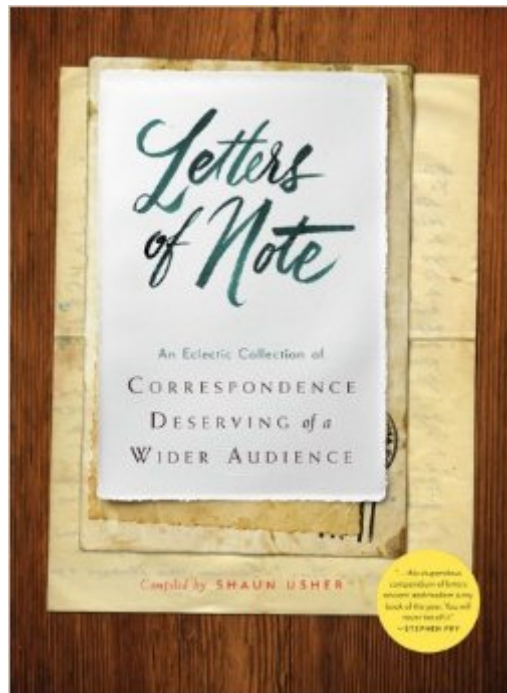


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# Letters Of Note: An Eclectic Collection Of Correspondence Deserving Of A Wider Audience



## Synopsis

This spectacular collection of more than 125 letters offers a never-before-seen glimpse of the events and people of history—the brightest and best, the most notorious, and the endearingly everyday. Entries include a transcript of the letter; a short contextual introduction; and, in 100 cases, a captivating facsimile of the letter itself. The artfulness of Shaun Usher's eclectic arrangement creates a reading experience rich in discovery. Mordant, hilarious, poignant, enlightening—surprise rewards each turn of the page. Colorfully illustrated with photographs, portraits, and relevant artworks, this handsome hardcover is a visual treat too, making *Letters of Note* an utterly distinctive gift, and an instant classic.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Shaun Usher has assembled a collection of letters that delights, and captivates. This is an enjoyable read. Not that every story is happy because many are not. Rather because reading each enriches and bestows appreciation for the moment. This is one book meant to touch and stroke the simile of the page; for me, better in hardback than in kindle. From Groucho Marx's advise to Woody Allen, Roald Dahl's thank you letter for the "dream in the bottle", a 10-year-old Fidel Castro to the President of the United States, Ray Bradbury's letter "I am not afraid of Robots. I am afraid of people, people, people. I want them to remain human.", Kurt Vonnegut to the head of the school board who ordered burning all school copies of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and Mick Jager's intelligent letter to Andy Warhol on the design of Rolling Stone's record sleeve which was ignored and became

the famously working jean crotch zipper. And there is the Reagan in polyester hound's tooth jacket, writing to his estranged son, mentioning how he knew more than many what an unhappy home is. Finally, if for nothing else, the 342 pages of letter and commentaries is worthwhile if only to have a copy of Queen Elizabeth II's handwritten letter to then President Eisenhower when, after seeing a picture of him bar-b-queuing at a party, she includes her recipe for "One Drop Scones". This is a gift book that is of large format with heavy stock paper. The large format gives a comfortable space with which they did careful, true renderings of the artifacts. The viewing of the originals is not here so important for any scholarly reason, but to warm the reading of each. Chronicle Books is usually good at such things and here it adds just that nice finish. If you have bathroom enough, this is a prize for the throne sitters.

What an incredible book! LETTERS OF NOTE, collected by Shaun Usher, consists of 125 letters-- if I counted correctly-- from many different people and times. The book is big enough and certainly beautiful enough to make that dubious qualification of suitable for a coffee table. Mr. Usher often includes with the letters full-page portraits of the writers, an actual reproduction of the letter, handwritten or typed or in whatever other form of the original letter as the case may be, along with the printed letters and a short paragraph about what occasioned the letter. This is one of those books that you can open anywhere and read a terrific letter. The first one I read was one from Bette Davis to her daughter responding to what she had written about Davis in her memoir MY MOTHER'S KEEPER. (Fortunately not every letter in the collection contains so much venom although Flannery O'Connor's may run a close second.) I guess the lady wasn't always acting in her movies. The letter I just finished is a note from Oscar Wilde to Bernulf Clegg explaining his remark that "All art is quite useless." Part of his beautiful letter reads as follows: "A work of art is useless as a flower is useless. A flower blossoms for its own joy. We gain a moment of joy by looking at it." In Queen Elizabeth's letter to President Eisenhower, she encloses her recipe for drop scones that she had promised him. Mary Stuart sends a letter to the brother of her ex-husband hours before she is to be beheaded: "thanks be to God, I scorn death and vow that I meet it innocent of any crime." One wonders how anyone at the NEW YORKER magazine could have not hired the twenty-three-year-old Eudora Welty after reading her charming, funny letter-- but they did. "I am a southerner, from Mississippi, the nation's most backward state. . . I recently coined a general word for Matisse's pictures. . . concubineapple." And-- if we are reading writers-- Raymond Chandler's on splitting an infinitive is priceless.. The saddest letter I read has to be the one from Mrs. Alleeta Sullivan in January, 1943 to the Bureau of Naval Personnel, asking to know the truth about

her five sons who were serving in the U. S. Navy on the same Navy cruiser as she had heard a rumor that all her sons had been killed. President Roosevelt, to his everlasting credit, personally answered her letter: "I realize full well there is little I can say to assuage your grief." John F. Kennedy in World War II, while stranded in the Solomon Islands, carved a message in a coconut shell and gave it to two natives and asked them to deliver it to the nearest Allied base, thirty-five nautical miles away. In a most sinister letter, someone posing as another African American (November, 1964) in the F. B. I. sent a letter to Martin Luther King suggesting that he kill himself. Virginia Woolf's letter to her husband that he found on the day she committed suicide will tear your heart out: "Dearest, I feel certain that I am going mad again. I feel we can't go through another of those terrible times. And I shan't recover this time." Finally the letter from William Safire to H. R. Haldeman, July 18, 1969 is one that we can all be thankful that President Nixon never had to read to the American public. (He would have read it if Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin had not been able to get off the moon.) "Fate has ordained that the men who went to the moon to explore in peace will stay on the moon to rest in peace." That one in its entirety put chills on my spine. LETTERS OF NOTE is quite simply a treasure trove.

Anytime you read primary documents it gives you more of an insight into people, cultures, time periods, issues, etc... This book, "Letters of Note" is a five star read for sure. It is interesting from page one with letters from Royalty, Presidents, great writers, poets, movie stars, and criminals (the Jack the Ripper letter is just down right frightening). To read letters from Flannery O'Connor and Virginia Woolf (her later is just heart wrenching) is to almost hear their words. The letter from the Queen to Eisenhower about a recipe? Greatness. This book? I cannot recommend it highly enough. The actual letters are pictured in the book then shown in regular font so you can read (some of the handwriting is difficult to read or in other languages) so you see the letter and then enjoy the letter along with some other information about the person and why it was written. Five stars is not enough of a rating. Can I give it more? I would if I could. Outstanding. This is one of those books that you will put on the shelf and then take it back off the shelf to read some more letters and then read and re-read.

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