

New Mexico “Letters About Literature” Champions Announced
Kaelyn Siefkes, Allie Vice, and Steffen Ortiz move on to national competition

Santa Fe, N.M. – The New Mexico State Library has announced the state level champions of the 2018 Letters About Literature competition. This annual writing contest for young readers in grades 4 through 12 is made possible by a generous grant from the Dollar General Literacy Foundation and is administered nationally by the Library of Congress Center for the Book.

Letters About Literature encourages young readers in grades 4 -12 to read a book and write a personal letter to the author explaining how the book changed or shaped their perspective on themselves or the world. The New Mexico State Library manages the state level program and submits a champion to the national competition for each of the three levels.

Kaelyn Siefkes, a fifth grade student at Estancia Valley Classical Academy in Moriarty, is the Level 1 champion. Kaelyn wrote her letter to Rachel Renee Russel about her series, *The Dork Diaries*.

Allie Vice, a seventh grade student at Eisenhower Middle School in Albuquerque, is the Level 2 champion. Her letter is addressed to *Out of My Mind* author, Sharon M. Draper.

Steffen Ortiz, a tenth grade student at East Mountain High School in Sandia, is the Level 3 champion. Steffen wrote his letter to Markus Zusak about his book, *The Book Thief*.

Five hundred and nineteen New Mexico students entered the 2018 contest. Of those 519 entries, 45 writers advanced to round two. In Level 1, there were 230 entries with 10 letters advancing to round two state judging. In Level 2, there were 154 entries with 17 letters advancing to round two state judging. In Level 3, there were 135 entries with 18 letters moving on to round two state judging. All of the state finalist writers who advanced to round two will receive an award certificate in the mail. Champions will receive a \$150 cash prize.

From the 45 New Mexico state finalists, the state judges selected three champions, three second place writers, three third place writers, and six honorable mention letters. Champions, second and third place winners, and honorable mention recipients will be honored at the State Capitol on May 4 at 1:30 PM. Secretary Gonzales will congratulate the students and the state champions will read their letters aloud.

The judging panel was comprised of government officials, librarians, authors, and book professionals from across the state including Department of Cultural Affairs Secretary Veronica Gonzales; Norice Lee, Associate Library Director, Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine, Health Sciences Library, Las Cruces ; retired State Librarian, Ben Wakashige; Anne Price, Youth Services Manager, Octavia Fellin Public Library, Gallup; Malcolm Alonzo, Library Services Supervisor, The Public Library of Albuquerque and Bernalillo, Alamosa Branch; Deanne Dekle, Youth Services & Outreach Consultant, New Mexico State Library; Susan Beck, Professor and Head of Access Services, New Mexico State University Library; Craig L. Newbill, retired Director, New Mexico Humanities Council; and Sarah Stark, Author, Santa Fe.

The three New Mexico champions' letters now advance to the national competition and will be sent to the Library of Congress for the national judging round, where they will be competing for a \$1000 cash award. The results of the national contest will be released in May.

To read the three winning letters or learn more about the Letters About Literature competition please visit the New Mexico State Library website - <http://www.nmstatelibrary.org/>