

2013 Letters About Literature Level 3 Honorable Mention

Paige Harrison's letter to Stephen Chbosky, author of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

January 9, 2013

Dear Mr. Chbosky,

Sixth grade was the start of the hardest years for me. I struggled with verbal abuse thrown at me from bullies and the typical insecurities that came with being a teenage girl. I never truly knew who I was or who I wanted to be. My insecurities continued to grow as did the number of schools I attended. Every school brought another bully, and it seemed with every school there was something I needed to change to achieve an image of supposed perfection. Soon I found myself hating every single thing about myself. At my low point, I was willing to do anything to change who I was. Then I found *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*.

I was hesitant to read it at first. The synopsis I had read online had already captured the basic outline of my life – enduring family struggles, striving to find my place in the world, being painfully awkward, and being innocently scared. I was afraid to read about someone so similar to me having a bad ending, or worse, having a cheesy happy ending where everything works out in a way that's completely opposite of real life. As I read, I found myself relating to Charlie better than anyone else I know. Eventually I realized how real his situation was, that teenagers go through what I've gone through, what Charlie went through, every single day. Knowing that other people live like me showed me I was never really alone.

When I read *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* for the first time I was transitioning into another new school, after my last school had left me battered and bruised. Knowing Charlie was going through the same situation was comforting. I struggled with making friends because for a long time I was trying to be someone I wasn't; I would strive to impress everyone at the same time. I pretended to like pop bands and I pretended that I love the movie *Mean Girls* when in reality I hated both with a passion. Charlie writes, "I guess we are who we are for a lot of reasons. And maybe we'll never know most of them." It finally hit me that I am who I am meant to be, not

who I pretend to be. After that, I stopped listening to catchy pop music and I stopped talking to people with whom I had nothing in common. I tried to be the most genuine version of me I could be.

Like Charlie, I still have days of insecurities, and I still over think things and cause myself to worry more than I should. But also like Charlie, I now know who I am and who I want to be. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* was much more than a novel; it served as a much needed reminder that it is much more important to be yourself than to try to please society. "So, if this does not end up being my last letter, please believe that things are good with me, and even when they're not, they will be soon enough. And I will believe the same about you."

With Admiration,

Paige Harrison