

Diverse cultures and traditions essay sample

[Society](#)



Using Tom Robinson's trial as a starting point explain what we learn about Maycomb's society from reading 'To Kill A Mockingbird'

Maycomb society is a white society. It has a society, which would typify any small rural town's society in southern America during the 1930's; it is full of prejudice, it has a fairly poor society and a lot of the people work on agricultural land. Looking into the Deep South, tradition for most people in Maycomb meant prejudice, separation, and racism. Atticus Finch chose to fight against this 'old tradition' with traditions of his own. Because of his highly ethical character, Atticus is able to honourably defend Tom Robinson and promote a 'new tradition' for himself and his children. Respect, dignity, and equality form the backbone of Atticus' belief system, a belief system containing qualities that are often overlooked in the traditional South. In the absence of much outside support, Atticus fights his battle the only way he knows how, with patience, perseverance, and honesty.

From the trial scene onwards we learn the true extent of Maycomb's hatred towards Negroes. Maycomb's hatred includes prejudice and segregation of blacks from whites. Harper Lee uses the trial scene to attack the society of Maycomb, to show us Maycomb's true feelings and Harper Lee also shows us how dangerous Maycomb's feelings can be because they have actually killed a mockingbird in Tom Robinson

A lot of gossip also goes on in the town and everybody is talked about and nobody is left alone to get along with their life. An example of gossip is when Jem once told Dill and Scout that Boo Radley 'Fed on raw squirrels; he was six feet tall, his eyes were popped out and he drooled all the time.' There

was also one other incidence that Boo was involved in with his father. One day Boo was cutting articles out of a local newspaper when his dad walked in, and Boo lodged the scissors in his leg, pulled them out, wiped them off and continued with what he was doing. His mother then ran out into the street screaming that Boo was killing his father, but he was not charged with anything.

The day of the trial, the people of Maycomb treat the trial as a gala occasion. People turned up for what seemed like a fun day out and sat in the Courthouse Square having lunch. The society of Maycomb treating the trial day as a gala occasion shows us that they already knew what the verdict was going to be. They knew that Mayella Ewell was going to win the case for just the fact that she is white.

Prejudice is shown when a group of people called the ' idlers club' start to talk about the case: ' Yeah but Atticus aims to defend him that's what I don't like about it,' when they say him they are obviously referring to Tom Robinson.

As the court case is about to begin, people start to make their way up the stairs to the courtroom. Negroes had to wait until all the white people have made their way up the stairs ' Whoa now just a minute (...) just don't start up them there stairs yet awhile,' this shows us that whites are higher in society and this also shows us of the segregation of whites and blacks in Maycomb society.

The case is actually a white against Black case but still the case is decided by whites this is shown by the setting of the courtroom because of the white
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jury, the white judge, white lawyer and the seating arrangements, and this also shows us about prejudice in society.

As Scout, Dill and Jem go to find a seat, they find there are no seats remaining but Reverend Sykes takes them upstairs to the coloured balcony and they find seats there. This is a strong example of segregation because the whites sat at the bottom of the courthouse separately from the blacks who had their own balcony.

We see another strong example of this earlier in the novel when Scout and Jem build a snowman out of mud and snow. The mud represents the black community, and the snow represents the white community. When they build the snowman, the snow is on top of the mud possibly representing that the white people are higher in society than black people.

Mr Heck Tate then testifies and explains what Mr Bob Ewell told him the night of the alleged rape ‘ Mr Ewell came in (...) and said get to his house quick, some nigger’d raped his girl.’ Here we learn how much Bob Ewell hates blacks because he calls blacks ‘ Niggers’.

Very strong evidence in favour of Tom Robinson is then presented to the jury. The testimony of Heck Tate and Bob Ewell says that Mayella Ewell was beaten up on the right side of her face but Tom Robinson’s left arm was fully 12 inches shorter and it was dead as it hung at his side. Jem notices this, ‘ Scout, look (...) he’s crippled!’ and then reverend Sykes explains that Tom got it caught in a cotton gin when he was a boy and it tore all the muscles loose from his bones.

Mayella Ewell then testifies, but it is clear that she is lying because of the inconsistency in her testimony and this makes it very unbelievable. A strong example of her unbelievable testimony is when Atticus is cross-examining her and she talks about her father ' He does tollable, cept when-' at the end of her answer to Atticus' question she stops and cuts her sentence short. This shows us that she is clearly not telling the truth because she was about to say something but something is stopping her from doing so. She again is unbelievable when she says ' No I don't recollect if he hit me', I mean yes I do, he hit me' this clearly shows that she has been told what to say in the testimony by someone, possibly her dad.

Tom Robinson's testimony then suggests that white people are lower than black people in society because of his use of Standard English, politeness and respect ' Yes sir', ' Please, sir?' which is a contrast to the testimonies of Mayella and Bob. In the two Ewell testimonies the Ewell's use non-standard English ' I told'ya', ' I mighta', they are rude, impolite and seem to have any respect. This contrast between the Ewell's and Tom is a clear attack on stereotypes because blacks were seen as rude, illiterate and lying people but in the testimonies we see that the Ewell's who are white are like this. Tom's testimony also shows us that he is as good as anyone.

A great deal of segregation in this novel goes towards Tom Robinson. This is because this was a time when white people had absolutely no respect for black folks, and did anything they could to make them feel like dirt.

Tom Robinson shown as a respectful Negro is not the first time Negroes have been shown to be respectful in the novel. They are shown respectful in

church scene when the Negroes are collecting money for Tom Robinson's wife, Helen Robinson to help her because no money was being brought home due to Tom's stay in jail.

Even the attorney is prejudice during the trial because he keeps on calling Tom 'boy' and showed no respect which is a total contrast to Atticus. This was the typical name for a black man in the 1930's.

Prejudice is strongly shown towards Tom Robinson when he is talking to Mr Gilmer. Tom says he felt sorry for Mayella and Mr Gilmer then says 'You felt sorry for her,' in a sarcastic tone because it was a disgrace for a black man to feel sorry for a white woman and Tom also helped a white woman which was also considered a disgrace. The code Mayella broke was asking Tom to help her.

Atticus then speaks about what Mayella did and in his speech he talks about the whites view of blacks 'She tempted a Negro (...) she did something that in our society is unspeakable: she kissed a Negro. This says to us what Atticus thinks of Maycomb as a society, it is a society that lives by rules and traditions.

Atticus then goes on to say she realised what she had done after she kissed him and sent all the blame onto Tom Robinson; 'A quiet, respectable, humble Negro.'

The verdict is then given but the surprise is the time taken to reach it not the verdict itself. We later find out why it took so long when Atticus is talking to Jem and Scout about the trial 'You might like to know there was one fellow

who took considerable wearing down-in the beginning he was rarin' for an outright acquittal.' Jem then works out that it was one of the Cunninghams, who wanted to kill Tom the night before. This shows us that the Cunningham was wrong before but he learnt from Atticus and was on Tom's side.

When the verdict is given Jem, Scout and Dill are in disillusionment for a few days while the older people in society are normal. This shows us the naivety of the children, it shows us what they have not learnt about society. It also tells us that you don't have to be clever to know what the verdict should have been and it's just because of the prejudice in society that the verdict was wrong. It's like society had made the courts mind up on the verdict. The narrator shows this because Scout and Jem have been brought up by Atticus, who is one of the only non-prejudice people in Maycomb and this shows us that people should be individuals like Atticus and should not just follow society.

Atticus is given lots of lavish food after the trial although times are hard ' Tell them (...) they must never do this again,' ' Times are too hard...'

The Negroes giving Atticus food questions why are black's hated in society? They show gratitude, respect. Kindness and even though times are so hard they give Atticus what seems like a feast. This shows us society is wrong to direct prejudice towards blacks.

To kill a mockingbird uses the effects of irony, sarcasm, and hypocrisy to criticise a variety of elements in Southern life.

Harper Lee employs the effects of irony in *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a way to criticise the deficiency of public education. 'Now tell your father not to teach you any more.' 'It's best to begin reading with a fresh mind.' Instead of praising Scout's ability to read at an advanced level, Miss Caroline discourages it. This ironic example set by Miss Caroline seems to demonstrate the inadequate training that she had received for her job. Miss Caroline seems to have been told to a strict standard on how her students should to behave, but when she encounters something different, such as Scout's advanced ability to read, she advises Scout to stop being advanced, whereas a modern-day schoolteacher would capitalise on Scout's ability to read and encourage her to read more. 'You won't learn to write until you're in the third grade.'

From this we learn that society is naïve and follows strict codes and rules of living and by attacking the education system Harper Lee attacks society. This links to the court case because the school follows traditions and codes in teaching just like Maycomb does in its prejudice beliefs

Mrs. Merriweather spends an afternoon at the Missionary Circle complaining about the plight of the poor Mrunas in Africa, but just a few moments later, she says, that Atticus should not help out Tom Robinson. It is amazing that Mrs. Merriweather does not recognise her seemingly straightforward hypocrisy. Just a short while ago, she was complaining about the poor Mrunas in Africa not receiving enough help, then she does a complete turn-around and complains about Atticus Finch helping out the blacks in Maycomb. The use of Mrs. Merriweather's hypocrisy greatly helps in Harper Lee's criticism of unjustified discrimination.

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In Scout's history lesson Scout hears Miss Gates say that it was 'time somebody taught 'em (the blacks) a lesson'. Miss Gates is so wound up in the myth of white superiority that she does not even recognise her hypocrisy when she denounces Hitler and says that persecuting anybody is wrong. Apparently in Miss Gate's case, blacks aren't 'anybody.'

The missionary circle and the history lesson tell us about the hypocrisy in society of Maycomb.

Before the trial we learn that Maycomb society greatly despised the fact that Atticus was defending Tom Robinson because of the mob turning up at Atticus' house and even children at Scout's school called Atticus a 'Nigger Lover.' The fact that even children are prejudice shows us that they are brought up to hate Negroes in a deeply prejudice society.

Prejudice doesn't seem to affect Scout because she is taught at home by Atticus and, of course, Calpurnia. This helps them stay away from the town's beliefs.

Mrs Dubose saying things about Atticus to Jem and Scout tell us that the ways of Maycomb must have been very old because Mrs Dubose is quite old.

Prejudice and segregation do not effect Scout and Jem too much because of Atticus' teachings and he teaches them with examples, patience and non-violence which tells us that Atticus is a great exception in society.

Maycomb is also a violent society and we see this when Bob Ewell goes after Jem and Scout when they are on the way home from the pageant but luckily Boo Radley kills Bob Ewell.

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Boo Radley's significance is shown at the end of the novel when he kills Bob Ewell.

Instead of arresting Boo Mr Tate says ' To my way of thinking,' ' Mr Finch, taking the one man who's done you and this town a great service an' draggin' him into the limelight with his shy ways-that's a sin.' ' If it were another man it'd be different but not this man, Mr Finch.

Mr Tate's speech shows us that Boo Radley is being compared to a Mockingbird and although he has killed Bob Ewell, he has not committed a sin, he has helped Atticus and the town. I think he says Boo has done this town a favour because Jem and Scout are not affected by prejudice and can help wipe out prejudice in the town in the future.

Maycomb is a society which has killed a mockingbird, Tom Robinson. It is a society loaded with hypocrisy, prejudice, segregation and hatred. By reading To kill a mockingbird we learn a lot about Maycomb society. We learn that not all people are full of hate for coloured people, but there are very few people who are not full of hate.