equal rights for all people because it a special thing to do for people. I have friends of all color and it doesn’t matter.
Yusuf Mohamed
5th grade
Minneapolis International Middle School.

My favorite book is called
from the top because it's a good book, and
I like to read Big Nate books because it's so
fun to read, you'll never stop reading it.

and now Nate is going to go on a
date with Jenny, and Nate doesn't know that
Jenny doesn't like him. So Jenny canceled the
date.

It helped my life because I used to
be bad and now I'm so change. So
now I'm so thoughtful. Just to tell you
I read over this week twenty books of
Big Nate is my life.

Yesterday I read over ten books
and I feel so strong and good. I almost
forgot to tell you that I'm in a
good school.
Describe your favorite book and why.

My favorite book is *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

I like that book because it shows companionship, loyalty, friendship, love, and how family matters more than anything else. It makes me want to be a better person. My favorite character is Little Ann. She is sweet because of her invigorating spirit and personality. Old Dan is rugged and tough.
Billy is a country boy with a dream of becoming a professional hunter. Something I really like about the book is the great hunting competition. My favorite part of the book is when the "Red Fern" grows in the backyard. I found the whole book sweet, touching, funny and likeable. I think the book is good, and others should like it, too.
The Hobbit

So far, my favorite book is The Hobbit. This book sets the stage for the Lord of the Rings trilogy.

The Hobbit has a variety of creatures made by J.R.R Tolkien, such as ranging from tiny hobbits to ferocious dragons. In this story, thirteen dwarves, Gandalf the wizard, and Bilbo the hobbit, set out to find their massive hoard of treasure taken by the mighty dragon, Smaug. Through the book, the gang goes through obstacles such as goblins, Wargs, trolls, monstrous spiders, and elves before meeting Smaug. After the dragon is killed by the men of the lake, a huge war breaks out; this battle is called the Battle of Five Armies. The elves, dwarves, and the men win against the Wargs and goblins when the eagles come and kill most of the goblins and Wargs. Thorin, the leader of the dwarves dies in the war, and is buried with the Arkenstone of Thrain, and with the sword Orcrist, the goblin- cleaver. Fili and Kili, the youngest of the dwarves also die in the war fighting with Thorin. After the war, Bilbo returns home, thus ending The Hobbit.

I liked this book because it had a lot of comedy and magic involved. The Hobbit had some slapstick comedy and some irony. Irony usually happens when Bilbo puts on his ring that makes himself invisible. Slapstick comedy usually happens when the Trolls (Tom, Bert, and William) play or when Bombur (the fatter dwarf) is active or mad. In this book, the magic is very interesting. In Mirkwood, there is a magical river that makes people fall into a deep sleep if they drink, bathe, or fall into it. Also, Bilbo’s sword, the “Sting” glows when goblins are very near.

In summary, these are my reasons why I think The Hobbit is my most favorite book I have read.
Well my favorite book is *Matilda* by Roald Dahl. This book is that when you start reading you just can't put it down.

Why? It's because she finds herself as the smallest kindergartnerer whith the cooolest powers. It's all in her eye's!

Oh did I tell you about her parents? They don't care about her talent. She loves to read and knows all her times tables.

Isn't she awesome? Her powers could move anything with her eyes. When I was reading I laughed got mad and almost ripped the book. This is such an emotional, magical, cool and frustrating book! So I recommend it to you.
Grades 6 – 8

FIRST PLACE

Ayan Adan Issa, 8th grade – STEP Academy

SECOND PLACE

Houa Lor, 6th grade – Noble Academy
Aubrey Mercurio, 6th grade – Concordia Creative Learning Academy
Mali M. O’Neal, 8th grade – Laura Jeffrey Academy

THIRD PLACE

Madeline Kadlec, 7th grade – Beacon Academy
Elizabeth Mae Carson, 6th grade – Eagle Ridge Academy
Jerry Kungu, 6th grade – Concordia Creative Learning Academy
Brooke Rayfield, 8th grade – Riverway Learning Community
Stuck in a World of Awe

Have you ever been stranded alone in an ocean with a broken leg and two injured whales? Have you ever felt so isolated in your life that the only things you can talk to in the world are whales? In this novel called “Stranded” by Ben Mikaelsen, is a story about a young girl’s determination to do the right thing, and to prove herself to her peers and parents. This book really changed my life and the way I see disabled people. This book taught me how to have sympathy, how to look at the world from a different perspective, and how I see animals now that I know they are or will be part of my life.

One reason how the book “Stranded” changed my life is that it taught me how to have sympathy towards other people. The main character, Koby, was a girl who went through hardship and days of harsh treatment. People used to bully her, but she didn’t let that get in her way. Now when I see people that are injured, I go and help them. I feel that it’s my duty to do so. When someone lacks the ability to do something, that doesn’t give anybody else the right to tease and take advantage of them. You should have sympathy for people. Put yourself in their shoes.

Another reason how this book changed my life is that it inspired me to look at the world from a different perspective. Before I read this book, I used to think that disabled people were the same as healthy, two-legged people. When I used to see people on a wheelchair, I used to
think they had a minor injury and not a lifelong one. Now, when I see people on a wheelchair, I say to myself, Thank God I can walk!

The last reason how this book changed my life is that it completely changed the way I look at animals. Koby was a kindhearted girl who took care of two whales. Some people in this world can’t even look after a fish! Now that I read this book, even insects need their freedom. Therefore, if you see an animal in need, you should give it a hand. Who knows what you will get in return.

In conclusion, the book “Stranded” is a really good, entertaining, and page-turning book. Changing the way I see things will not only help me understand the world better, but also alter my way of life. I give this book five stars and even though I first read this book in the fifth grade, I recommend you to read and enjoy it.
Lost Treasure of the Emerald Eye
By: Geronimo Stilton

The pages kept turning, my eyes kept running, Oh wow, this is going to be a big surprise. It took only a few months for me to understand English, but it took me forever to know how to read. Every time in kindergarten the teachers kept telling me to read, but I would always answer back, “I’ll try,” but I never did try. When it came to “reading time” in class, I always pretended to read my book. Then, when it came to second grade I decided time is not waiting for me anymore. One day, I saw one of my friend reading a book called, The Curse of the Cheese Pyramid, I asked him, “Is that a good book?” He answered me, “It’s awesome, its one of the Geronimo Stilton’s series, you should read one!” He handed me a book from Geronimo Stilton’s book series that was, Lost Treasure of the Emerald Eye. The book seemed enjoyable to read, and when I turn the pages, I was filled with happiness. After that day I received that book I was totally into it. Then the pages stopped, my eyes stopped running, oh wow, it is a big surprise, I read a book!
The Book That Changed My Life.

The book *Chicken Soup (Teenage soul)* Changed my life forever. Firstly *Chicken Soup (The teenage soul)* help me with my attitude and respect. It made me act better in school. It made me think in a different way. It helped me with others and teachers. It made my parents and I argue less, and my teachers and I are more respective of each other.

Secondly it made me get through the tough things in life. It helped me when my great grandpa (*Hugo Krueger*) died (I was just so depressed). And the book *Chicken soup (Teenage Soul)* gave me a better perspective on life.

Lastly it was one of the books that got me hooked on reading alone with *The Hunger Games* and *Maximum Ride*.

I like this book because of the stories of trouble and drama. And the overall statement is that “no matter what is going on in your life it could be worse.” That is the reasons I like this book. My name is Aubrey Micheal Mercurio I am from CCLA and *Chicken Soup (Teenage Soul)* changed my life.
A Resilient, Magnanimous Princess

When I was younger, I was constantly picked on. I would come home from school crying, and when I had to go back in the morning, I would hide because I was so scared. Then one day, my friend recommended the book *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. It changed my life. I began to feel more comfortable with myself. I realized that things might not be so great right now, but eventually they would get better. I started to stand up to the kids who bullied me. I made it clear that I was who I was, and I wasn’t going to change.

I identified a lot with Sara Crewe (the main character), and the struggles she faced. It empowered me to read about a young girl who could face so much, and still not give up. Not only did Sara stay strong to who she was, but she encouraged other people to imagine, hope, and dream. Reading *A Little Princess* made me resilient. It gave me a new inner-strength. I don’t think I would be who I am today if I had not become part of Sara’s world.
Lazarillo de Tormes His Fortunes and Misfortunes as Told by himself

Maddie Kadlec

7th grade

Beacon Academy

*Lazarillo de Tormes* has been a life-changing book for me. This is a book in Spanish written in Spain in the 16th century by an anonymous author. *Lazarillo de Tormes* is about a poor boy without a home. It is a very long book, but I just read a revised edition in Spanish with my teacher. Before I read this book, I was timid with my Spanish. I never talked to anyone, even though I’ve been learning for years. When I read this book, I realized I know a lot more of the language than I thought I did. What changed my level of confidence wasn’t the story; it was more about me realizing that I could read a book in Spanish, even if it was only 50 pages. However, I did enjoy the story and thought it was amusing. When I considered talking to people before I read this book I thought, “I shouldn’t do this. I might mess up.” Now I think, “Won’t this be a hoot to practice Spanish!” Lazarillo never gave up and neither did I.
The book which has changed my life is *Little Women*. The first day I picked up the book, I couldn’t put it down. *Little Women* opened my eyes as it reminded me of how important my family and friends were in my life and now they have always been there for me since my first breath of life until now. Through my ups and downs, they have held my hands encouraging me each step of the way. The book communicated to me that I cannot be a perfect sister and that I will make mistakes as I experience new changes every day. The March sisters set a good example of love to everyone they encounter, which inspires me to have those same intentions in life. I make many mistakes being a sister, but I remember that I can’t be perfect as I try my best to be supportive to my family, and friends. I grow in my relationships each day at home, school, and church. *Little Women* has changed the way I live my life and it has moved me in many ways. I appreciate the literature in my life, because it can move me to do great things.
Naruto is my favorite book for lots of reasons. One reason is that Naruto is determined to be Hokage which is president but he never gives up even if it costs his life. He has faith in people even if their bad and cruel. He is very nice and has lots friends and that's what encourages me to read the book. It may have some fighting scenes but it can teach you a thing or two how to make friends, I mean I made lots of friends by not giving up and trying harder every time. I have to try and many other people do too and that's what I like about Naruto.

Furthermore, I really like Naruto because he inspires me to be who I am. He is never afraid of being himself he tries and tries and will go until he can't move, well not really. He would keep going but still he would go even more than that but it would make no difference. He would keep trying and with his friends Sasuke Uchiha and Sakura Hanara, he can do anything. If you would want a good book it is Naruto.
Brooke Rayfield
Riverway Learning Community
8th grade

A Book That Changed My Life

Hello, my name is Brooke Rayfield, and I go to Riverway Learning Community. When I was asked what book helped change my life, I said no book has helped change my life yet. I have troubles with reading comprehension, so I really don’t like to read. I would like to be a better reader so that I would like books more. I work hard at trying to make my reading comprehension better. If I were a better reader I would read more and be able to enjoy books a lot better. I would learn about things that are around me. If I read more and if I could understand it, I would be able to answer my questions.

My teachers and friends also try to help me with comprehension and with all the questions I have. They are a big help to me. As of right now I don’t have a book that helped change my life but hopefully when I get older and better at comprehension I will have a book that helped change my life. Right now I am currently reading The Glass Castle with my friend Zoey. We would take turns reading out loud so that we can both understand it.

I want to be a better reader so that I will understand and like books more. If I were a better reader I would read more. If I were to read more I could answer my everyday questions. I would control my education.
SPECIAL AWARD

Paige, 11th grade – Wolf Creek Online Charter

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Luke Bjur, 10th grade – New Heights Charter
Jasmine Thompson, 9th grade – Rochester Off Campus
Evan Martinson-Packer, 11th grader – Academic Arts High School
Kao Soua Yang, 9th grade – Prairie Seeds Academy
Paige

Grade: 11, but graduating early.

Wolf Creek Online Charter High School

In 2006 my mother’s colleague William Cope Moyers, executive director of Hazelden’s Center for Public Advocacy, came out with his first novel, “Broken: My Story of Addiction and Redemption”. Though I was only approaching my twelfth birthday at the time, I read his novel and was really affected by it. My mother, who works in the PR Department at Hazelden, helped him to promote his novel. He had a book signing and had to give a speech for recovering addicts at Hazelden one weekend shortly after the book came out. I tagged along with my mother that day and sat in the audience as he spoke about his story.

What he had to say in the story and in real life really moved me and had a profound affect on my life. As soon as we had arrived at home I began meticulously typing away on our computer, thinking of a way to tell my mother a secret I had been hiding for years. As I finished my twentieth page, I printed out my story and allowed her to read some of what I had been holding inside. I couldn’t physically tell her about the molestation, but I could write it out for her to read. Quickly she broke into great sobs and asked me if what I wrote had been true.

I told her that yes, it was. The following Monday she contacted the police department and I was interviewed. A year later my sister came out and said that he too had been violating her for many years as well. After several court dates and a trial, my father is now in prison for hopefully the rest of his life. I can definitely thank William for helping me to find the courage to tell my mother.
By Sam Mistry
Grade 9 Honors English Student
St. Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists
3/23/12

*It's Kind of a Funny Story* How a Book Can Change Your Life

Depression is no easy subject to understand. Therapists get too deep, psychologists get too wordy. In his book, *It's Kind of a Funny Story*, Ned Vizzini just tells it like it is, what it feels like to be a teenage boy with depression: “So why am I depressed? That's the million-dollar question, baby, the Tootsie Roll question; not even the owl knows the answer to that one.” Because I am depressed and unsure why, I can relate.

Based on the experiences of Ned Vizzini, *It's Kind of a Funny Story* revolves around a young man, Craig, who checks into a mental hospital for having suicidal thoughts. After spending a few days there, Craig comes out feeling like a new man. This book is incredible since I can see myself as Craig. I have a difficult time sorting through my feelings, but this book sums them all up. Like many suffering from depression, I have an “Anchor”, one of, “those things that occupy my mind and make me feel good.” My anchor is this book. Whenever I’m down, I read it and instantly feel like I’m not alone. I never know how to explain my feelings to my family, so I read excerpts from the book aloud to them, “I'm not doing well in terms of being a functional human, you know?”

Craig’s idea of a “mental shift” is like how my brain shifted from depressed to hopeful after reading this book, “My brain doesn’t want to think anymore; all of a sudden it wants to do.” I don’t need to overthink things and make myself stressed, I can just live and enjoy living! *It's Kind of A Funny Story* continues to change my life. I start each day with a little reminder from Ned, “Things to do today: 1) Breathe in. 2) Breath out.” For the last line, I replace Craig’s name with my own, and I know I can make it, “So now live for real, [Sam]. Live. Live. Live. Live.”
The Book that Changed my Life

Elizaveta Anderson

North Lakes Academy 11th Grade

March 23, 12

The book that turned my life around was *The Last Song* by Nicholas Sparks. The book taught me to treat life like there's no tomorrow. I learned how to be closer to family. Today, I try my hardest to be more positive toward my family members, not to believe everything I hear, and not to regret things that happen.

The book taught me to be more positive to my family members. In the book, the main character, Ronnie, isn't close to her dad. When she goes and visits him for the summer after not seeing him for long time, she's rude to him. Ronnie shows only negative emotion towards him until the end, when he's dying. After reading the book I realized I should be more positive towards my family members because they could die any time. I don't want my last words with them to be "I'm mad at you" or some kind of negative feeling.

The book also taught me to not believe every word I hear. Ronnie's mother said her father left her unexpectedly for another woman, but the truth was, she left him for another man. Ronnie could have gotten both sides of the story if she just asked her father and, most likely, she could have had a great relationship with him. When I hear something not true or when someone tells me something I think isn't true, I talk about it with someone who can help me figure it out.

The last lesson the book taught me was to try my hardest not to live with regret. All that time that Ronnie could have been talking with her father, she was doing bad, negative things. She could have had a positive relationship if she knew the truth. As the summer went
by she was connecting more with him and wanted to learn more about him, but by the end of it he passed away. I would regret not talking to my father. As my life goes on, I try to work at even the small things in life. Even if I make a mistake, I learn from it and don't regret it anymore.

*The Last Song* taught me three very important life lessons. From when I started reading the book until the second I finished it, it made me think about how life and how it is precious and short. It taught me that the unsuccessful things I do should not be regretted; instead, I should learn from them. I always try to seek the truth in a lie and stay as positive as I can be towards those I love. This was a wonderful, life-changing book.
Get Me Out Of Here was written by Rachel Reiland as a twenty-nine year old woman dealing with Borderline Personality Disorder. She lived with this her whole life and had never gotten a diagnoses until after a hospital visit for suicidal ideation. Her book takes the reader through an agonizing journey of her struggles with this disease and the roots of her past that evoked many of her harmful behaviors. With the help of her therapist, Dr. Padgett, and a time frame of four years, Reiland was able to overcome the devastating restraint of BPD. This book changed my life because I have been cut down and set back with the unfortunate mental illnesses of depression and anxiety, so I know where she is coming from and it’s so relieving to know that other people know where I’m coming from as well. To have Reiland take my hand and guide me through her story gave me hope that only someone else who had suffered could.

One symptom of BPD is extreme paralyzing fear of abandonment. With this, the BPD sufferer will let out explosive rages, but when their loved ones leave from exhaustion of dealing with the mood swings the person will become infuriated that they are being abandoned. This spoke to me in volumes that most people will never have to understand, and I hope they never do. My biological father walked out when I was eight months old, and he is still absent in my life. However, Reiland’s terrifying yet uplifting story helped me realize that their is love and hope in the world that is to be found. Not only have I dealt with depression and abandonment, but I have also been hospitalized as Reiland was. She brought a new light to people who have been hospitalized for depression, suicidal ideation, and BPD. Her story is not about a girl locked up in a psychward, it’s more than that; it’s a journal of what’s behind the face of someone society calls “crazy”. Rachel Reiland is an excavator into the grotesque truth of our society, and I will proudly plow behind her.
Persepolis

“I wanted to be the justice, love and wrath of god all in one.” this is a very strong statement. but it becomes all the more powerful why it comes from the mouth of a six year old Marjane Satrapi in her book *Persepolis*.

When i was six years old i remember sitting on the floor in my room in my underwear playing with legos. Obviously people mature at different rates. but when i turned 14 my sister did lead me to a book that would change the way i would view the world from then on.

when i picked up the book *Persepolis* i started to feel a connection with the characters and the plight of the Iranian people. i felt the dance,food,faith and culture of the old country turning the pages for me. I began to feel the cigarettes being put out on the backs of my thighs along with my fellow political prisoners. i began to hear the bombs Saddam drop over Tehran. and i could taste the tear gas while protesting the Shah’s repressive regime with the many revolutionaries around me.

My memories often fall back to the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota. The Protest was peaceful and many young children were in attendance. Suddenly a canister of tear gas exploded 20 feet to my right, a second later there was another on my left. Kids not older than 8 were doubled over choking on the substance that filled their lungs. as i ran forward with my mouth covered by my sleeve to kick away the gas canister I thought about Marjane Satrapi and the first time she saw violence, at a protest like this.
Persepolis has changed my life because it inspired me to do the right thing even if it's dangerous.
Caleb Rieck, Grade 9
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*One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish.* This is just one of Dr. Seuss’s famous books. I loved to read his books whether it be for the rhymes or his imagination. If you didn’t know, each book has a secret lesson in it. In *The Sneetches* it’s about accepting people who are different.

His books were always on my mind from my head to my toes.

They told me to never grow up or get old.

Then if so, not shut them out.

But to keep my mind open and even about.

A mind is as good as the person who owns it,

and if you use it

for fun or to give you a fright,

you will see things with a whole new light.

Whether a battle, safari, or even just flight,

things will appear if you keep that mind bright.

You may look at a page as if to be paper, but look again and you’ll see more than that.

Look there’s a mouse,

or a house

anything can happen when you don’t shut them out.

Most books tell you things using logistics or numbers.

Dr. Seuss taught great lessons through words and not numbers.
So if you are thirteen, fourteen, fifteen or more keep that mind open
and don’t close the door.

Get in your car and drive straight to the store,
get a Dr. Seuss book, three even four.

Get back to your house and crack open the cover
open your mind there are more worlds to discover.

Each world has a meaning with something to teach,
I suggest that you start with a book with a Sneetch.

It will teach you that every person is unique, even me.

I learned all this from Dr. Seuss don’t you see.
Minnesota Charter School Essay

Hello, my name is Brooke Powell. I’m currently a junior at Riverway Learning Community. There are roughly 100 students enrolled in this small charter school; this consists of pre-k through 12th grade students.

Every afternoon, Secondary 7th-12th grade students read quietly after lunch. Each student is allowed to read any book they want as long as its school appropriate. When we finish a book, we are required to write a book report. During this time, I read a life changing story which leads into this year’s Minnesota Charter School’s essay topic.

The book that has made a major impact on my life and millions of others is A Child Called It by David Pelzer. It’s a story about a severe case of child abuse that happened in California. The author of this book also happens to be the abused victim in the story. This book helped me understand that child abuse goes far beyond unnecessary and excessive spanking.

As children, we all look for the satisfaction of others. In society we thrive off of others’ opinions of us. We feel the need to be accepted by everyone, and if we are not, we feel obligated to change. But what if we were forced to change, not because of society, but because you were told countless times daily that, “you are worthless”? A person’s name loses all meaning, becomes translated into the boy, then an expletive in front of child, and eventually degraded into “it.” Now imagine being seven years old and experiencing all of that.

David’s mother was an alcoholic, but does that justify stabbing her son, attempting to drown him, burning his hand on the stove, and forcing him to drink bleach? NEVER. I’ve heard people say, “That book is so fake, nothing like that ever happens.” Every time I hear that, it makes my stomach turn. In our society, it’s reality and I don’t think many people realize that! Did you know that more than five children die everyday because of child abuse? Or that every ten seconds a child abuse case is reported? These statistics are scary, don’t you agree?

No child ever deserves to be called an “it” or any other disrespectful names. No child should be hit or kicked around. No child should ever have to steal from the local gas station, just to put food in their stomach because their parents don’t feed them. No child should ever have to go through what David did!

This book inspired me to do some great things with my 2012 title as “Minnesota’s Perfect Teen.” I hope to spend time with child abuse victims that have been saved. I also hope to work with a non-profit organization to raise money and spread awareness. With or without a sparkling crown, this is still something that I don’t think is right and I wish I could stop it!
Shundiin Green
Grade: 10
Wolf Creek Online Charter High School

No one really understands your life until they’ve walked in your shoes or experienced a similar situation. When my sister got brain cancer I didn’t know where to turn and I wish it was me instead of her. I would see her every day at the hospital trying to smile and make everyone think she was doing ok, even with tears falling from her eyes. I would cry and pray every night she would make it through another day and keep trusting in God that He would heal her. Months would go by where she was so ill she couldn’t even speak but I kept praying some miracle would happen. Finally one day when she went into surgery they got the brain tumor out and she started to progress from there. My sister came home from the hospital because she was doing so much better mentally, emotionally, and physically. While driving back we stopped at the library and checked out this book called Nancy Drew Notebooks: The Scary Tales Sleepover. We went home and she read it to me. I saw her smile a real smile and laugh a real laugh; it truly brought my eyes to tears because I haven’t seen her do that in so long. We had so much fun together laughing, we would actually stay up until 9 (which was very late to us) and read this book together. My sister and I would read this story over and over every single night for months. This book really helped change my life in so many ways; first of all, it helped me have hope with that smile she had while reading the Nancy Drew Notebook she would make it through another day. Second, it made me more compassionate toward others. Lastly, it truly put in my heart to help kids and teach them how to read and how important reading is.
A book that changed my life

Many books that have changed my life, which includes children’s books to long novels. Books are meant to make people think or that is in my opinion. The book that has changed my life the most is the Bible. This is because I have grown up in a house that uses the Bible for all of our rules and our discipline, so, to say the least, it has been in my life for all of my life.

There are many things that I have learned from the Bible as well, such as to respect all people equally and to treat everyone how I would like to be treated. It also taught me how to be honest and that lying is something that I should not do ever. I know there are many books that teach children how to be good citizens but the Bible is the book that has taught ME the most throughout my life.

It is the fundamentals to my life. It has given me rules and laws to live by. It has shown me that even when people do bad against me I should forgive them because I would want someone to forgive me as well. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” That’s what it’s saying: if you would want someone to forgive you, you must also forgive others. I’m not trying to make anyone read this book but I would suggest reading it because it has changed my life, no matter who you are you should read it, it might make the world more peaceful if everyone were to read it. This book has given me purpose in life, and it has taught me to treat others well. That is the reason I chose to write about the Bible.
Jasmine Thompson
Grade 9
Rochester Off Campus

A book that completely changed my life is *My Sister’s Keeper*, by Jodi Picolt. This book has had an amazing impact on my life. After losing my little brother Thomas to cancer I felt alone and as if no one cared to help me. This book has given me the confidence that I needed to do everyday tasks that needed to be done. *My Sister’s Keeper* has also taught me not to take life or your loved ones for granted. Even though he died at such a young age this book also kind of lets me know that he knew it was his time to go and that they aren’t scared to die because they know God has a plan for them. People can’t be crying and complaining just because they don’t get what they want, others have it a lot worse. Someone will say oh my god my life is bad because I don’t have a pair of shoes, and when I used to say my life is bad it’s because my little brother was dying and it took a little while to realize that it wasn’t my life that was bad it was his. I was just being selfish and wanting it to be all about me and only me. After Tommy died I realized that not everything can be all about me. I realized that I needed to wake up to reality. Unlike most I can relate to this book . . . this book changed my life and the way I look at life.
Evan Martinson-Packer
Grade 11
March 22, 2012
Academic Arts High School

A book I read that inspired me was a book called "Tweak: Growing Up on Methamphetamines," written by Nic Sheff. This book is about a man who suffers from drug addiction. This touched me a lot because in my past, I experimented with drugs; also, some relatives in my family suffered from drug addiction. After reading it I started to re-evaluate my life. I didn’t want to end up addicted to hard drugs, like meth or heroin, because of the choices I made when I was younger.

Both my mom and dad suffered from chemical dependency. My dad was in and out of Alcoholics Anonymous. He would be sober for a period of time, then slip up and start using drugs and drinking again. When I look at people around me, I can compare their lives to the book. I noticed that addicts think they can control their addiction, but the problem usually gets progressively worse.

After reading, I started re-evaluating my life. I started going to A.A. meetings with my dad. Going to these meeting were good bonding experiences with him. The more I went, the less we would fight, and the closer we became. This may have never happened if
I didn’t read this book.

Movies and music often times will portray drug addiction as glamorous or fun, but this book shows how it really is. It shows the real outcome of drug addiction, and where it will lead one if they continue on that path of self-destruction. This is why I believe this book helped me change my life in a positive way.
There are many books that inspired me; however, there is only one book that really helped change me: *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey. This book motivated me, because it truly is a life changing experience.

This book has made me learn to be more responsible. Sean says, “Life for teens is no longer a playground. It is a jungle out there.” On my first day of high school, my English teacher asked us whether or not people can make us mad. Most of us answered yes. She explained that people cannot make us mad, but it is our decision to react that way. From that moment on, I realized that I am responsible for my own actions, and people should not be my scapegoat.

I used to be really shy. Sean’s second habit says to begin with the end in mind. I know that I want to be a confident and strong role model for others. He taught me that to help others, I have to help myself first. To accomplish this desire, I start to come out of my shell and interact with people around me – making me more successful.

After reading the book, I have come to realize who I used to be, who I am now, and who I want to be. Through reflection, I discovered my selfless side. I want to improve myself, and find the true self-definition that I want to have. My identity is not determined by how many times I fall, but it is about how many times I get back up. I want to start, not again, but from where I am to become a better me.

I have become a more open, productive, and successful person because of this book. I hope teens can be changed by this like me. They should pick out the meaning from the book and not just read it.