Letters About Literature

By Jeannie Standal

What do Chris Crutcher, Anthony Doerr, Susan Nipp and Earnest Hemingway have in common? They are all successful, distinguished authors, of course, and they have all called Idaho home! They followed vastly different paths to a writing career, crediting being read to by a parent, writing for the school newspaper, seeing the Make Way for Ducklings sculpture in Boston, or absconding with Dad’s Playboy magazine with getting them started. Letters About Literature is an opportunity to let students explore their talents as writers and readers, and follow in these Idahoans’ footsteps.

In our Facetime, text, blogpost world, students don’t get much opportunity to practice letter-writing, but Letters About Literature (LAL) is a reading and writing contest that students can use to flex their writing muscles. An LAL entry requires a student to write a letter to the author of a work that made a lasting difference his/her life or point of view. Students must pull events and ideas from the book to support the change they discuss in the letter. This is no book report, rather it is a way students can find evidence to support their ideas and explore why a text affected real life.

In addition to all the academic benefits that come from participating in LAL, students can win fabulous prizes! Winners in each category receive cash, books, and a framed certificate, along with a trip to the awards celebration in Boise. In addition, national winners receive $1,000!

The contest is open to individuals or classes, and to public, private, or homeschooled students. See Links to More Learning for rules, teacher guidelines, and entry deadlines. Collaborate with your school librarian to kick off Letter About Literature in your school!