

For Immediate Release:
May 5, 2016

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Jesse White Announces Winners of “Letters About Literature” Contest
Winners from Galena, Inverness and Wheaton

Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White announced that students from Galesburg, Inverness and Wheaton are the winners of the 2016 “Letters About Literature” contest. The national reading and writing contest for students in Illinois is sponsored by the Dollar General Literacy Foundation, the Illinois State Library and the Illinois Center for the Book. White honored the winners on Thursday at a ceremony in his Springfield office.

“For the ninth year in a row, I am proud to announce that Illinois had more entries than any state,” said White. “The young writers we honored today have demonstrated, through their writing skills, how literature impacts so many lives.”

To participate in the competition, students in grades 4-12 must read a book or poem and then write a personal letter to the author explaining how the book changed their views of the world and/or themselves. Students may select authors, living or deceased, from fiction, nonfiction, contemporary or classic. The Illinois Center for the Book appointed judges to select the top essayists in three competition levels.

This year's Illinois winners are:

- Level I, Grades 4-6: **Emma Blaum** of Galena wrote to author R.J. Palacio about her book, “Wonder.” Emma is a student at Galena Primary School, and her letter was submitted by her teacher Trista Richard.
- Level II, Grades 7-8: **Sarah Huddleston** of Inverness wrote to co-author David Levithan about his book “Will Grayson, Will Grayson.” Sarah attends Quest Academy in Palatine and her letter was submitted by her teacher Jen Fabsik.
- Level III, Grades 9-12: **Zachary Kowalczyk** of Wheaton wrote to Illinois author Alex Kotlowitz about his book, “There Are No Children Here.” Zachary attends Benet Academy in Lisle, and his letter was submitted by his teacher Lori Rogalski.

Each winner received a \$200 check from the Illinois Center for the Book, a plaque signed by Secretary White, a tour of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum in Springfield and a complimentary lunch at the Illinois State Library. Teachers received a \$100 check from the Illinois Center for the Book to purchase books for their school library, a tour of the Lincoln Presidential Museum and a complimentary lunch at the State Library.

At the event Secretary White was presented with the Crystal Honor Award by the Illinois School Media Association (ISLMA). ISLMA announced Secretary White as the winner of the award in the fall of 2015 for his distinguished support of school libraries throughout Illinois.

Read the winning essays at <http://illinoiscenterforthebook.org/letters.html>.

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