April Reading Response
Letter-Essays

April 14, 2011

Dear Communication Arts Students,

This month, I wanted to try something a little different. I want you to tell me about your books. Tell me about your ideas and observations about your books. Your letter-essays will become a record of the reading, thinking, learning, and teaching we have accomplished together.

Each letter-essay should be at least two pages long and written as a personal, critical response to one book- in other words, not a series of paragraphs about a series of books, but a long look at the aspects of your April book that intrigue you.

Before you write, take a look at your book. Skim it, and select at least one passage you think is significant, in terms of how you reacted to the book’s theme, problem, character development, or plot arc, or to the author’s style. Choose a chunk of text that you think shows something essential. In your letter-essay, quote – copy- the passage you chose, and write about what you think it shows about the book, the author, or your response to either.

What else might you do in a letter-essay? Tell about your experience as a reader of the book. Describe what you noticed about how the author wrote. Tell what you think the themes might be. Tell what surprised you. Pose your wonderings- your questions about the author, the characters, the structure, the voice, and yourself as a reader. Try the sentence openers I provided to help you get thinking and writing. Be aware that a good letter-essay is one that teaches you something you didn’t realize about your book, or yourself as a reader, before you wrote it.

Use correct friendly letter format for your letter-essays. Always cite the name of the author of the book and the title. Indicate the title by capitalizing and underlining it- for example, The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton.

I can’t wait for your first letter-essays. They are an opportunity to speak your mind about what you are reading, but in a friendly yet critical way.

Sincerely,

Ms. Gallaher

Writing about Reading: Some Openers

I was surprised when/ angry about/ satisfied with/ moved by/ incredulous at...
I liked the way the author...
If I were the author I would have...
The main character...
The structure of this book...
The resolution of the problem...
I didn’t agree with...
Why did...

I rated this book a ____ out of ten because...

I was struck by / interested by / convinced by this passage: “. . .” It shows . . . about the author’s writing.
Letter-Essay Requirements

Provide a brief summary of the novel
Tell me your opinion- What would you rate it? Why? Would you recommend it to others?
Address at least two literary elements – Character, Conflict, Plot, Setting, Theme, Structure, Voice, Genre
Provide a thoughtful, yet serious commentary on your April book
2 pages minimum – 1 page double spaced in 12 point font, if typed.
Use proper friendly letter format

A Sample Letter-Essay

Dear Ms. Gallaher,

_The Game of Sunken Places_ is one of my favorite fantasy novels. Most other authors would have probably made this story muddled and confusing, due to its unique topic, but M. T. Anderson’s quick, to-the-point writing made it an extremely amusing and fast-paced book. Unlike other novels I have read recently, I was involved in the story almost immediately.

Greg and Brian are the main characters in this book. Their problem is that Greg’s mysterious uncle invited him and a friend (Brian) to come and visit. When they get to their rooms, they find the Game of Sunken Places. It is an old board game that is an exact replica of the mansion that they are staying in. When they figure out that they are actually _in_ the game, and that two “spirit-nations” are betting on who will win it, they become determined to beat their mysterious opponent.

“Two spirit-nations are at war. You will decide the conflict. On the one side, there are the People of the Mound of Norumbega, who used to live here. On the other side, the Thussor Hordes, who drove them out.” Uncle Max bowed his head against the headrest of the chair.

Gregory demanded, “What happens if we lose?”

“A treaty was struck,” said Uncle Max. “The People of Norumbega were forced into exile. But there is a chance for return. The Game is arranged. Rounds are played. If the Norumbegans win, they will return from their exile. If the Thussor Hordes win, they will take possession of the mountain, the Mound of Norumbega.”

Brian was incredulous. “The fate of this whole spirit-nation depends on whether we win or lose?”

I thought it was an interesting choice Anderson made to change the main character as the book progressed – at first Gregory is the main character, but then Brian begins to slowly take that position. The book is in third person (e.g., “Greg jumped”) so the change is not that drastic.

This novel is a combination of fantasy, adventure, and a bit of realistic fiction because most of it could be real, but some parts are fantasy. The only problem I had about _The Game of Sunken Places_ was that I found the climax to be a little fast. I think that with the entire plot building up to it, more could have come of it. Because of that, I would rate this an 8.5, not a 9 or a 9.5.

If I had to decide one theme for this book, it would be friendship, because that is what is holding G and B together the entire story. In the end, Gregory gives up all the glory and lets Brian become the hero. They worked as friends to win the game for the good side. Then when they figured out that they were supposed to be opponents, Gregory lets himself lose for the better good.

Overall, I think this book is a great read.

Sincerely,

Nathan