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Dear Lois Lowry,

My copy of The Giver shows many years of love in its careworn cover and bent pages...even in the stain of hot chocolate right across Chapter 11. Jonas was the brother I always wished I had, and the Giver was just like my real grandfather. The characters enveloped me in their reality and I loved them as if they were real people. However, The Giver told a story of a future that was – at best – a distant possibility. Though my spirits rose and fell with every trial and tribulation the characters faced, I never could connect to the story of a world without differences. Everywhere I turned, in my reality, there was diversity to be encountered. I have Christian, African, Muslim, and Asian friends. I was born in England, am a descendant of India and I live in America. To me, a world without differences is like a world without the sun.

In recent years, I decided that I ‘outgrew’ this book. I moved on to lengthy novels with complex plots and obscure language. I *thought* there was nothing left for this book to offer me, nothing to learn or to feel. I had a lesson coming to me...one that I am glad I learned.

As I mentioned before, I have Muslim friends. One of them follows shari’a, or the laws of Islam as written in their holy book, the Quran. They wear the traditional headscarf worn by women (called the *hijab*). As my friend explains it, wearing the hijab is a sign of respect; it preserves a woman’s modesty and strengthens her loyalty to Allah and to Islam. No one ever thought about it a lot at our school...she was just the girl who was allowed to wear a hat in class! However, recent events made this simple dress a hot topic for discussion at our cafeteria tables. Recently, many European countries have considered banning the hijab in public schools to promote a secular society. Muslim women feel violated by this proposition because it is a moral sin to take off the hijab in Islam.

Jonas took a long time to understand the critical situation of his community. Like him, I was slow to realize the importance of this movement in Europe. In addition to banning the hijab, France and other countries were also planning to ban the Jewish skullcap, the *yarmulke*, and Christian crucifixes. It was as if their governments were determined to cut out all religion from society. As the argument developed at our table, I began to think about this idea more and more. When I went home, I talked about it with my grandfather, because he always has a few stories to tell to help me decide my opinion on current events.

My grandfather is like the Giver...he imparts tales of past pain and joy to help me gain a better perspective about things happening today. The tale he told me when I came back from school that day was the history of our own family. I come from a state in India called Kashmir which, for the past thirty years, has suffered beneath a lethal war between India and Pakistan and Hindus v. Muslims. My grandfather told me of how Muslims and Hindus lived together for many years in peace, until people from Pakistan and India came to Kashmir to call for a separation of the land according to the citizens’ religion. Then, the Muslims and Hindus started fighting over who got Kashmir. Eventually, it broke out into war. Even today, I have never seen my homeland;