

# Mrs. dubose and chapter 11 of 'to kill a mockingbird'

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



Explore the ways Mrs Dubose is presented in 'to kill a mockingbird' \* How Lee uses language and narrative to present character. \* How Lee manipulates structure to present the character. \* Your own and other characters' response to the character. \* How the character links to wider themes of the novel. Just as Boo Radley seems to be the ghost of Maycomb, Mrs. Dubose has an alternate persona herself; she is the dragon of Maycomb town. Scout introduces her as "plain hell" and she says that "Jem and I hated her. If she was on the porch when we passed, we would be raked by her wrathful gaze, subjected to ruthless interrogation regarding our behaviour, and given a melancholy prediction on what we would amount to when we grew up, which was always nothing." Despite being confined to a wheelchair most of the time, Mrs. Dubose has the power to inspire rage and fear just through the power of her words. This introduction to Mrs. Dubose makes the reader despise her and want her dead. Lee has used Scout's hatred for the character at the time to pass on the bad image of her. The very sight of Mrs. Dubose's face was enough to make Scout's stomach turn in knots and turn her slightly green. Scout describes her in a hideous way; 'Cords of saliva would collect on her lips; she would draw them in, then open her mouth again. Her mouth seemed to have a private existence of its own. It worked separate and apart from the rest of her, out and in, like a clam hole at low tide. Occasionally it would say, "Pt," like some viscous substance coming to a boil.' Lee uses very negative adjectives to describe the old lady such as 'some viscous substance' this gives the impression that Mrs. Dubose is a 'something' not a someone and that negative view of her from the children is what makes us dislike Mrs. Dubose so much. Atticus however

says Mrs. Dubose is a 'Lady' and tells the children she should be treated like one. Atticus is wiser than the children so obviously knows not to listen to the gossip from the rest of the neighbourhood and is not prejudice towards Mrs. Dubose because of what the children have been saying about her. Atticus knows something the children don't and that there for the readers don't, and that is the full story of Mrs. Dubose. Lee doesn't give any information away about Mrs. Dubose, apart from the fact that she lives 'two doors to the north' of the Finches and that Scout doesn't like her. Lee uses foreshadowing to make us recognise the character but not know anything about her, this leaves us curious to what she might be like. Lee wants the reader to not like Mrs. Dubose so that they can learn a lesson alongside the children. We hate her because scout hates her. As the chapter progresses our view slowly changes as Scouts does. When Mrs. Dubose starts talking about Atticus behind his back both the children get very angry at her and as the reader I felt slightly angry at her as well but as I have a greater knowledge of the time they are living in I feel more upset as they are using terms which should really be a good thing as an insult. The term 'nigger lover' comes up a lot in the book and it angers me that the people at the time think it is a bad thing. The children on the other hand don't have this greater knowledge so do not understand and take Mrs. Dubose's words straight to heart. This causes a greater upset in the likes of Mrs. Dubose's garden. Jem uses Scout's new baton to attack the plants 'He did not begin to calm down until he had cut the tops off every camellia bush Mrs. Dubose owned,' The children feel ashamed after this, they didn't meet Atticus on his way home from work. They knew Jem was in trouble for this. 'Two geological ages later,' the

children waited anxiously for Atticus to come home and they knew that he'd be angry. Atticus sends Jem to have a talk with Mrs. Dubose but he comes back with some unexpected news. ' She wants me to read to her.' Jem desperately wants to get out of this, she's a monster and she scares the children and they don't want to read to her. The children's reading sessions got longer and longer and this confused them, every day the alarm clock that signalled their release from the grasps of Mrs. Dubose got further and further away from their arrival time. Yet still every day Mrs. Dubose would have a ' fit or something' and ' spit a lot'. One of the last times they were reading it got so late that on Atticus' way home from work the children were still there so he came in for a chat. He and Mrs. Dubose had a conversation that the children heard but obviously didn't fully understand. "' I have a feeling Jem's reading days are numbered, " said Atticus. " Only a week longer, I think, " she said, " just to make sure..."'" The children don't quite understand the conversation. As readers we do not understand it either until further in the chapter. Mrs. Dubose is a representation of the wider theme in the novel; courage. She is a morphine addict who had vowed to go clean before she died, and enlisted Jem and Scout (without their knowledge) to keep her off the stuff for longer and longer periods of time. Atticus tells the kids the lesson he hopes they've learned from her. " I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do. Mrs. Dubose won, all ninety-eight pounds of her. According to her views, she died beholden to nothing and nobody. She was

the bravest person I ever knew. " Mrs. Dubose could have easily left the world with no pain and suffering by staying on morphine but instead she realised what was controlling her life and fought against it and won. She teaches us that no matter how hard it is never give up, she had it fixed in her head that she would succeed or die trying. She also teaches us, and the children, a lesson on prejudice. Lee doesn't give all the information about Mrs. Dubose straight away, she gives up small pieces of information at a time. Originally we hate her because all the information we are given by Scout leads us to hate her, we don't know her well enough to make our own judgement so we prejudge her using the information someone else has given us. It turns out that Mrs. Dubose is someone we grow to respect and almost admire for her act of bravery. At the end of the chapter Atticus tells us ' You know she was a great lady' at this moment every one of us is feeling guilty for looking at her in such a bad light. Mrs. Dubose is a mocking bird. She never really did anything to us yet we dislike her so greatly. To me the quote ' it's a sin to kill a mockingbird' applies to her. She was never really appreciated in life but in death people wish she was still there. The mockingbirds are always singing and the people take them for granted or may even find it annoying, like conversations with Mrs. Dubose, but when they do stop singing people miss them. It's sad that Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose had to pass away for us to realise what a great woman she was. And I think Lee used this to play with our heartstrings a little and to make us rethink our lives for a minute and realise that where and when we live, isn't all that bad.