

Bookends (. . . or how to close your letter)

All good writing whether it is a story, a research report or even a letter has three key parts:

- a beginning, or introduction;
- a middle, or body of supporting details; and
- an ending, or conclusion.

All three parts are important. The body is the largest part of the written message but it is often the

opening and closing paragraphs that help to organize the message and emphasize key points. Think of the opening and closing paragraphs of your letter to an author as *bookends*. A book end provides support. It holds the many volumes books in place, one next to the other. Remove one of the bookends and what happens? The books begin to tip and slide.

Directions: *The bookend below are from national winning letters from each of the three competition levels in previous LAL contests. Read the each opening and closing paragraph, discuss how the bookends mirror one another and emphasize key points.*

LEVEL I

from a letter by Gideon Bender (Washington, DC) to Lois Lowry:

Opening

There are many times that I never even think about all the decisions I make during a single day—what will I wear to school, what will I eat for lunch, how will I spend my free time, what book will I read, and on and on. Some of these decisions are more important and more difficult to make than others, but all of them are mine and all of them impact how I live my life.

Closing

As I continue down the roads of my life, I know I will not always remember the importance of having opportunities and challenges. However, I do know that when I face especially difficult or wonderful choices, I will remember that the decisions Jonas made empowered him to determine his own future. And I will do the same. Thank you for the gift of your words. Peace.

1. What word or main idea from the opening does Gideon repeat in the closing?
2. Gideon is writing about the book *The Giver*. What link does he make with Jonas?

LEVEL II

from a letter by Anna Byers (Louisville, Kentucky) to Davida Hurwin:

Opening

Reading is a strange thing if you think about it, and I suppose you have. I mean, why would anyone want to escape and live the life of another when they could be out there living their own life? Taking this into consideration, perhaps it is the books we relate to, the ones that involve our lives, the books and characters with which we have things in common that are the best. They change us and make us who we are. Your book, *A Time for Dancing*, was one of those books for me.

Closing

It is difficult to walk through life muddled by a puzzle you can't seem to solve. This was my life before I read your book. Afterwards, I was enlightened. I had unlocked both my own feelings and those of my mother. *A Time for Dancing* allowed me to walk in the shoes of a person struck down by cancer. It was a walk I needed to take to understand my mother's death and to be at peace with it. Thank you for the gift of a lifetime, the gift of understanding and remembering and the gift of tears. I hope your beautiful book reaches many more and enlightens them, too. Thank you.

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Reading-Writing Worksheet G continued

3. What main idea does Anna introduce in her opening paragraph that she then returns to in her closing paragraph?
4. What link to the book does Anna make—with a character, a conflict, or both a character and conflict?

LEVEL III

from a letter by Jazlyn Langford (Molt, Montana) to Roald Dahl:

Opening

There are some things in life that make you happy just because: a hot bubble bath after a week of camping; a baby's toothless grin; watching giant snowflakes float down from the heavens and land like butterfly kisses in a children's tousled hair; finding a crumpled \$20 bill in your coat pocket from last spring; gazing into a star-filled sky. Sometimes things don't need explanations—they are simply endearing and wonderful. *Matilda* is one of these things.

Closing

Something in *Matilda* makes in inexplicably happy anytime I read it, like the pheromone in babies that makes you want to kiss them. You don't know why, but that's not really the issue. All you know is that you're happy and that's enough. Matilda accurately describes this wonderful sensation as ". . . flying past the stars on silver wings." So I would simply like to say thank you, Roald Dahl, for everything. You gave me my silver wings and now I can fly.

5. What main idea does Jazlyn introduce in her opening that she then returns to in her closing?
6. "Sometimes things don't need explanations" Jazlyn writes in her opening. How does she emphasize this key point in the closing?

A FINAL NOTE!

SOME LETTERS HAVE BOOKENDS BUT THEY AREN'T READER RESPONSE BOOKENDS.

Read this opening and closing and discuss why it may be better suited for a "lit-crit" (or literature analysis) exam (perhaps) and not for this particular writing assignment called Letters About Literature.

Opening

Your book *To Kill a Mockingbird* subtly shows how people judge and are judged by others. The book's characterizations and theme of racial intolerance and intolerance for anyone who is different are still relevant in today's society. In this letter, I will explain what I mean by this and how your use of characterization and symbolism makes this work of literature a classic.

Closing

I believe that the appeal of *To Kill a Mockingbird* that has continued for decades since its publication is a direct result of the symbolism you wove throughout the narrative. In addition, your characterization of Scout and exploration of her relationship with both Jem, the other women in the novel, and most importantly with her father ensures that this book will remain a classic for decades still to come.