

## Correspond, Don't Compliment!

**Directions:** Read the passage below, then complete the activity that follows.

Sure you liked the book. You might even have loved, adored, or been excited by the author's words. But if your letter is nothing more than a list of compliments then you are missing the purpose of this assignment—to share with the author how his/her work changed your view of the world or yourself. The excerpt below from the opening paragraphs of a letter to Phyllis Whitney is really a fan letter. The student-writer is guilty of complimenting instead of corresponding!

*I am writing this letter to you as a pleased reader. As I dove into your book, Sea Jade, I felt both humbled and inspired. Sometimes I feel confused at how an author can pack so much emotion into one small book. It's like a new world is opened at just the flipping of a page. Speaking from a future author's point of view, I can tell you your book was a great creation. Yours was truly a wonderful tale of*

*adventure, excitement, and wonder that I found incredible. Good job! Keep writing!*

How do you correspond instead of compliment? The key is **reader's respond**. A response can be many things: a feeling not felt before, a memory, or an action taken as a result of reading. It can also be a sudden understanding or insight. The author's words pull the chain on the light bulb inside your head and you go, Aha!

Identifying your reader's response is the first step. The next step is to share it by explaining it, describing it, putting it into your own words.

The writer of the letter above knows *Sea Jade* had a powerful effect on her but she fails to express what that effect is. For example, she could have told Phyllis Whitney why she felt humbled or what action she was inspired to take. In short, the writer didn't develop her ideas.

### ACTIVITY

Determine if the passages below are fan letters or thoughtful correspondence. For each passage that compliments instead of corresponds, suggest ways to weave reader-response details into the paragraph.

1. I have always read your books and love them dearly. It's unbelievable to me that in your lifetime you wrote so many books that are so good. They recently came out with the movie, "The Grinch," after one of your books. Your books are so funny! I love how you make up words instead of using plain words. *(to Dr. Seuss)*
2. Your diary has become a world classic. It has enriched us with human spirit. It reminds the people of the terrifying horrors that the Jews faced in 1942 and how bleak their future was. *(to Anne Frank)*
3. Your book *the Last Shot* was the most intriguing book on the inner city that I have ever read in my life. The plot was spectacular and I could see the scene in my head. You described the characters with absolute perfection. I never thought that someone could make a book about recruiting high school players in an inner city of New York so fascinating. *(to Darcy Frey)*
4. My cousin died at the age of 11 from cancer six years ago. He was my best friend, hero, and companion. We were close cousins, and I always thought that we would be together. This left me devastated for months. I kept all of my feelings concealed as if I caught a firefly, put it in a jar, and never let it fly. Six years later, my feelings were still as raw and painful as the night I got the call. When our teacher explained what the book *Bridge to Terabithia* was about, I knew it would bring back many sad, depressing, and awful memories, but I had to be strong. We started reading your book that day. *(to Katherine Paterson)*