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Dear Andrea Davis Pinkney,

In the past, I've never really appreciated the many amazing privileges I get to have as a first generation Pakistani American Muslim. I always thought these privileges came, somewhat easily, as if I was born with them, never truly thinking about how my life would have been if my parents hadn't moved from Pakistan to the U.S. I have always heard people say "never take things for granted," but I never thought I had been doing so. As a result, I was ignorant about these aspects for most of my life, but once I read *The Red Pencil*, I finally realized that I had been taking things for granted, and I immediately regretted it.

Amira and I connect to each other on another level. She's strong, passionate about what she believes in, and is an average Muslim girl who wants to change the world for the better, just like me. Although she is merely a fictional character, I often feel as if we are friends, listening to each other's problems and unconsciously giving advice in return. Her differences, however, really got me thinking "what would I have done if I were in her place?" Luckily, my parents immigrated not to escape from a war, but to gain more opportunities and to provide their children with these opportunities as well. This is where Amira and I differ the most, mainly because she is the one craving the opportunity of having an education, while I already have it in the palm of my hand. At times, Muslims can confuse culture with religion and misconstrue the practices and beliefs of Islam. Because of this, other people might have negative views on Islam and Muslims. In reality, Islam teaches that all people are equal in the eyes of god, Allah, no matter your race, gender, or status. Education and learning about this life is strongly supported in Islam. This is what Amira's mother ignores, or was never taught, and she proceeds to oppress Amira. I wish people would realize this more in the real world, and I'm so grateful for my parents who carefully wrote my future by practicing the true form of Islam, working hard, day in and day out, and going through many hardships just to provide an education and a better life for me and my sisters.

Among the list of qualities of Amira that I see in myself, having a special bond with my sister tops the list. One of my sisters went through many obstacles, including bullying, probably one of the most challenging obstacles of all. I often acted as the support team for my sister, along with my eldest sister, fueling her to stay strong through any obstacle, no matter the size. Although I am the youngest of three girls, I find myself protecting my older sisters in ways that Amira would protect her younger sister. This brought me closer to Amira in more ways than one, and it gave me a sense of pride. I'm proud of my sisters and the great women they have become. With the help of their own red pencils they write their futures with, I don't believe it will be too difficult for them to become even greater women someday.

Like Amira, I now believe hope can change everything and anything; you just have to find it in yourself first. Even in the toughest of times, it's always important to carry your red pencil and speak up for yourself and what you believe in. My gratitude of the ability to have an education and to learn to read, write, and change the world and Amira's optimism in the ability to one day do so is the reason why I cherish your book. It acts as my support team, guiding me to become stronger than I've ever been before. Something great is rising on the horizon, and I now

feel the bright sun's open hand, closer than I'd ever thought it would be, holding my even brighter future. I'm so fortunate to have diligent parents and inspirational sisters to help support me on my own journey to the sun. Mrs. Pinkney, thank you for showing me the sun and helping me realize that others are not as privileged as I am, it's important to be grateful for what I have now, and that with hope, you can do anything, including changing a person's negative ideas, and maybe even positively changing the world. I hope that someday, in my future, I will be able to change the world by incorporating these important lessons learned from your book, even if I have to start out small.

Your hopeful reader,  
Hamna Tameez, Grade 8