

Mail? Do I answer mail?

Posted on Feb 28, Posted by [Lois Lowry](#) Category [Uncategorized](#)

Amazingly, it is once again snowing. I guess that shouldn't surprise me, because it is, after all, February in New England. But somehow I had begun to think that perhaps the end was in sight and spring was around the corner. Not so.

Someone has posted a comment asking if I answer my snail mail. Yes, I do, but I do it the same way I answer the email: with some pre-prepared replies, most often. So many people..kids, mostly...ask the same questions, and to try to answer them personally, with different replies, would be impossible. How many ways can you answer "How did you get the idea for The Giver?" So I have my stock replies. Once I got an email from a kid who called me "a lazy bum" because his friend had also written, and they both got the same answer. I told him that if I were REALLY a lazy bum, I wouldn't have taken the time to read that morning's 40+ emails....much less figure out which of my answers to send back.

As for "snail mail" I have a large stack of cards that I have had made, with a photo, and I write a note on the bottom, and my signature..in case you want to lick your finger and test it...is real. Or, for some replies, I have a letter I've already written. I might select one reply or another, depending on the questions asked.

If readers send a lengthy list of questions, i have to answer them very briefly, or perhaps select one or two to answer.

It is helpful is a teacher combines all of the kids' comments/questions into one email. Once a teacher had 63 kids send me separate emails. Because it was clear they were all from the same class, I asked one of the kids to send me the teacher's email address, which she did...and then I emailed her to suggest that in the future it would be helpful if she sent one email instead of so many. But she was outraged by that and said she'd never use my books in her classroom again. Sigh.

And once a mother was very offended because I had not answered her daughter's (snail mail) letter immediately. The daughter's classmates had all written to authors and the others had received their replies. The mother had emailed me with her outrage, and so I received that on my laptop...but I was out of the country for three weeks, and so had not gotten her daughter's letter yet. When I got home, there were over 100 letters waiting...presumably her daughter's among them...and so they each had to get a standard "form" reply. The mother then emailed me that she wanted to "rip off your face."

I felt sorry for the child of such a mom.

I once..after the disaster with the teacher who said she'd never use my books again...emailed a number of writer friends/acquaintances to see how they dealt with such situations (63 letters from the same class, for example). I asked Jerry Spinelli, Katherine Paterson, E.L. Konigsburg, Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, Jane Yolen, Chris Crutcher...maybe some others; those are whom I recall right now. It was clear from their replies that they all grapple with the same challenge, and do pretty much what I do...which is to say: the best we can.

Tags: Untagged