

MASSACHUSETTS LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE 2023

HONORS LEVEL III

Dear Angie Thomas,

My list of favorite authors is scarce. Only three authors have ever been able to make it, and your number one. Your books, specifically *The Hate U Give*, have had an unfathomable impact on not only my character, but also my overall life.

After watching *The Hate U Give* movie, I immediately picked up the book; to this day I wish I had read the book first. After only a couple of sentences, I was entranced. I flipped through the pages vigorously, eager to reach the end. The experiences of the characters reminded me so much of my own, and I was captivated. I always knew that there were challenges that my community faced but what I failed to realize is that I was sheltered from most of the issues that we actually face. Similarly to Starr, I don't go to school in my home city, I attend school in the suburbs, and have to be a very specific version of myself. It is not easy to ignore the way some teachers and students look at me when I voice my opinion. In classes where I'm the only student of color, I tend to stay quiet to avoid the glances that all tend to convey the same message. She's being too aggressive or she's too loud. I also found that when something discriminatory happens people tend to feel the need to talk to me and voice that they had nothing to do with it. As if they need my validation, and to verbally tell them that they aren't racist.

When George Floyd was murdered by former officer Derek Chauvin, there was an incredible amount of direct messages and text messages from my white peers. At first it was the simple "Hey I heard this happened and just wanted to check up on you" and progressed to people apologizing for my loss and them telling me they have never said the N word, ever. The situation was horrible. Floyd lost his life to someone who was supposed to protect him. What I failed to understand is why *I* was being given condolences for something that didn't happen to someone in my family; more, I was confused on why I was the designated speaker for black people everywhere. For one of the first times in my life, I related to Starr on a more personal level. A combination of Floyd's death and *The Hate U Give* made me realize that I'm the minority at my school and in whatever profession I decide to pursue. It opened my eyes to the adversity that I have faced in the past and also the ones that are more than likely to happen in the future. But also that I'm not alone facing it.

All this is to say thank you because, without you, Starr, Maverick, Lisa and even Seven, I would still be ignorant to the problems that I as a black woman will need to solve.

Sincerely,

Maya