Dear Writers,

My mother and I both love to read, so when I write her letters by email, I tell her about what I’m reading. You’ll be writing literary letters, too, both to me and to your fellow writers, so I thought I’d share a letter I wrote my mom as an example.

Dear Mom,

I’ve started the voyage again! This is my third time through Patrick O’Brien’s twenty historical novels about British Naval Captain Jack Aubrey and his best friend and surgeon, Steven Maturin. I’ll end up reading these novels more than some of my writers read the Harry Potter series!

I’m trying to understand how I can forget enough about these novels to read them again with any enjoyment. I believe it’s the loose way O’Brain holds the plot together. It’s almost as if any of the events could happen in any of the books! I guess the almost random events -- storms, enemy attacks -- makes it more like real life, and it also makes the action unexpected and surprising.

But the best part of the series is the friendship between Jack and Steven. That friendship is sorely tried in the series’s second book that I just finished, called Post Captain. Jack and Steven fall in love with the same girl, and they almost fight a duel before a battle brings Jack back to his senses and makes him regret the insults he hurled at Steven.

One of the funniest moments in the book is when Jack and Steven are dining on their ship with Jack’s new officers. One visitor asks Jack why the ship’s last watch is called the “dog watch.” Steven pipes up and says, “Why, it’s because it’s curtailed, of course.” Curtailed, of course, means that the watch is shortened, but -- get it? -- “cur” means dog! Dog tailed! Jack laughs so hard that he cries.

I think you’d love this beautiful series. Are you reading anything interesting these days?

Your son,

Peter

When you write a literary letter, you can write anything about the book! It’s not a book report, though, so spend only a little time describing the plot. Talk about what struck you about the book or about as much of the book as you’ve read so far! Make connections between yourself and the book. Or talk about the book’s characters and style. Here are some sentences you might finish:
This book is a challenge for me because . . .
This part of it reminded me of the time when . . .
I could not believe . . .
I was confused when . . .
If I had written the book, I think . . .
I was surprised by . . .
I noticed that the author used one of my favorite devices . . .
After I read this passage, I began to think of . . .
I wonder what will happen, now that . . .
We write literary letters for three reasons:
1. We’re a community of readers as well as of writers, and we’ll grow together as we write about what we’re reading.
2. Literary letters will give us more insight into our reading.
3. Literary letters will help us understand texts in ways that will prepare us for SOL’s and for literary analysis essays.
A good literary letter will:
1. have 200 words or more
2. include one or more quotes from the text (use quotation marks), but the quotes can’t amount to more than twenty percent of the letter
3. make connections between the book and the letter writer
4. be specific, thoughtful, and truthful
You don’t have to finish the book to write about it. You can write a literary letter after reading just a few paragraphs of the book if you’d like to! You must send me the letter as an upload on TurnItIn.com.
Your first letter will be to me. Future letters will be to your fellow writers. Everyone will write back, though not at as great a length!
Future letters also will focus on some of the aspects of texts that we’ll be studying, so the letters will reinforce our new ways of understanding texts. We’ll also have mini-lessons that relate to future letters.
The literary letter rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A (100 points)</th>
<th>C (75 points)</th>
<th>F (59 points)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>200 words + quote</td>
<td>100 words + quote</td>
<td>few words + quote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good connections between novel &amp; writer</td>
<td>Fair connections between novel &amp; writer</td>
<td>Poor or no connections between novel &amp; writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific, thoughtful, and truthful</td>
<td>Somewhat specific, thoughtful, and truthful</td>
<td>Lacking in specifics, reflection, or honesty</td>
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</tbody>
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