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Dear Julie Anne Peters,

I remember seeing a Goth person for the first time at the mall when I was about seven, and I instantly thought negatively about them. I said to myself, that girl is weird and messed up, obviously not normal. Every time I saw a group of kids dressed in black with dyed hair and not so subtle eye makeup, I figured they were a gang. This got more difficult as I got older, I noticed more kids like this everywhere. My friends and I never thought we had anything in common with them. So except for an occasional glance at their bizarre appearance, I paid them little attention. A lot of kids like this were quiet and didn't have many friends.

I was paired with a Goth girl for a project last year, and I'll admit my first thought was great; I'll have to do the whole thing myself. But then I remembered your book, Define "Normal". I decided to give her a chance, just like Antonia did for Jazz, and she definitely surprised me.

This whole situation reminded me of the peer counseling sessions in your book and how Antonia figured out that there was a real person, a great one, underneath everything that we see on the outside. If I wouldn't have read your book, I would have likely missed out on a friendship, and I also would have ended up with a lousy project.

My new friend reminded me a lot of Jazz. She felt misunderstood, and she expressed herself through music. Not many people at school knew it, but she was an amazing musician. She played piano and cello, and she was also in my ballet class. We had a lot more in common than either of us knew; we even shared the same birthday! It was sad when she moved last summer, but our friendship taught me that a lot of my stereotypes were wrong, and who you are on the inside is definitely more important than your outward appearance.

I found Define "Normal" to be one of the most inspirational stories I've ever read. It taught me that everyone has secret struggles and we can truly learn some of life's most important lessons through each other. Reading your book helped me realize that I was judging people based on their appearance, so now I try to look deeper, because it's what's on the inside that really counts. Thank you for writing a novel that challenges stereotypes and lets us know that our differences can actually bring us closer together.

Sincerely,

Maddi Hemesath

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