

”to kill a mockingbird”
by harper lee essay
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Throughout history, people are often ranked and criticized by society. An individual's nationality, wealth and social status were closely looked over by society's eye. Thus, one's dignity would be decided based on society's opinion of them. In the novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, the theme of human dignity is portrayed by Scout, Calpurnia, and Atticus. This essay will analyze the theme of human dignity and describe how this novel proves that all people, regardless of race, social status, and family history are people of worth.

Scout depicts the theme of human dignity by following Atticus' words of wisdom and putting them to use in her everyday life. She demonstrates the immense understanding that humans are to be treated equally. This proves that her knowledge is well beyond her years. Thankfully, Atticus, a positive role model, is responsible for teaching her this.

" As Atticus once advised me to do, I tried to climb into Jem's skin and walk around in it: if I had gone alone to the Radley Place at two in the morning, my funeral would have been held the next afternoon. So I left Jem alone and tried not to bother him." (Lee 57) It is evident that Scout uses Atticus' advice and her father's words have a positive affect on her. The fact that she decides not to bother Jem proves her respect and maturity. Furthermore, it proves that through her father, Scout has developed an understanding to respect every human being with dignity and respect, including her brother.

" I never understood her preoccupation with heredity. Somewhere, I had received the impression that Fine Folks were people who did the best they could with the sense they had, but Aunt Alexandra was of the opinion,

obliquely expressed, that the longer a family had been squatting on one patch of land the finer it was." (Lee 130) It is unmistakable that Aunt Alexandra and Scout are two very different people. Even though Scout is young, she has a more mature comprehension of people than that of Aunt Alexandra. This shows that Scout knows that families should not be ranked on their property or where they come from. Thus, Scout once again shows her understanding of human dignity.

" When I pointed to him his palms slipped slightly, leaving greasy sweat steaks on the wall, and he hooked his thumbs in his belt. A strange small spasm shook him, as if he heard fingernails scrape slate, but as I gazed at him in wonder the tension slowly drained from his face. His lips parted into a timid smile, and our neighbor's image blurred with my sudden tears. ' Hey, Boo,' I said." (Lee 270) This is the first distinctive sign that Boo is a good man. Even though Scout has never seen him before, she incredibly realizes who he is. This is the first time that she recognizes that the man that she used to fear the most had cared about her and saved her life. Therefore, she is brought to tears at this realization and discovers that despite Boo's social status, he is still a person of worth.

Another character that portrays the theme of human dignity is Calpurnia. As a black woman, Calpurnia has her own opinions and statements on the subject of human dignity. She shows her knowledge and respect of all people throughout the novel.

" There's some folks who don't eat like us, but you ain't called on to contradict 'em at the table when they don't. That boy's yo' comp'ny and if he

wants to eat up the table cloth you let him, you hear?" (Lee 24) This refers to Walter Cunningham coming over to eat dinner at the Finch's. It shows how Calpurnia gets angry at Scout because she makes rude remarks towards him. Calpurnia lectures Scout, telling her that she must treat Walter with dignity and respect. The deeper message to this quote is the fact that even though Walter comes from a different type of family and lives by different morals, he is still a person of worth.

" Lula stopped, but she said, ' You ain't got no business bringin' white chillun in here-they got their church, we got our'n. It is our church, ain't it, Miss Cal?' Calpurnia said, ' It's the same God, ain't it?'" (Lee 119) Calpurnia takes Jem and Scout into the First Purchase African M. E. Church and makes a very interesting statement. When Lula, a member of the church, doesn't want white children to enter, Calpurnia claims that all people are people of worth by saying that " it's the same God". This suggests that all people should be permitted to worship, despite the colour of their skin.

" It's not necessary to tell all you know. It's not ladylike -in the second place, folks don't like to have someone around knowin' more than they do. It aggravates 'em. You're not gonna change any of them by talkin' right, they've got to want to learn themselves, and when they don't want to learn there's nothing you can do but keep your mouth shut or talk their language.'" (Lee 126) It is clear that Calpurnia has an understanding of different kinds of people. The fact that she talks proper in the Finch home proves that she has class and respect for them. In addition, she also shows respect for the people at her church by talking like they do. She also sets an example for Scout by telling her what is ladylike.

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Overall, Calpurnia demonstrates her understanding of the influence of language, and to use it properly to respect the dignity of other people.

Atticus portrays the theme of human dignity by acting as Maycomb's leading attorney. He stands up for justice and defends Tom Robinson despite the consequences.

"' First of all,' he said, ' if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view'" (Lee 30) The fact that Atticus provides Scout with the knowledge of treating all humans with dignity and respect is an admirable quality. He does this by telling her that you will get along by people once you truly understand them. For instance, this applies to the case of Boo Radley. He was known as the town's recluse, and was known as a ghoulish figure that eats cats and stalks about the neighborhood at night. However, once Scout truly understood him, she got along with him.

" The witnesses for the state...have presented themselves to you gentlemen, to this court, in the cynical confidence that their testimony would not be doubted, confident that you gentlemen would go along with them on the assumption-the evil assumption-that all Negroes lie, that all Negroes are basically immoral beings, that all Negro men are not to be trusted around our women, an assumption one associates with minds of their caliber. Which, gentlemen, we know is in itself a lie as black as Tom Robinson's skin, a lie I do not have to point out to you. You know the truth, the truth is this: some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, some Negro men cannot be trusted around women, black or white. But this is a truth that applies to the human

race and to no particular race of men..." (Lee 217) It is clear that Atticus is very powerful and influential with his words. In addition, he stands up for human dignity wholeheartedly. He states some very thoughtful and valid facts about how people in his society accuse black people, like Tom Robinson, of unrighteous things, just because of their skin colour.

" The one place where a man ought to get a square deal is in a courtroom, be he any color of the rainbow, but people have a way of carrying their resentments right into a jury box. As you grow older, you'll see white men cheat black men every day of your life, but let me tell you something and don't you forget it - whenever a white man does that to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he comes from, that white man is trash." (Lee 233) It is evident that Atticus reveals his profound understanding of human dignity through these words. He states the fact that white men cheat black men everyday of their lives in his society. In addition, he says that white men are " trash" when they abuse or maltreat black people. This statement is definitely true because people are still people despite the colour of their skin.

In conclusion, the novel To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee portrays the theme of human dignity. Primarily, the characters Scout, Calpurnia, and Atticus reveal their understanding that all humans are to be treated equally, even in their society full of injustice and prejudice. This essay has analyzed the theme of human dignity and has described how this novel proves that all people, regardless of race, social status, and family history are people of worth.