

Dear Robert Lipsyte,

*The Contender* changed my life. Just like Alfred, I too got picked on endlessly when I was little. Just like Alfred, I too worked out at the gym to work out my anger.

As I was reading your book I started to wonder. I bet kids wouldn't pick on me if they noticed I started going to the gym and getting bigger and bigger. Then I wouldn't have to be scared to go to school anymore. As I got further in your book I learned that you should face your fears. So when the kids at school called me a name I would just ignore them. Then eventually I started to get physically bigger like I planned to and most of the kids noticed.

Then things started to get better kids wouldn't call me names anymore; they would try to be my friend. I was even in a boxing class. As fast as everything got better it all went away because my grades dropped. My mom was getting mad. She was worried about my grades and the crowd I was keeping. I made some friends with all the wrong people. It was not looking good for me.

Before I read your book I thought being popular would be cool. To me, it seemed more important to be cool than to keep good friends. That's the main lesson I learned from your book, and I am glad I did. I told my old friends that I need to start working harder and stop getting into trouble. Now my grades are average and my friends are not bad. To me *Contender* means powerful, strong, and a soldier.

Before I read *The Contender* I was uncomfortable with the way my life was going. It seemed like every time I found something I liked someone or something would mess it up. After I read it and tried boxing my life turned around. In the boxing class I'm in they make you keep up your grades so that's not a problem for me anymore. To me *The Contender* is the best book I have ever read.

Sincerely,

Vincent Paolino