

Dear Mr. Howe,

Last year for Christmas my dad gave me a book. The year before that he gave me a book. And the year before that. And the birthday after that, and the Christmas before, and the birthday before, and on and on. To simplify matters, he always gives books as presents. I think it is a noble habit, and I devour them faster than my classmates can believe. But last Christmas it wasn't just any book. It was *The Misfits*.

My mom read it aloud to me and my brother, something my parents have done since we were really little. We read it fast, my brother and I begging Mom to read farther every time it seemed like she'd stop. We finished in about one week, a week filled with rolling-on-the-floor-laughter, edge-of-the-seat-suspense, and conversations about different lines of Bobby and how true they were. About a week after mom finished it, my brother said to me, "When I grow up I want to make a movie of *The Misfits*." I hope no one does, though. A movie would ruin the beauty of things like the forum, that you just wouldn't be able to convey on a screen. But I hoped that for *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Narnia Chronicles*, and all my hopes so far have been dashed.

The whole time I was reading (well, listening to) *The Misfits* I was thinking, "Oh, yeah, that is so true...definitely...gosh, that so fits...I can totally relate..." and so on and so forth. My brother agrees with me, so I'm not just weird, I've never been able to relate to a book so well. I could see myself and my classmates and teachers in your characters really clearly. Being able to relate so closely was really cool and made the book seem much more real.

One thing that this particular work of art made me realize, however, was that people aren't always what they seem. I'm a bit of a misfit myself, or at least I used to be for most of my grade school career, though recently not as extremely as the gang of five, so I observe people a lot. One guy, who immediately reminded me of Jimmy Lemon, or maybe DuSawn Carter, can be a real jerk, but can also be really funny and nice. DuShawn seems like that. Reading about DuShawn made me look at my classmate more closely, and I saw he wasn't as much of a jerk as I had always thought; he just wanted attention.

And Colin, well, I saw him right away in a classmate too, although I strongly suspect my classmate isn't gay (although I wouldn't hold it against him or anything if he was; he's too nice to hold something against). The "Colin" type of people always bring out your "normal" side, if you have one (I'm not sure I do, though I have many sides). I discovered this unique talent after watching my classmate, with Colin in mind. When he was talking to others, they became more "normal" than I usually saw them.

And there's always a Brittany Hobson, isn't there? The Mother Teresa of the class, who is nice to everyone in a patronizing fashion that drives you nuts after a while, once you've gotten over the initial delighted shock of being noticed by a popular person. Again, after looking at my class's "Mother Teresa," I started feeling more and more like her leper pity case on the rare occasion that she struck up conversation with me.

There's even a girl in your class who fits Kelsey's character to the letter, including the artistic talent. I just can't quite see her going up to the person she likes, who happens to be my class's "Colin," and saying she likes him, not even after he delivered an amazing speech that changes the course of his life. But then I can't see my class's "Colin" delivering a life-changing speech, either. Or any other type of speech, for that matter.

Then there's Addie, my favorite character after Tondayala Cherise DuPre. Addie reminds me of me, only she's much more vocal (a reason I love Tondayala Cherise: vocal people are so fun). I'd love to be like Addie, to tell the truth. She's so cool. If I could stand up for my beliefs as well as her, I might not be the only Democrat in the class. But Addie inspired me to try harder, because I see now that standing up for your beliefs is one of the best things you can do, and it doesn't always make you look like an idiot. Not always, just sometimes.

The only character I can't seem to match up to a person in my life was Bobby. Maybe that's fitting. He's so cool; he seems almost larger than life, and not in the fact that he favored marshmallow fluff sandwiches. I guess I can see pieces of him in different people, the shyness, the unpopularity, the smartness, the creativity, and of course, the love of old movies. The more I think about it, I see him in one guy in my class who's probably been called more names than the rest of us eighth graders put together, except that Bobby seems like he wouldn't be boring to be around.

Since I read your life-changing novel when I was in seventh grade, and the stars of the book happen to be in that grade as well, I saw that seventh grade things can change your life. That's really cool, and it made me study my life more to find meaning in what I was doing, and to see if it would change my life. Aside from playing soccer really for the first time, I didn't see much. But maybe standing up for my beliefs for the first time in my life will make a difference eventually. And maybe my friends will influence me, like Addie did Bobby. I've got fairly influential friends who convinced me to play soccer, which I'm sure was a life changing thing, and they support me in my stand for anything, whether it be my stand for being able to go to the midnight showing of the fourth Harry Potter movie or my stand on who should be elected president. I lost both causes, but I fought valiantly.

I have read others of your books, of course, and they have equally influenced me. *Eat Your Poison, Dear* has given me a life long fear of cafeteria food, and since reading it several years ago, I have always taken my own lunch to school. *It Came From Beneath The Bed* has entirely changed my outlook on koalas—so if Patches (my stuffed koala) is ever giving me a vacant look, I can safely assume it means he is hungry—or maybe just desiring world domination, thanks to my maniacal brother and his science work. Okay, so maybe Patches is just hungry, if it's a choice between that and my brother successfully completing a science experiment. *Howliday Inn*, *Celery Stalks at Midnight*, and *Bunnicula* just go to show that my neighbor's yippy dog may very well be smarter than me, even though she did run head first into a tree once. Okay, twice. In a row. Maybe Howie and Harold are just unique. And the same neighbor's old rabbit was probably a vampire. Had I only known then, I would never have agreed to rabbit-sit for it, even if I was getting paid. And, naturally, like all good kid-detective books, the Sebastian Barth books inspired me to solve a mystery (although it may interest you to know I've never succeeded in finding a mystery, let alone solving one).

All in all, I love your books, and I'm always guaranteed at least one cozy afternoon by the heat or air conditioning vent with one of your books. I always circulate them to my friends after one reading so we can have deep discussions at 3:30 in the morning when we've run out of reminiscences about school. My only problem is I read too fast, so I never can have quite enough.

Hoping for another book soon

Emma Westerholm