Letter-Essay Assignment (50 points)

We've come to the point in the quarter where it's time to share what we've been reading independently in a more in-depth way. However, instead of a formal essay, we're going to write "letter-essays" about one of our independent reading books, so your letter can be more conversational. Here are a few of the specifics:

- Compose a letter of <u>at least 400 words</u> that critically analyzes one of the books you've finished so far this school year. (See below for a list of possible topics.)
- Address the letter to me, and follow the block style format that you see within my sample letter. Use a salutation (Dear Mrs. Moege) followed by a comma and a closing (Sincerely) followed by a comma.
- Cite the name of the author of the book and its title. Indicate the title by capitalizing and italicizing it – for example, *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner.
- Proofread your essay carefully before turning it by the due date. (Read it out loud several times, have a friend read it, and/or review it with me.)

What should you write about in your letter-essay? Tell about your experience as a reader of the book. Describe what you noticed about how the author wrote. Tell what you think the themes might be. Tell what surprised you. Pose your wonderings – your questions about the author, the characters, the structure, the voice, and yourself as a reader. **Be aware that a good letter-essay is one that teaches you something you didn't realized about your book, or yourself as a reader, before you wrote it.** You also need to support your views with text support. Some ideas follow:

- What surprised, angered, moved, or satisfied you within/about the book
- What you liked about the author's style
- What you noticed about the author's style
- Questions for the author
- Things you would do if you had been the author
- Whom you'd compare the author to
- What the book reminded you of
- The main character and/or others
- The character development
- The structure of this book
- The climax of the plot
- The resolution of the main character's problem
- The genre of this book
- The theme of the book
- Things you wished had happened/been different
- Why you chose the book
- What you didn't agree with
- What you understood about the book/its characters
- What you couldn't understand
- How characters changed
- The book's rating

2 October 2011

Dear Students,

When I finished *The Hunger Games* trilogy last year, I was disappointed the series had to end. Then this summer I learned about another series that, according to reviewers, was "Hunger Games-like," so I downloaded James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* onto my Kindle and was soon caught up in a strange, futuristic society where teens must use their wits, strength, and determination to survive.

The main characters in *The Maze Runner* are mainly teenage boys who have been unexpectedly dumped into an area known as "the Glade." There they establish a working community and assign tasks to all residents – gardening, butchering, cooking, and running the maze located just outside of the Glade. The maze's huge rock walls open up each morning and shut each evening. During the day, runners enter the labyrinth to study its patterns, hoping to uncover the secret of getting home. However, the runners must return to the Glade by nightfall or face deadly creatures called "Grievers." The protagonist Thomas, after arriving in the Glade, must overcome suspicion, jealousy, and his own insecurities to lead the gang out.

Now that I've finished the book and its sequel, I've noticed something. Current books and movies often fixate on societies broken or about to be broken by some kind of disaster. Movies that come to mind include *2012*, *The Book of Eli*, or *Armageddon*. Dashner's books, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, and Lois Lowry's *Gathering Blue* all revolve around societies made dysfunctional by some previous disaster. Unlike the movies I mentioned, these books involve unseen villains who manipulate and test the characters. Still, a hero rises through the chaos to bring either hope or an end to the craziness.

In *The Maze Runner*, Thomas rises to hero status for several reasons. First, he has a knowledge about the maze but why … he can't quite pinpoint. Thus, he doesn't fear the maze and takes great risks in exploring it at times when no other boy has. Thomas also places others' well-being before his own, which sometimes leads to his own pain but ultimately saves others and raises the trust level of the group. Finally, Thomas – like the other boys – hungers to return to home and will do whatever it takes to get there. His iron will leads to a sequel, where his intellect and stamina are again pushed to the limit. (By the way, *The Scorch Trials* is even better than *The Maze Runner*.)

A few times I struggled to "buy into" some of the futuristic twists (like the machine-like Grievers and their hiding place (can't give details) or Thomas' ability to "talk" in his mind with Teresa, the only girl who ends up in the Glade. However, the plot is fast-paced, and readers root for the teens as they struggle to return to a life they're not even sure exists anymore. I give *The Maze Runner* a strong 8 out of 10 stars though several sections definitely warranted a 10 rating. I need to buy this set for my classroom library!

Sincerely,

Mrs. Moege

Comment [MMS1]: The first paragraph shares one of the reasons I chose the book in the first place.

Comment [MMS2]: This paragraph focuses on an overview of the plot and a bit about the main character.

Comment [MMS3]: The third paragraph shows something I noticed about books and movies of this genre.

Comment [MMS4]: My fourth paragraph shares more information about the main character.

Comment [MMS5]: The final paragraph reviews the good/bad points of the book and gives a final rating.