

Teacher's Worksheet:

Can LAL Assist Students in Meeting Common Core State Standards for Writing?

LAL is confident that teachers can successfully adapt LAL's writing prompt and activities as tools to help students achieve Common Core State Standards for writing. Consider, for example, the letter below. Margaret Lim, a sixth grade student from Searcy, Arkansas, wrote this letter to Sharon Draper for the LettersAbout Literature 2012 competition. Her entry took Arkansas's first place prize on Level 1 (grades 4 – 6) and advanced to take one of the two national awards. We have noted in sidebar comments where we believe the letter meets specific CCSS for writing in grades 6 – 8.

Dear Sharon Draper,

A lot of books have flashes of insight, but only few of them have those bursts of fireworks that snap open the reader's mind and make them realize something new. Your book, *Out of My Mind*, filled me with those sparks. Although your book is just another story out of the billion others out there, it meant more than "just another story" to me. I enjoyed getting to know Melody. Despite the fact that she had cerebral palsy, Melody had an amazing character that shone brightly. *Out of My Mind* helped me learn a life-long lesson.

Your book has changed my point of view. I never teased those who had special needs, but I never really felt comfortable around them either. When I started reading your novel, I saw how Melody was a smart and talented girl. At the beginning of the book, I asked myself, "Would I be Melody's friend?" The weird feeling in the pit of my stomach told me the sad truth: *no*. I carried on with your book from start to finish, and when I closed it, I asked myself the same question, "Would I be Melody's friend?" I realized, with a grin, that the answer was right in front of me. Throughout *Out of my Mind*, I had become Melody's friend. Her thoughts became my own. When her quiz team left her behind when it was time for them to travel for their competition, I felt angry. How could they? I then remembered that only a few weeks before, I would most likely do the same thing as Melody's teammates. Her teammates showed me what not to do, because when they left Melody, they left me, and I did not like the feeling of being left behind.

Writing Standard 1A: Introduce a claim about a topic. Writer states clearly in the first paragraph that Draper's book helped her "learn a life-long lesson."

Writing Standard 1B: Support claim with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic. In paragraph two, writer states her point of view before reading and then describes how her POV changed while reading.

Writing Standards 2C: Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts. She describes a progression as she read and indicates so by using phrases like "when I started reading...", "I carried on...", "then I remembered..." and "when I closed it."

As I read and read, Melody's thoughts and feelings melted easily into my brain like an ice cube on a sidewalk on a hot summer's day. I have read other books about people with special needs and how they were treated unfairly, but the setting was always in the past. By putting the story in present day, I saw how people with disabilities are still treated with unkindness and how some people still act as if people with special needs are at the bottom of the feeding chart. I feel guilty about my previous thoughts. Melody is my inspiration. I have no idea how she dealt with her disabilities so well. In public, I am not a talker, but at home, I am a chatterbox. If I couldn't talk, I would blow. Melody had the electronic talker, but it didn't allow her to communicate fully. Even when she could "speak" her mind, it was still hard for others to understand how she truly felt.

Before I read *Out of My Mind*, I used to wonder how people with special needs thought. It's hard to confess, but I thought that they were less intelligent. Judging on the person's disabilities clouded my mind, and I formed misguided conclusions about them. Last year, there was a boy in my class who had Asperger's syndrome. I didn't really know him; he just seemed different to me. Later on in the year, we happened to get seated in the same group. This was around the time that I read your novel. I got to know him and see what he was really like. Melody showed me how she was just as good as anyone else in her classroom and how the same goes for anyone else with disabilities. The boy in my class amazed me by what he was capable of doing. As the days went by, I started helping him instead of avoiding him.

Melody opened my eyes and cleared the world around me. She showed me how a girl with cerebral palsy is the same as a girl like me. Once I learned from my mistake, I started to fix it, like with the boy in my class. Now it is time for me to thank you for writing this amazing novel. I will never forget your fantastic book. I don't think anyone could. If they did, they would be out of their minds.

Sincerely,

Margaret Lim

Writing Standard 3D: Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details and sensory language to convey experiences and events.

Examples from this paragraph: "melted easily into my brain like an ice cube on a sidewalk on a hot summer's day", "bottom of the feeding chart", and "I am a chatterbox."

Writing standard 2B: Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

She identifies the setting as a reason why this story in particular was different for her and also relates a personal characteristic (a chatterbox) and how this helped her to better understand Melody's courage. In the next paragraph, she introduces another supportive detail—the boy she met in school

Writing standard 3B: Use narrative techniques, she describes a real-life relationship relative to the conflicts she understands in the book

Writing standard 1E: Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented. Closing paragraph restates her claim in a fresh way that relates to the title of the author's work.

Writing Standard 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience. Clearly, the writer is keeping her audience in mind, that is the author of the book, and rather than summarizing the book, she shares with the author her personal insight (or reader response). In doing so, she meets the purpose of the assignment which is explain how a book or an author changed your view of your world or yourself.