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Dear wonderful readers of Humboldt County,

Thank you so much for reading my book!

When you're a writer (and I guarantee that some of you are going to grow up to be writers someday), you spend a lot of time staring at a blank computer screen (or an equally blank pad of paper). Even though this is the best job in the world, it can be frustrating and a little lonely sometimes.

That's why hearing that you voted for *Dogtown* to win the California Young Reader Medal means the world to me. I don't get to meet as many readers in person as I'd like, so connecting with you this way is incredibly inspiring.

I'll never forget the moment Gennifer Choldenko and I decided to write these books together. We were already good friends, and it all started one day at lunch. She said, "What if . . . we wrote a book together?"

Then in between book tours, school visits, and deadlines for other books, ideas began to fly back and forth between our inboxes.

It took time. None of the ideas felt right. And then one day *Dogtown* appeared on the page. It was just the faintest shadow of an idea. But we both saw something in it, and we kept coming back to it. "This could work," we said.

Soon characters, voices, chapters, and eventually drafts began to get traded back and forth. When I look back at the time, the thing I remember most is all the laughter, and the friendship. I think that's reflected in the books—at their core, the *Dogtown* books are about friendship. Writing them was a wonderful experience, and it certainly brought Gennifer and I closer together. Like Chance says in book one, "Your heart is a muscle. It grows stronger the more you use it."

Before I close, I have a confession to make that may surprise you:

When I was your age, I really, really, REALLY didn't like to read.

Crazy thing to hear from a writer, I know. But I'll bet many of you are secretly thinking, "Hey, I don't like to read, either."

Well, here's the thing. If you don't like to read, it's not your fault. It could be that you, like my daughter, have a problem called dyslexia. That can make reading difficult, but with the right help from your teachers, it will get easier.

Another possibility is that you're like I was. I thought books were boring. I just didn't get the point of reading.

That's because I hadn't found (drum roll, please) The Right Book.

Finding The Right Book is like searching for a good friend. It can take a long time. And it's different for each person. For me, The Right Book was a beautiful novel called *Charlotte's Web*.

For you, it may be a graphic novel, or a picture book, or a non-fiction title, or a funny series.

The important thing is that when you find The Right Book—the book that makes you laugh or cry or understand the world a little better—you'll see how reading can change your life.

So hang in there. Keep reading. Keep trying. The Right Book is on a bookshelf nearby, just waiting for you to find it.

Thank you again for reading and enjoying *Dogtown* together. Now, stop reading this letter and go find a great book to read!

All my best,

Katherine Applegate