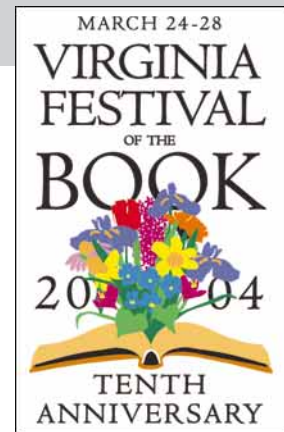


Girl, Interrupted by Susanna Kaysen recommended by Brittany L. Dick

A program of the Virginia Center for the Book at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, the "VABooks!" column suggests books for Virginians to read in common. Charlottesville High School senior Brittany L. Dick won the 2003 Virginia Letters About Literature contest (level three) by writing a letter to Susanna Kaysen, author of *Girl, Interrupted*. Sponsored by the National Library Congress, the *Weekly Reader* and Target, the 2004 Virginia Letters About Literature contest's guidelines are available at virginiafoundation.org. We hope that individuals, book groups, families and neighbors will read and discuss VABooks! selections.



Dear Susanna Kaysen,

I have been to the same places as you. I understand the darkness that seeps into view, and the void felt when you can't find happiness. I've had days where the weight of stress holds you in bed, to sit and wish that you could always stay asleep; go to another world where you can be in control of things, where stresses and emotions can't attack you. I know what it feels like to be numb.

Through life, we go through hardships and disappointments. In your book, *Girl, Interrupted*, you address two different kinds of people, the sane and the insane. The difference between the two is their capabilities to deal with the real world that is around us.

I can still picture myself stranded, alone. Everything is cold around me. Every move I make feels slimy and wrong. The sharp darkness, it cuts into the air with constant, screeching noise. My whole body aches. My chest feels as though it is about to collapse, and my brain feels like it is being eaten away by the evil disease, depression.

In my short life, as I am only sixteen, I have already been to the parallel universe that you speak of in your book. It's not really a parallel universe so much, as a universe that exists inside of our minds. Our perception in these universes has a hard time depicting what is real

and surreal. For me, everything that has a slightly negative outcome or vibe is extremely intensified. What would be an easily solved problem for a "normal" person is a life or death situation for me.

When I was younger, and started to feel my wave of depression come over me, I was confused. These thoughts had never existed to me. Was I alone, or did everyone feel and go through the same things that I was. Your book helped me. Even as I opened the first page, it clicked. YES! I feel the same way! What a relief it was to know that I was not the only one. As I turned every page, reading on about your own dark world, I began to see a light in mine. The mere idea that someone understood what I was going through comforted me. My body began to leave its numb state, I could move as I felt myself warming up.

I am now, after four years of what I felt was hopeless depression, finding hope. I am finding ways to incorporate my moods into my art. Instead of sitting in bed and wishing that something would happen to end the world; I have something to get up for. You used your writing to vent your emotions and heal. With your help, I too have found a medium to help balance my emotions. My art shows my heartache, my sadness, and my happiness radiating off of wry pages. It is important to me, and I have learned that what is most important is my life and using it to my advantage.

Yes, I have been to the dark comers of the world, of my world. I have climbed the unconquerable stairs to a balanced existence. At times, my world shakes, and I can always turn to your book, to what has become my roots. I've read your book six times. Every time, each word's importance and meaning is intensified. As strong as we think we are, our minds are very fragile. But, despite my weaknesses, I have yet to be broken.

I still feel separated from the rest of the population of the "normal" and "sane." But it was your book that made me feel like I was a part of something, that I wasn't alone.

You've helped me so much to understand and accept who I am. In the end, things may not change too much, but I will have learned how to handle my surroundings. I don't like being where I was, and your words helped me to heal myself.

Virginia Festival of the Book

145 Ednam Drive • Charlottesville, VA • 22903-462
434.924.3296 • vabook@virginia.edu • <http://www.vabook.org>