



McSweeney's & 826 NATIONAL PRESENT

THANKS
AND
HAVE
FUN
RUNNING
THE
COUNTRY

KIDS' LETTERS to
PRESIDENT OBAMA
EDITED BY JORY JOHN

Review written by Lilibet Snellings

The day after the election of Barack Obama, the students at 826 Valencia, the Dave Egger's-founded writing and tutoring center in San Francisco, were going loco. Many of them had known only one administration in their short lifetimes, and from what they gathered, it pretty much stunk. The campaign was also exciting, because, like Obama, most of them come from heterogeneous backgrounds, and while they had been pulling for the guy the whole time, they never thought he'd actually win. When he did, they went bananas. Filled with so much excitement, and so many questions, they were about to pop. Jory John, 826 Valencia's director, decided to channel their energy into a writing exercise, and, moved by the richness of the results, asked the children at all of the 826 Centers – in Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, Brooklyn, Boston and Ann Arbor – to do the same. Thus was born *Thanks And Have Fun Running The Country: Kids' Letters To President Obama*.

The collection of letters, some typed, some handwritten (and some with drawings), is at times hysterical—"I would fill the White House with mashed potatoes and drive through it on a boat," says Amir Abdelhadi, who is six, and from Chicago; at times witty (and wise)—"I think that, unlike W, you should dodge other countries and not shoes," says D'Andre "The King" Legrand, age 12, from Brooklyn; and, at times, heartbreaking—"I really hope you can help with the crime problem. I had a beautiful Siberian husky and someone stole him. I was very sad," says Daniel Gonzalez, who is 12 and from Seattle. Some entries are hopeful, like eight year-old Bushra, from Ann Arbor, who says, "My whole religion voted for you. I am Arabic and I heard you were half way Arabic." And some are just downright adorable—"You're just like a big me, because I am from Chicago and I am biracial and have curly hair," says seven year-old Avante Price.

On a recent afternoon at the 826 Center in LA's Echo Park, the students were still abuzz. "Did you vote for him?!!" they asked, excitedly. *Yes*. "You better have!" say Alanis Gordillo, who is ten, looking up from her math homework, "If he walked in right now I would say 'I love you! Will you give me a kiss? Adopt me!' Sasha and Malia are so lucky. They get to live in The White House *and* they get a dog!" Her classmate Jackson Huang declared, "I am excited because he's the first African American to be president and that's exciting for history," and then proudly proclaimed there was an inauguration party on his street.

He added, "I think he should make gas prices lower because if gas prices aren't lower then people are going to lose their houses, and then they'll be homeless, and this country should be the richest." He paused to catch his breath. "How much is a tape recorder?"

Several kids talked about the war. Oscar Miranda, who is ten, said, "I would tell him to stop the war because a lot of innocent people are dying." Others just wanted to talk about dinosaurs.

Seven year-old Anthony Vasquez said, "I want him to make a museum of dinosaurs. But not like real dinosaurs, just the bones." After he went on about dinosaurs for a minute or so I asked, "Do you have any *other advice* or suggestions for the President?"

He thought for a second. "Make their bodies brown and their heads green!"

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Thanks And Have Fun Running The Country: Kids Letters To President Obama is available at <http://store.mcsweeneys.net/> for \$12. All proceeds benefit 826 National.