

Sample Written Responses- For Rising ECMCS 7th and 8th Graders Summer Reading Project

The models below have been created to show what a student might do. These models represent a project based on *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. This novel was chosen because everyone has read it. **The models are strong but not perfect.** Make sure you pay attention to the details included as well as the analysis that is present.

Option A, Model 1

Dear Mr. Rushdie,

My name is _____, and I'm a middle school student who recently read *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* for summer reading. I most connected to the character of Haroun and how he had to deal with what to do when things in our world feel broken.

One of the scenes that really stuck with me was when Haroun gets to the Sea of Stories for the first time (page 72, I think). I could just imagine all the colors and streams mixing together, and I loved the idea that stories were alive and flowing like water. It made me think about how powerful stories are and how they can be combined in cool ways. It reminded me of the Marvel Universe and how they're able to keep going back into past timelines and tell background stories or side character stories, and I love getting to revisit that world over and over again.

Did you think it was a happy ending? I don't think I'd be all ok with my mom coming back like that and just walking back into our lives like nothing had happened. It felt a little too easy, like no one really talked about how much pain she caused. I wanted Haroun or Rashid to say more about how they felt. Sometimes people expect you to forgive quickly, but it's not that simple. I think people deserve second chances, but I also think they need to earn back trust. Even though I didn't totally buy the ending, I guess it would've been weird to end a story like this without a happy ending, since it was kind of like a fairy tale and those end happy.

I also saw myself in Haroun because of the way he cared about his father. My dad and I are close too- we both love to fish. If he lost his job or was going through a hard time, I think I'm old enough now where he'd tell me about it. But in the real world I don't know how I'd be able to help him like Haroun helped his dad. I guess what Haroun really did was work hard to cheer him back up.

If I could ask you something, I'd want to know if this book was inspired by someone in your real life. Was your dad like Haroun's? Also, what advice would you give to young people who feel like their voices don't matter yet? And do you ever enjoy going back and reading your own work and reflecting on it, or are you more like Stephen King, an author who famously never re-reads his works?

Sincerely,
Student Name

Option A, Model 2:

Mr. Rushdie,

I recently read *Haroun* in my class, and I wanted to thank you for crafting such a wonderful novel. While much of the book stuck with me, I was particularly fascinated by the vast ocean of allusions. Your understanding of literary history is clearly extensive; your ability to weave in tropes, new and old, as well as blend in comical understandings of those ideas is masterful. While there were so many to choose from, I was particularly fond of the bus driver, Mr. Butt. His wacky yet wise antics were likely an inspiration for one of my other favorite characters, Otto (the bus driver in *The Simpsons*). The descriptions of weaving around the mountain reminded me of my senior year field trip to Georgia. We were supposed to go caving in a remote area of the state, and after a 16 hour drive from Michigan, with only an hour left in the drive, the skies opened in a downpour of the thickest rain I've ever seen in my entire life. Looking back, it was terrifying how we were slipping and sliding around the muddy bends, but as high schoolers we thought it was such an adventure. Haroun's trip mixes these feelings of excitement with Mr. Butt's laughter and jokes about crashes with the billboards that get increasingly intense about the chances of death (but while rhyming in a silly singsong way).

My favorite character was Mudra and his shadow. I loved how they had different personalities, like Maui and his tattoo in *Moana*. I think I'd like having a life-long buddy by my side like that. Another character that stood out to me was Haroun's father. While my dad was not an Ocean of Notions, he was a charismatic man with a penchant for sharing stories. Growing up, I didn't always appreciate them, kind of like when Haroun questions him "What's the use of stories that aren't even true?" I would give anything to hear him tell another one.

My favorite moment was when Haroun bit the Bite-a-Lite and the shadowy Khattam-Sud and his story-destroying ship melted away. It reminds me of the Wicked Witch melting in the *Wizard of Oz*. The ceremony at the end, when the Walrus calls him to the throne room and everyone from the entire story is present, reminds me of the ending of the original *Star Wars* episode 6 when Luke and Han Solo receive medals from Leia.

Having read your biography, I understand how much this story recounts your own personal struggles and challenges. Accordingly, I wanted to ask about the catharsis of this book: was it a helpful experience to get this novel down on paper, or did it bring up rough memories and times? Did it make you feel closer to your son Zafar to write this to him? Did it help him understand the importance of stories the way Haroun grasps it by the end when he's willing to risk everything to save the Sea of Stories?

Thank you again for crafting such a wonderful tale!

Sincerely,
Student Name