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“I WILL ALWAYS WRITE BACK” the stories of a Zimbabwean boy, [@martin.ganda](#), & his American pen pal, [@caitlin_alifirenka](#), really resonated with my daughters, ages 10 & 12. It’s interesting, because I gave this one a solid 3, but my girls rated it 5. Let’s talk about why!

- Caitlin is a typical white, privileged American 7th grade girl. Martin is a 12 yr old boy, from the slums of Zimbabwe &

struggles even to find paper & postage with which to correspond to his new American pen pal. Their lives couldn't be more different, but over the course of several years, not only does their pen pal communication unexpectedly continue, but their friendship turns to a deep affinity for one another, which in turn becomes a promise & responsibility to "always write back". This is quite remarkable in many ways because while Caitlin is living a typical American teen life, Martin is coming of age in a country with deep political unrest & increasing poverty. There's little reason for them to continue writing to each other, except for this incredible bond they've made.

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Early on in their letters, Martin tries to shield Caitlin from his family's economic struggles, but she keys in & begins to realize the difference she can make by sending Martin small amounts of cash & is shocked when she learns he has to pay to go to school. Caitlin's parents become invested in their relationship & begin financially supporting Martin's entire family, providing schooling as well as meeting basic needs. Martin & Caitlin finally meet when Martin arrives in the U. S. to attend college & remain friends to this day.

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Throughout, my girls & I enjoyed Martin's side of the story much more, but we especially loved reading their actual letters to one another. The writing, apart from their letters isn't amazing, but the repetition of American privilege vs. Martin's life in Zimbabwe was a valuable perspective for my daughters. I do think this story has a bit of a white savior arc, though both Caitlin & Martin's lives WERE unmeasurably changed & enriched by one another. An authentic, heartfelt story that I'm so glad we read together & could discuss throughout. Please share your thoughts."

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