

2025 Classical Literature Scholarship—1st Place

The Hole

Maia Schreiner

I have a hole inside my head. It's not an actual hole, but it still gets in the way of thinking. My negative thoughts like to pool in it, but the kind ones steer clear. If I'm not careful, I fall in and find myself in an ocean of misery. Fortunately, it sometimes seems to disappear. It's never for long though. It always comes back, a little bit different, to sit in the middle of my head.

The hole was a major problem last Spring. Burnt out and exhausted, I picked what I felt was the "easier" final project for Socratic: reading and annotating *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The limited time to finish the three hundred and seventy nine pages did scare me, but putting together a presentation, after doing what felt like twenty in the previous term, sounded like Dante's secret tenth circle. So I pushed on, with a handmade reading schedule and a pen for notes, and scoured my way through the tale.

Strangely enough, I found the book wasn't just about social injustice and slavery; it was also about hope, self-identity, and love. Tom became my light. He always found a path forward despite the hardships, abuse, and torment. He tried his best to love everyone. He shared his beliefs and hope with others and inspired them to do the same. He knew who he wanted to be and pursued it. In chapter twenty eight, St. Clare and Tom are having a conversation about freedom. Tom says, "I'd rather have... poor everything, and have 'em mine than have the best, and have 'em any man's else" (Stowe, 259). To me, it means he'd rather be himself than be somebody he's not. Quite frankly, I think I loved the quote because it reminds me of a goal I've had for myself.

I don't want to spend most of my life stuck in the hole. It's a deep chasm of pure anguish. As much as I wish it wasn't there, I have little control over it. It formed from years of others' thoughts and opinions jaunting around. My sister's self-directed comments on her weight and my brother's demeaning taunts wore the area thin. After years of faded friendships and failed therapy sessions, my loneliness punctured the surface. The damage has kept accumulating. The hole, on its own, is hardly dangerous, but, like a pothole on a busy road, it grows with constant traffic. That's where things get tricky. By simply going through the motions and performing the tasks of each day, I generate traffic. Sometimes my thoughts are a bit heavy and tear things up more. Other times, they're just a flock of tiny worries picking at the worn spots. If I don't take the time to recenter myself, I fall into the chasm. *That* is when things get dangerous. There's a broken mirror in there that whispers cruel things in my ear, thinking it's helpful when it's not. Nevertheless, in my darkest moments, there's still hope. A figure reaches out an arm out to pull me up. It's Tom.

Because of this book, I've grown a lot since last Spring. With Tom's help, I've discovered the importance of self-care activities, like reading for fun or taking a walk after school. I've found hope in the little things in life too, like sitting in a comfy chair or finding a convenient parking spot. While I wouldn't say I'm perfect, I'm happy that I've pushed this far. I'm happy that I know who I am and who I want to become. I'm happy that I can experience life every day.

There's a hole inside my head. My negative thoughts like to pool in it, but the kind ones steer clear. If I'm not careful, I fall in and find myself in an ocean of misery. Fortunately, it seems to sometimes disappear. It's never for long though. It always comes back, a little bit

different, to sit in the middle of my head. However, I know how to climb out of it, how to find a spot of light in the darkness, thanks to Tom.