

BOOK CHOICE PERSUASIVE LETTER: STRONG SAMPLE

May 7, 1995

Dear Mr. Ross,

This book. Oh, this book! I am begging you to let me be “doomed to remember a boy with a wrecked voice” (1), the way the narrator of this story does. I don’t know what John’s prayer for his friend is, but mine is that you will send *A Prayer for Owen Meany* by John Irving my way.

First of all, there’s the teasing mystery Irving dangles in the very first sentence. It might be a cheap trick to bait the reader... but I bought it hook, line, and sinker! What is so “wrecked” about Owen’s voice, and how did it get that way? What has damaged him so much to make him “the smallest person I ever knew”? How is he “the instrument of my mother’s death”—and how could John ever forgive the boy who killed his mother? And most of all, why is Owen “the reason I believe in God”? I know these questions are meaty enough to pull me through this 543-page beast of a book.

Then there’s the astounding fact of Irving’s writing. He is clearly at the top of his game, and you know I love wordsmiths the way Katie love the Backstreet Boys. That one opening sentence is so beautifully crafted and densely packed with half-hidden hints that I know I’m about to swoon all over again. While the first-person narrator’s voice doesn’t seem to be anything special (as far as I can tell), I only have to flip through the first few pages to see that Owen’s voice clearly is. I want to spend time with this alarming, funny, crass person whose words are always rendered in ALL CAPS. There’s somebody interesting here to know, and something interesting for me to learn about the skill Irving uses to bring him to life.

Maybe this doorstep of a novel wouldn’t feel so urgently important if I wasn’t already hearing my heartbeat in it. Lately, my heart has been asking questions that my brain only half-understands. Questions about my place in the world... about whether my life is by accident or on purpose... about whether or not I, too, am “God’s instrument,” whatever that means. I don’t have answers for the questions, but I want to talk and to listen and to see where the conversation goes.

Of the options you’ve presented, there is no contest. *A Prayer for Owen Meany* is the book I would trade a kidney to get my hands on for book club. Now that I know a little more about it, I suddenly understand why Mr. Burke has been ranting and raving for the last week. If you match me with my (distant) second choice, I will survive... but you’ll have to tear me away from a borrowed copy of this book to get me to read *The Outsiders*.

With fingers crossed,

Melanie Mealey