

Accentuate the Positive

Hate to red-pencil compositions? Most kids hate getting their papers back with red marks all over them, too. At LAL, we don't use red pencils or pens. Instead, we look for the positive elements in each letters—whether it is a single word choice, a phrase, or a well-thought out idea. Try this simple activity with your students. Put away your red pencil and grab a yellow (or orange, green, pink) highlighter. As you read the letter, highlight the ideas and language you like. The example below shows you what we mean.

Dear Charlotte Bronte,

I am writing in regards to your book *Villette*. This book has had a large influence upon my life. **Picking up your book is like wrapping myself in a warm blanket of familiarity.** I never find it difficult to understand your character's feelings. I have experienced many of them myself.

(Evelina, Chaska, MN)

SAMPLE 1

Dear Bette Green,

I finished *The Summer of my German Soldier* the other night. I just want to tell you that it was an excellent book. It was so well written that I was crying at the end. The book gave me such a different perspective on how prejudiced our country is. I hope I'm not prejudiced like some of the people in your book. I try to be fair, but it is so easy when choosing between people to choose the one who is most like me.

I also really began to see how lucky I am to be part of a family that accepts me for who I am, and not to be abused like Patty was in your book. A deep feeling of helplessness swept over me as I was reading parts of your book about the father's abuse. I guess I would have run out to try to help, like Antone did. too.

(from a letter written by Linetta from Bridgewater, VA)

SAMPLE 2

Dear Rick Riordan,

I have read almost all of your Percy Jackson books, and I loved and sucked up every word, every detail, every page. When I heard that we would be reading your first three books in class, I wanted to scream out, "Halleluiah." I first heard about your books from my cousin and I gave one a try. Needless to say, I instantly fell in love. I must have read it a zillion times before I found out there were two more.

(from a letter written by Sean from Illinois)

SAMPLE 3

Dear Matt Christopher,

My number #1 fear in sports is getting hurt. After reading *Face-Off* I'm not afraid of getting hit in sports. I had an experience that changed my fear about being hit in sports. Just like Scott Harrison, I used to cover my face with my glove when I was playing outfield.

I was up to bat with a count of 3 balls and 2 strikes. I dug my cleats in waiting for whatever nasty pitch the pitcher was going to throw. The pitcher threw the ball and I hit the ball. I ran as hard as I could. My heart was pounding 90 miles per hour. I got out, but before I knew it, I was flying and flat on the ground. I had tripped over the base and cut my arm really bad. I knew that I had to get right back up and take it like man and not like a whoosh. I got right back up and went right back to the dugout. My coach told me, "Good job giving it your best also good job getting right back up go get a warp for that nasty cut."

Matt Harrison inspired me to get right back up and don't be afraid of getting hurt in sports. I feel as if I have started a new chapter in my life by reading *Face Off*.

(from a letter written by Travis in Michigan)