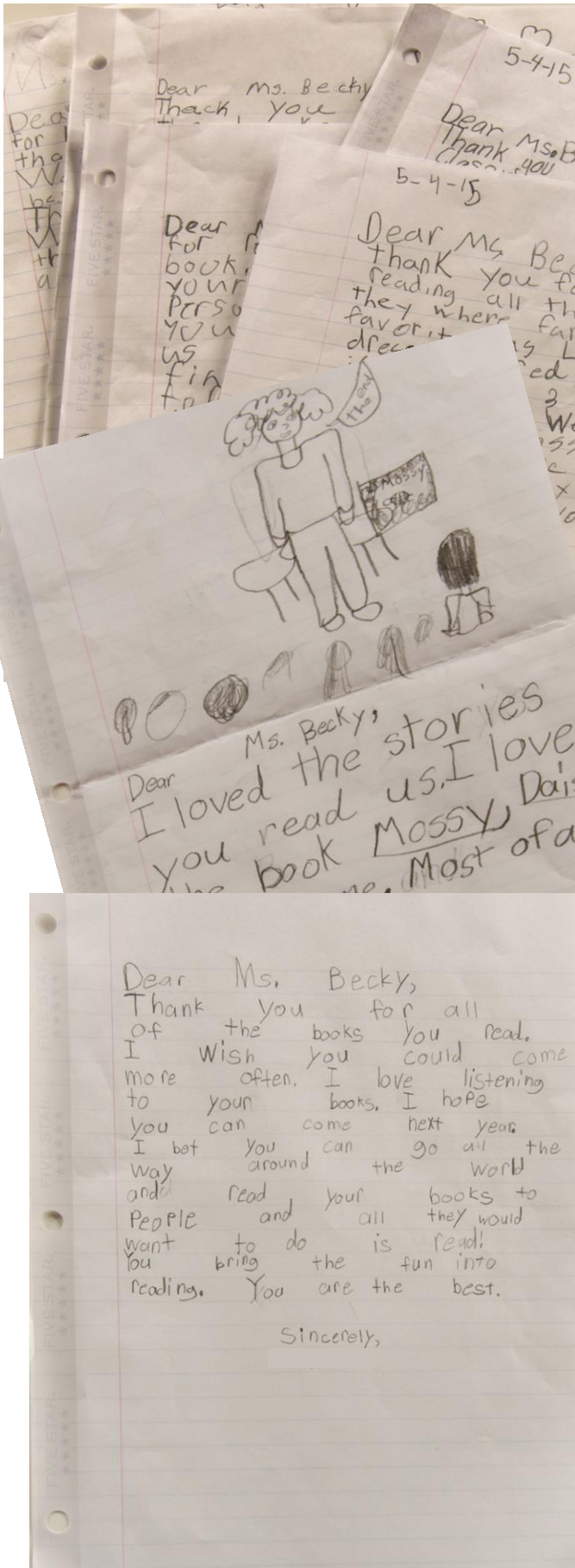


Dear Ms. Becky



"...I wish that you can come every day of your life and even in collage [sic] and all the schools I go to the rest of my life..."

"I thank you for reading all of the books that you have. My favorite part is when you let us write are [sic] own story."

These are just two out of almost 20 thank-you's written to Ms. Becky Young by the second-graders of Deborah Villalba's class at Stout Elementary. A sample of the letters also appear here.

Over the course of several months, Becky Young went to Ms. Villalba's class and read stories that reinforced the lessons Ms. Villalba was teaching. In the 45 minutes she had, Ms. Young read a story, led the children in a discussion about the story, and then asked the students to write something for themselves. To encourage their literary efforts, she created a sheet of theme-decorated lined paper, for instance, paper decorated with deer for the activity coupled with the book, *Wild Christmas Reindeer*.

Dear Ms. Becky, thank YOU for  
all the cool stories you've read to  
US it was fun when you gave us  
papers about the rain. We all  
hope you get to start to read to us  
more. I bet other kids would love  
your stories. I think you're the best  
reader that I've ever none and I  
mean it!

Dear Ms. Becky,  
Thank you for the rain song.  
I wrote a poem for you.

Lady bugs all dressed in  
red, waltzing through the  
flower bed, if I were little  
just like you, I'd dance  
among the flowers too!

Ms. Becky, please  
I read so

You are  
the

best

Ms. Becky

The activities varied. For Black History Month, the book was *Sweet Clara's Freedom Quilt*. Clara was a young slave girl separated from her mother and sent to another plantation, where she learned to sew; she never learned to read or write. She decided to create a map from scraps of material to show the way North to freedom. She created the map from information gathered from drivers and visitors, then used the map to escape. To give the class an experience of Clara's challenge, Ms. Young asked the students to pair up and tell each other how to get to their home from school. Each student had to draw a map based on what his or her partner had described. The children then wrote about how they felt trying to draw the map, and how they would feel if they were never allowed to learn to read and write. At the end of each class, she also left time for the children to share their stories.

Other books read included *Penguins* by Seymour Simon; and *Weather, Poems for all Seasons* collected by Lee Bennet Hopkins. All the books read were left with Ms. Villalba for the student to read again.

Ms. Young was loved, there's no doubt about that. Reading to the children made a lasting impression on each of them, to judge from both their letters and her interactions with them. As she walked into the classroom one day, one bright-eyed little girl grabbed her around the waist and hugged her. "I read my story about the reindeer to my little sister and she laughed so much. It was FUN."

Walking across campus to class, Ms. Young was spotted by one of her students; he was heading for the office. He hollered and waved, "Hey, Ms. Becky, don't start until I get back to class," and started running toward the office at full speed.

This has not been Ms. Young's first foray into teaching. She was a classroom teacher in junior high school and high school English and history, as well as working as a school librarian. As librarian, she worked with students from pre-K to college. She also taught GED, amnesty classes and citizenship classes for immigrants in night school.

The Southwest Festival of the Written Word, which coordinated this reading activity with Stout Elementary, is lucky to have *Dear Ms. Becky* as a volunteer.

