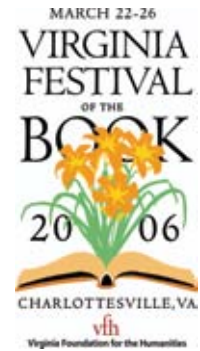


The Westing Game by Ellen Raskin recommended by Hannah Danielle Pierce

A program of the Center for the Book at the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, the "VABooks!" column suggests books for Virginians to read in common. This month, Hannah Danielle Pierce—National winner (Level III) in the 2005 Letters About Literature competition and 12th grader at Falling Branch Christian Academy, Radford, Virginia—recommends *The Westing Game* by Ellen Raskin. We hope that individuals, book groups, families and neighbors will read and discuss VABooks! selections.



Dear Ellen Raskin,

A murder. An unclaimed inheritance. Cryptic clues. Sixteen eccentric "heirs," A wild, dangerous game just daring me to play. These were the wonders awaiting me in *The Westing Game*. I could not be convinced to even peek inside.

It's ironic, really. The reason I would not read your book is the same reason I'm sure others have been eager to do so. It was the gold seal on the cover. I knew about those Newbery Medal Winners. They were all boring to me, filled with typical people in realistic situations who learned plenty of moral lessons by the end of the story. My mom, however, was convinced that I would connect with some selection on her Newbery Medal bookmark during my seventh grade year, so she made me keep reading.

It was only under threat of lost library privileges that I checked out *The Westing Game* and forced myself to open it. After only eight sentences, my hatred had faded. I met Turtle, and I was captivated. I still wonder how a whole decade before I was born you were able to write a character who would mirror my heart so accurately. Turtle was everything I wanted to be. She was courageous and feisty, kicking people when she was angry and not bothering to watch her tongue. Turtle showed on the outside all I wanted so badly on the inside. I did not want the story to ever end.

As I felt the dwindling thickness of the pages between my bookmark and the back cover, I was filled with a growing sense of dread. Sandy died. Turtle won. Then Sandy died again. I did something I had never done before—I cried over a book. I was surprised that the tears seemed to be anything but wasted. After reading the last word, I closed the book gingerly and held it to my chest. For what seemed like hours, I was speechless. My heart was lost in your story, entirely satisfied with a book for the first time. Through my reading I had become Turtle, and part of me had died with Sandy, too.

Turtle came inside me during that first reading and has never left. She encourages me to be bold, open, and daring. Having her as part of me has transformed me from a shy, timid girl whose best friends were her books to a bright, friendly personality whose best friends are still books, but this time by her choice.

I've read hundreds of other books since seventh grade, but I cannot refrain from looking for your story on their pages. When I become frustrated because it is not there, I know that is time to go back to the library, check out that same battered copy of your book and devour it again. Spending time with Turtle restores my hope for reading. Even now, when I have it practically memorized, the ending still brings tears to my eyes.

The Westing Game by Ellen Raskin
recommended by Hannah Danielle Pierce (continued)

Thank you, Ellen Raskin, for transforming my life and my reading habits. Thanks to *The Westing Game*, I am a stronger, more confident human being. I also know now that tears shed over a good book are not wasted. Most importantly, I have learned that I should never judge a book by that gold seal on its cover. It wasn't just Turtle who won. When I pulled *The Westing Game* off the shelf, when I discovered myself in your feisty thirteen-year-old, when I cried at the end—Ellen! I won!

Hannah Danielle Pierce

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