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Dear Mrs. Levine,

The point of this letter is to let you know how your writing has changed my life. I have always enjoyed reading, and each book is like a whole new world, filled with adventures and even lessons to learn. One of the biggest lessons I learned was from your writing. It all began one crisp day in October....

I sighed. Life in the middle of nowhere, Iowa, can be so dull sometimes. It seems like nothing exciting ever happens in the center of a bunch of corn and pigs. Nothing ever happens to ordinary people in the real world. I sighed again, a little less fervently this time, and trudged through yet another pile of the newly fallen leaves. I had resigned myself to the fact that school was here once again, and, along with it, veritable piles of homework. So far I had to do an essay, a math assignment, a project, and a book report—all by the end of the week. And it was Wednesday already. Stress, a familiar and unwelcome companion from September to June, had joined me once again. How on earth was I going to get all of this done on time, and done well? It was impossible. I'd rather be one of the characters in the books I always read and go off seeking adventure, complete with swords and danger. But my life's adventures consist of wading through mounds of homework and balancing my life. I prefer swords any day.

Maybe reading could help relieve my stress. After all, there's no point in doing homework, or any other work, for that matter, when you're stressed and grumpy. You'll just have to redo it later. And I really needed that pick-me-up. I turned toward my house and made my way to the front door, still pondering what book to read. Then it hit me. Of course! Ella Enchanted by Gail Carson Levine! I'd already read it more than a dozen times, and I still found myself emotionally attached to the characters and breathlessly awaiting the resolution. There was nothing better to cheer me up than my favorite book.

I opened the door, already invigorated by the thought of curling up with Ella Enchanted. I settled comfortable into the couch and began to read. My stress evaporated as I let myself become part of the world of Frell, complete with Ella, Olive, Hattie, Dame Olga, and Prince Char.

There was something different about the story's effect on me as I read it this time. It always made me feel better and provided an escape, but today I seemed to be absorbing lessons as I delved into the private life of any ordinary girl named Ella. I surprised myself by relating to the life of a girl in a world full of magic and enchantments. Even though things like fairies and curses were normal in the book, I found parallels between Ella's world and my own.

Ella had experienced the love of her family, the absence of freedom, the loss of one she loved, hardships, friendships, enemies, school (of a sort), and even true love. She had so much adversity to overcome—a curse and some evil stepsisters. All I had to overcome

was homework. Yet the same lessons Ella learned applied to me. She got through life by leaning on those she trusted, using her wits, being friendly and open-minded, and keeping her sense of humor.

I was amazed, realizing that all I had to do was take these lessons and use them in my own world. I have good family and friends who love me and support me through everything. I know my own limits and strengths and I always try my best. Maybe all I needed was to regain my lost sense of humor. After all, what's homework in the grand scheme of things? As for boredom, I could make my own adventures. You don't need a bunch of hostile ogres or crazed fairies to have an exciting day. Each day is a gift, open for discovery and wonder.

I skipped down the stairs, my sense of purpose renewed. I ran to my mom and gave her a gigantic hug as she stood making some cookies. "What in the world?" she asked me, startled. "Oh, nothing," I laughed, smiling at her confusion. "I've just discovered the secret to leading a good life." She kept staring at me quizzically as I flitted away, spinning and twirling crazily in sheer joy and abandon. What I said was true: I *have* discovered what it takes to be happy. All you have to do is keep a sense of humor when adversity and stress rear their ugly heads. Follow your heart and keep your friends close to you, and *anything* is possible.

Thank you for your lessons.

Sincerely,
Shannon Schreur

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