

Courage in to kill a mockingbird

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



One likes to think of a hero, as strong, brave, and meeting all challenges head on. All the characters in this book have a different view as to what courage is, and they all show it in different ways through their everyday lives. Younger characters, like Jem and Scout, see the physical aspect of it, whereas Atticus believes this to be an extremely weak form of courage. He believes in the mental quality of courage. The ability to be in minority and not back down and to be able to change; he admires Mrs.

Dubose for her acts of courage that are against all odds.

For a younger character, like Scout, courage is often associated with a physical act that is usually dangerous. It is hard for young children to realize that courage can be shown in other aspects of life. Scout sees an example of courage in her father when he shoots the mad dog Tim Johnson (pg. 101). Although Atticus does not think of it as very courageous, Jem and Scout are proud of their father and the courage he showed in this dangerous situation.

Atticus views courage on a more intellectual level, as a moral thing not something that can be proved with a weapon.

Later on in the story, Jem and Scout encounter the vindictive, spiteful Mrs. Dubose who often shouts out racism directed at the passing children because of Atticus' job. At one point she proclaimed, " Your father's no better than the niggers and trash he works for! " (pg. 111). When she blatantly made Atticus an object of ridicule like that, Jem decided that the best way to settle things was to ruin Mrs. Dubose's camellias. Since he could not attack Mrs. Dubose directly, Jem decided to go for something close to

her. He is committing a physical act of retaliation, which led to her suffering mental pain yet again.

It was a cowardly act, for he dared not step up and confront her. After Atticus heard about this stunt, Jem was made to read to her every afternoon for a month. He now needed mental valour, and he did find it more difficult to source this than the physical bravery he was used to displaying. This is made apparent by him refusing to walk past her house alone, and because Jem was at first terrified of going to see her. Mrs. Dubose was a very sick woman, and had used morphine to ease her pain but was now addicted. It was her goal to leave the world “ beholden to nothing and nobody” (pg. 120).

She displayed what Atticus refers to as “ real courage. ” (pg. 121). She showed “ real courage” because she does not have the luxury of standing there with a gun pointed at her addiction. One single attempt could not free her from the addiction. Rather, it had to be a many staged process over an extended period of time. It was sheer determination and “ real courage” that allowed her to accomplish her goal. It was not until after she died that Atticus explained to Jem and Scout how courageous the woman was because she knew she was dying but was still determined to die free of the morphine.

She fought against great odds, even though she knew that she would surely die. Atticus tells his children that he wanted them to see “ what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. ” He also says that she was the “ bravest person he ever knew. ” (pg. 121) “ Real courage” is when you fight for what is right regardless of whether you win or lose. Atticus Finch demonstrates “ real courage” several times throughout the novel, in addition to the lessons that he teaches his children.

The largest and most important example would be the trial of Tom Robinson. When Atticus took the case, he went up against Maycomb, a generally prejudiced town, in order to defend Tom. He understood that taking the case would make him an object of ridicule and that no one would forgive him for believing a black man's word over a white man's. Even his own sister expresses disapproval at his decision, practically telling him he was bringing disgrace to the family. Nevertheless, no matter how much his reputation suffered, he did not change his mind.

Standing up for his morals and ethics was more important than what people thought about him. From the very start Atticus knows he will not win the case however he does his job and finishes what he set out to do. Atticus's strong sense of morality and justice motivates him to defend Tom Robinson with determination, giving it all he has. He shows this when he says, " Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try and win. " (pg. 82). He says this to Scout after she comes home from school angry at Cecil Jacobs for making fun of Atticus in the schoolyard.

Atticus tells her to fight with her head instead of her fists. He wants the people of Maycomb to hear the truth about Tom, " That boy may go to the chair, but he's not going till the truth's told. " (pg. 159). Atticus is putting everything a man holds dear, dignity, respect, honor and status, on the line to protect Tom. He later shows more bravery when he goes to the jailhouse to protect Tom from a mob. Without thinking twice, he rushed to Tom's aid. He went willingly, knowing that if a mob did form he would be greatly outnumbered and would easily be beaten.

Still, he put Tom's well being ahead of his own welfare. While serving justice, Atticus also showed great courage. For example, he did not go along with Heck Tate when he told a lie about what really happened the night Bob Ewell was found stabbed to death. Atticus put his life and career on the line because he knew that, as an officer of the court, withholding information from an investigation could have gotten Mr. Tate thrown into jail. Nonetheless, like many times before, doing what was right and fair prevailed in Atticus's way of thinking.

In addition, Atticus went against his moral code and principles he had always upheld before, when Atticus is faced with the decision of abiding by the law or breaking it in order to do the right thing. He knew that incarcerating a man like Arthur Radley would have been unforgivable, especially after Arthur had just performed a great deed by saving his children's lives. He knew that exposing him would be an awful way of repaying him; it would have been like " shooting a mockingbird. " Therefore, Atticus chose to protect Boo from the public eye rather than abide by the law and his " honest" judicial ways he was so accustomed to follow.

Sometimes it takes even more courage to set a new level of morals than to stay in one's comfort zone. (pg. 297-302). The courage to change habits and thoughts is very important, because not everyone is able to do it. A very good example of this courage is when Atticus asked Scout not to fight anymore. " When I committed myself to this act of cowardice. Word got around that Scout Finch wouldn't fight anymore, her daddy wouldn't let her. " (pg. 97). That was a great act of courage because Scout used to fight a lot but as she had promised her father she would not fight anymore.

Scout, like Jem does not want to disappoint Atticus, so she makes a change. In conclusion, Atticus shows praiseworthy courage and behaviour in many instances throughout the story, not by fighting or killing, but by standing up for what he believed in a civilized and determined way. His strongest motivation, however, were his children. He wants to be a good example for his kids and encourage in them a strong sense of moral value. One time Scout asks him why he had taken a case he knew he was not going to win and he responded by saying, “ For a number of reasons.

The main one is, if I didn't I couldn't hold up my head in town, I couldn't represent this county in the legislature, I couldn't even tell you or Jem not to do something again. ” (pg. 82). In other words, he would not have been able to talk to his kids about justice and standing up for what one believes when he himself had not stood for what he believed in. The lessons taught by Atticus and Mrs. Dubose show Jem and Scout what it is to be courageous, to be able to change, to tell the truth and most importantly to stand up for their own beliefs. All quotes from Lee, Harper, 1960, To kill a Mockingbird, London, Pan Books