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Dear Harper Lee,

The life lessons that the characters in your story have taught me have helped to change my perceptions of the world outside of secluded Montana. After reading this book, I developed a profound physical and emotional attachment to some of the characters after I shared similar experiences with them and subsequently gained an innate understanding of their own experiences.

Growing up in Montana, I have never seen much diversity and thus I've never been able to attach myself to all of the hateful things I have viewed on the news on a daily basis. I feel sad while watching the stories about those who lose their lives due to discrimination, but I typically move on just moments after seeing it and never think twice about it again. These disheartening news stories had become a mundane part of daily life and did not invoke a sense of understanding for me, a 12 year old living in isolated Montana. I would always just console myself by recognizing that these atrocities were thousands of miles away from me and did not directly impact my life. While reading your novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I sympathized and attached myself with the emotions of Tom Robinson, a black man who was falsely accused of rape for his race. However, after I finished the book I moved on with my daily life without thinking much about the inhumane treatment of Tom Robinson. Like I typically do, I consoled myself by recognizing that catastrophes like these had occurred in the past and they were so far away from me. However, all of my perceptions about connectivity with the outside world changed after I was there when one of these catastrophes occurred.

In the summer of 2015 I stayed across the street from the Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Charleston where nine African Americans were killed in a hate driven shooting. For the first time in my life I was there in the aftermath of a tragedy and all of the sudden I gained a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of our world and the impacts these atrocities have on different communities on a daily basis. In the days following the event, the members of the community came together to rebuild. Their faith prevailed through detrimental adversity, and I now understood the implications of the tragic news stories on those personally affected by them. Although the community was saddened and tarnished, they did not lose hope and came together. They were singing songs and praying, hand in hand, to celebrate the lives of those who had lost them. This illuminated to me the beauty of the community coming together after tragedy strikes and how the recovering process can espouse change and hope for the future.

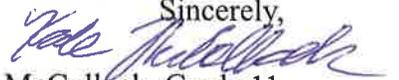
When I contemplated what I had been a part of in Charleston and what the community had experienced, I thought about your novel and how the tragedy that occurred at the end of the novel relates to the fatal events that had transpired in Charleston. However, there was a spark of hope in both the novel and in Charleston. It took a long time for the jury to make their verdict, which was rare at the time for cases dealing with African American men, because their word was not trusted due to the widespread racism at the time. This illuminated a spark of hope in a time of destitution. The fact that the jury took so long to make a verdict conveyed hope for the future.

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Sadly, racism has remained persistent to this day, and racially targeted atrocities still occur on a daily basis in our modern world. In Charleston, the unrelenting faith of the community following tragedy ignited a spark of hope for the future. When I went to mourn the lives that were lost and celebrate them with the community, I could not conceptualize what I was witnessing. It was a lot for me to take in. Later that night I thought of your novel and the hope it demonstrated. I thank your novel for allowing me to understand what I had seen in Charleston and I thank you for your tragic ending, because it demonstrated to me that our society is far from eliminating racism, but there is hope.

After what I had been a part of in Charleston, my perceptions of the world changed forever. I finally understood what Tom Robinson had been through and every time I now see catastrophic stories on the news, I feel for the community in a profound manner, because now I realize that the world is not such a large place after all. Tragedy brings out the kindness in people. Throughout your novel, Jem and Scout are afraid of Boo Radley and keep their distance from him because they judge him from their preconceived notions. At the end of the novel, he protects them and they see for themselves the true kindness in his heart. In Charleston, the community came together in harmony following the tragic shooting in hopes of espousing a brighter future. Thank you for writing *To Kill a Mockingbird* and helping me to understand how our world is connected and what hope truly is.

Sincerely,



Kade McCulloch, Grade 11

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