

WINNER, LEVEL 1

Anna Mytko

Grade 6

Riviera Hall Lutheran School

Redondo Beach

Hug-O-War, Shel Silverstein**Dear Shel Silverstein,**

I was five years old and had one end of a jump rope in my mouth and my twin brother had the other in his mouth. It was a fierce game of Tug-of-War and neither of us was going to give up. Competing against my brother was natural for me and serious business. We played for about ten minutes before getting tired. Just as I was going to win by forcing my brother to my side of the room, he gave one particularly hard game-ending tug, I saw blood, realized that my first tooth had been jerked out and started bawling. Then, I stopped. I actually had beaten my twin at something. I was the first to lose a tooth!

At seven years old, I came upon what would become my favorite poem of yours called *Hug-O-War* and was instantly reminded of how I painfully lost my first tooth. I took the poem literally. Your words seemed to be a warning not to play Tug-of-War, but to try and hug instead. I felt as if you knew me and this poem was written with me in mind. I loved this feeling of connection to a famous person and felt important.

When I was nine, I chose *Hug-O-War* to recite in school. The class loved this clever poem and I remember thinking that maybe your words weren't meant just for me. Maybe the warning was more of a suggestion and was actually for all kids in my class and school. We should all be kinder to each other, hug and play and we would all "win." I loved the feeling of having found a poem that made me feel connected to my classmates. They smiled as I read and I felt important.

Reading *Hug-O-War* now at age eleven, I realize my first interpretations were correct, but also not quite right. I can see that *Hug-O-War* is a gentle, playful suggestion for the entire world. If everyone was nice, the world would be a better place and society would run better. When you say "and everyone hugs instead of tugs" you mean cooperating instead of fighting would make all of humanity "win." Since I figured out this bigger way of thinking about *Hug-O-War*, I like this poem even more. I love this feeling of better understanding a poem and feel it is important that the world read *Hug-O-War*.

My family loves your poems Mr. Silverstein. We can read your poems over our lives and keep learning from them. Thank you for sharing your amazing talent with the world. Without poetry like yours people would have no way to hear literature in a different way. Maybe a short, clever poem can help them understand the concepts of life easier. Had I hugged and not tugged my brother that day, we would have both

won the game. If everyone could hug, giggle, wiggle, kiss, cuddle and grin then the world would truly be a better place.

*Best wishes,
Anna Mytko*

My name is Anna and I go to Riviera Hall Lutheran School in Redondo Beach, California. I am currently in sixth grade and I play club soccer. I also enjoy reading, writing, and geography. I hope that in the future more young people will understand poetry and think about how it can help them in their lives.

L E V E L 1

HONORABLE MENTION, LEVEL 1

Nishita Belur

Grade 6

Challenger School—Strawberry Park

San Jose

The Summer of the Monkeys, Wilson Rawls

Dear Wilson Rawls,

My name is Nishita Belur, a sixth grader at Challenger School, San Jose, California. This letter is my heartfelt appreciation of your book, *The Summer of the Monkeys*.

Your book greatly inspired me to be a better person. Even though our family was not well off, my parents decided to send me and my brother to a private Challenger school, the fees of which were partially paid off by scholarships. They were able to buy our books and uniforms. When my brother entered his second year of preschool last year, my parents did not have enough money to buy his expensive uniform. Coincidentally, I won a two hundred fifty dollar cash prize at a local spelling bee competition. I had dreamed for many years of buying an Apple iPod, which I wanted to do, using that money.

This was the time when I was reading your book, *The Summer of the Monkeys*, for our book report. This fantastic book opened my eyes to what I should really do with the prize money. Before I read this book, the thought of letting my parents have the money to buy my brother's uniform didn't even cross my insensitive mind. Your book, however, Mr. Rawls, inspired me to give my money to my parents to buy my brother's uniform. This way, my parents did not have to worry about my brother's uniform expenses for at least the next two years. After I read your inspiring, thoughtful novel, Mr. Rawls, it touched my heart and made me look at the world in a different way. It showed me that real satisfaction in life is in understanding and reciprocating to other's needs rather than spending money on my own luxuries.