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2nd Place: "Tattered Fiction"

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Tattered Fiction: Personal Essay
Murphy Studebaker

The books on our shelves hold not only the stories within the words on their pages, but the stories of their previous owners as well. My personal copy of *Kite Runner* is my trip to South Africa during the summer of 2015, my copy of *The Color Purple* is my senior year of high school. Physical books become time periods and experiences of our lives, and the black ink and pencil marks in the margins capture the thoughts of past selves.

Tattered Fiction is a collection of old books acquired over the years in bookstores around the United States that argues the immortal brilliance of the physical book. Some have damaged pages or broken spines, some have letters written on the inside jacket, some have small annotations inked between the lines. Each one carries the story of its previous owners within its pages, leaving only small clues as to what those stories may be. The anthology of Shakespeare's soliloquies was given from a daughter to a mother, a note written on the inside cover in bright red ink. The copy of *Walden* was given as a birthday gift from grandparents to a granddaughter in 2009. While an unusual collection of bound books, Tattered Fiction is a narrative within itself – a collection of both the novels themselves and the narratives of the physical books' histories. Though rough and falling apart, they are the well-loved and well-traveled conquerors of my bookshelf. They have found their way to me, calling out from carts and cases in stores from all over the country, finding the beginning of a new narrative in my home. They are the institutors of change and knowledge in peoples' lives I never knew. They are a celebration of the bound-book, an irreplaceable part of the reading experience, a physical object that holds unfathomable depth and width between its covers has no digital substitution.

Tattered Fiction: Bibliography
Murphy Studebaker

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. Del Rey Books 1991.

Previous Owner: Birdville High School English Department

Condition: This book's spine is broken, leaving several loose pages held together between the beginning and end of the novel. It is lightly annotated with several beautiful quotes underlined in black ink.

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Penguin Putnam Inc. 1997

Previous Owner: Sarah Yeakley

Condition: A large chunk of pages from the middle of the novel have been separated from the spine, and the pages are heavily annotated in blue ink and yellow highlighter. It can be inferred that Sarah was a studious reader.

Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. Viking Penguin, Inc. 1957.

Previous Owner: Unknown

Condition: The pages are yellowed, but the book was otherwise kept in good condition. The only annotation is a single sentence underlined in black ink: "The things that were to come are too fantastic not to tell."

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Scholastic, Inc. 1997

Previous Owner: Amanda Studebaker

Condition: Heavily-loved, this book's spine is tattered and torn, and several pages are water-logged, but still readable. It is worn with my days carrying it around in the third grade, discovering the magic of fiction.

Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Little Brown and Company, 1951.

Previous Owner: Charles T. Moore

Condition: Charles either bought the book for school and never read it, or took the care of his books very seriously, because it is in pristine condition. The only annotation is his name written on the inside cover.

Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. The Arden Shakespeare 1952.

Previous Owner: Saadom Al Bayati

Condition: The cover is tattered and worn, just clinging onto the hardback binding., but the inside of the book is in very good condition. The pages are the typical old book yellow.

Shakespeare, William. *Shakespeare Soliloquies*. Peter Pauper Press, Inc. 1960

Previous Owner: Elizabeth

Condition: In great condition. The only inscription is on the front cover in red cursive, under a quote from Romeo and Juliet: "For you, mom, Happiness & romance and love and affections & peace within. Your daughter, Elizabeth."



Shakespeare, William. *Twelfth Night*. Morrison & Gibb Limited, Great Britain 1935.

Previous Owner: Unknown

Condition: This is a pocket-sized edition of the play. It is not annotated and held together well, but the outside cover has been worn with age.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Everyman Publishing 1995

Previous Owner: William Studebaker

Condition: The pages are empty, but the inside cover reads, "There are some who say this is a must read for all authors."

Vonnegut, Kurt. *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* Dell Publishing Co., Inc. New York 1970

Previous Owner: Marion Britow

Condition: Other than the pages being yellowed with age, the book seems to be untouched.

Tattered Fiction: Wish List Murphy Studebaker

These titles are some of the most inspiring and empowering stories created by mankind, books and plays that inspired historical movements and crimes or even just inspired change within myself. Acquiring physical copies of these stories that once belonged to someone else would give insight into how another related to the story – how it changed them, which lines of text resonated with their soul, how often they carried the book with them and whether or not they read in the rain.

Burgess, Anthony. *A Clockwork Orange*.

A novel historically known for inspiring a wave of crimes and assassinations, it would be fascinating to add a copy of this novel owned by one of the criminals who used it to plan their own malicious acts.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*.

Because it is almost universally recognized as the definition of American Literature, I would love a copy of this novel previously owned by a U.S. President.

Green, John. *Looking for Alaska*.

This story is one of the most influential young adult novels of modern literature, and finding a copy annotated by a young teenager would give insight into the modern young reader's connection to the written word.

Jong, Erica. *Fear of Flying*.

Because of its controversial but empowering content, I would love to add a copy of this novel that was owned and read by a young woman, seeing how its contents shaped her own femininity.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*.

An incredibly powerful story. I would love a copy that once belonged to an African American woman living in the South, and see what lines she chose to underline or highlight.

Orwell, George. *Animal Farm*.

A powerful piece of political satire, an annotated copy of *Animal Farm* from a politician's private library would be fascinating to add to the collection.

Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* First Edition.

Though another copy already exists in the collection, one of the first additions of this groundbreaking novel would be the queen jewel of my collection. Not only is it the story that helped me fall in love with reading, it created an entire generation.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*.

One of the greatest plays of all time, influencing imitation after imitation and adaptation after adaptation. Its prevalence in modern society and education makes it a great addition to the narrative of the collection.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Welcome to the Monkey House*.

Possibly one of the most witty and bizarre authors out there, Vonnegut's collection of short stories would provide some excellent humor to the collection.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*.

This story had such an impact on my development when I read it for my AP Literature class, and I would love to see another's copy and infer how the text affected them as well.