

Wesley Morris (8th Grade)
C.W. Stanford Middle School
Hillsborough, NC

Home:
7001 New Sharon Church Road
Rougemont, NC 27572

Dear Ms. Lee:

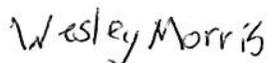
Your story haunted me with emotions I didn't know that I could feel. When I read To Kill a Mockingbird for class last October, the tragic Charleston church massacre was fresh on my mind. Nine innocent people were killed because of their skin color. I wondered, how could the word of a man like Bob Ewell triumph over a man who was black? Was it because of fear or was it because of ignorance? Reading your novel on the heels of this tragedy, I couldn't help but compare the character Ewell to Dylann Roof who murdered people who were worshipping at their church. Then something clicked inside of me, something deep within my gut, in a strange and foreign way, and that feeling has never left me. Now, I have a new awareness about our humanity. I know, more than ever before, that I will strive to be fair and understanding.

Before I read this story, I had only a dim understanding of racism. But like a light that grows brighter, I am learning. Your story started conversations with my teacher at school and at home with my parents, about those historical events that were divisive, that influenced and fueled opposing views about race relations. Early on, the adult Scout reflects on Maycomb as the kind of small town where people believe it's important to know your roots and which side of the war your ancestors fought on. Aunt Alexandra embodies this cultural Southern tradition and the perpetuation of it while Mr. Cunningham represents the ignorant mob mentality that wants to lynch Tom Robinson. Sadly, I now know that there are people who still think like this today.

For the first time ever, I've noticed an unmistakable symbol of oppression hanging high in front of a house on my daily route to school. How long has it been there? I can't remember. I don't know who lives there either, but I do know what it represents. Your story made me realize that the voices of Maycomb are alive in my own community! I've heard some of the racial slurs around me, spoken in tones that were unfair and unjust. I just did not understand them until now.

Therefore, with this letter I am making a pledge to you, Ms. Lee. Like a light that shines brighter with a new awareness, know that your book has made a deep and lasting impression on me. Thank you for giving me the patient, wise, and kind teacher in Atticus, set starkly against racial injustice so that I know the kind of person I will strive to be. When he explains to Scout that she must walk in another person's skin, I know that he wants her to understand the other person's differences because that is how she can extend love and compassion. I will strive to be this kind of leader, to stand strong when I see a situation that is unjust. And in the end, I know that good will win over evil. As Scout recalls the disturbing final events, she tells Atticus that Tom was really nice. That's when Atticus tells her that "most people are when you finally see them." This is the wonderful news that your story offers us. We can overcome our differences when we take the time to really see, to be patient, and try to understand why we think the way we do.

With peace and great respect,



Wesley Morris