

December 3, 2023

Dear Jane Yolen,

I'm writing to you because I've been reading your books my whole life. The latest one that I've read is *The Devil's Arithmetic*. I came across your novel in another book called *The Attack of the Black Rectangles*. It was a story about banning books. In the story, words in your book were being blacked out as they were deemed inappropriate. This piqued my interest, as I was learning a lot about World War II at the time. As someone of Jewish descent, I was intrigued to learn more about this war. I asked my mom to buy your book for me. When I got the book, I realized that your name was familiar. So, I looked back at some of my old books, and lo and behold, your name was on some of my favorite books.

As a toddler, I started by listening to the *How Do Dinosaurs* books, and later moved to books like *Romping Monsters*, *Stomping Monsters* and *Creepy Monsters*, *Sleepy Monsters*. I enjoyed getting to listen to your books being read out loud at library story time and at home by my parents. The books taught me life lessons and helped grow my love of reading from when I was a toddler all the way up to middle school.

In sixth grade, I started reading *The Devil's Arithmetic*. I realized that I'm a lot like the main character, Hannah. I'm able to relate very well to her as we are both Jewish and have relatives who were in concentration camps. Unlike her, I do not have any living relatives who were in the camps. However, the book connected me to my relatives, even though they may not be alive. I can imagine the things they might have had to face.

When Hannah didn't take her grandpa seriously, it made me think about the times I have asked my grandparents things, and I realized that grandparents are basically a living piece of history. Understanding Hannah's experiences in the camps gave me a deeper understanding of history, and in turn gave me a deeper understanding of why their Jewish identity is so important to my own relatives.

In the book you showcase how even in the camps people would try to find meaning through stories. For example, they told stories about what the numbers on their arms meant. This shows me that some people will try to find meaning by helping others. They found meaning by looking back at things that are bigger than themselves and trying to solve them.

Your book taught me to care about things that are bigger than myself. It taught me to care about issues like homelessness, problems in our community, and problems in our world. The concentration camps were so much bigger than the people trying to destroy them, but they kept trying. I have become involved in a number of community projects. I am a Girl Scout, and I belong to two other organizations (Family Career Leaders of America and Loveworks). As a part of those organizations, we do service projects. Some projects that I have been involved with include, donating supplies to a wildlife rehabilitation facility, making a poster to oppose vaping,

doing a drive for supplies for an animal shelter, handing out water to people in the CROP Walk to end hunger, and donating gifts to teens whose families cannot afford them. All of these projects have contributed to my community.

As I said previously, I read about this book in a book about banning books. I think banning books is a big problem as we're erasing knowledge, history, and stories every time we ban a book. I think that we should stop banning books because every time we ban a book, we erase history and if we erase history, we are destined to repeat it.

Thank you for the important part you played in my love of reading through your books.

Sincerely,
Philippa Marie Deacon Wallet