

# Suffering innocence in to kill a mockingbird

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



The fascinating story *To Kill A Mockingbird* takes place in a sleepy, southern county of Maycomb in the 1930s. Although this town has a variety of pleasant and honorable citizens who have set morals, there are also people who live in Maycomb County who are unfair, possibly evil, and lack morals. Maycomb has a visible separation of two societies: the whites and the blacks. Throughout the novel there are numerous innocent characters who could be considered mockingbirds. However, Jem, Boo and Tom Robinson are three characters who are used to symbolize innocence in *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

These three characters can be considered mockingbirds because they suffer pain through injustice, stereotyping, and racial prejudice and ultimately, they lose their innocence. Firstly, Jem is a mockingbird because he suffers a terrible personal pain when he experiences injustice throughout the story. When Atticus loses his case against Bob Ewell, Jem along with the black community sees the injustice of the court system. During the trial Jem declares: " We're gonna win, Scout.

I don't see how we can't. He's been at it 'bout five minutes.

He made it as plain and easy as-well, as I'da explained it to you. You should've understood it, even" (Lee 202). Jem is explaining that Atticus proved Tom's innocence so clearly that the court room had understood and even young Scout could have. Jem is immensely confident in Atticus' defense and cannot possibly see how Tom Robinson could lose the trial; Nonetheless, Jem is robbed of his innocence when the jury rules unjustly that Tom Robinson is guilty. The injustice of the trial creates Jem a Mockingbird because the trial robs him of his innocence.

He believe that jury was wrong in every way for believing Mayella Ewells lies along with Bob Ewells'. Jem believes that the conviction of Tom was not fair whatsoever. On the way home Jem states to his father with tear filled eyes: " It ain't right, Atticus," and his fathers only response was " no son, it's not right" (Lee 212). The tears display much pain and suffering he felt in response to Tom's conviction. Once Jem had regained his composure again he asked his father, " How could they do it, how could they? And Atticus replies: " I don't know, but they did it.

They've done it before and they did it tonight and they'll do it again and when they do it-seems that only children weep" (Lee 213). At this point Jem is fully stripped of his innocence and suffers a huge blow. Atticus tell Jem that Maycomb has had countless unfair and grievous trials in the past and they will continue to overflow with unfair trials in the future. Atticus tells Jem that it seems as if it is only children that weep when trials are decided unjustly. This is because like Jem, children who witness their first unfair trial they are still innocent mockingbirds.

They weep because at first they do not understand what injustice is. But then once they realize what it is and grow to learn what is really is, it saddens them to see that people of such low rank in a town who seem to be the nicest people ever would go to such an extent to make an innocent man guilty. Miss. Maudie speaks to Jem in an attempt to cheer him up. Jem explains to Miss Maudie: " It's like bein' a caterpillar in a cocoon, that's what it is. Like somethin' asleep wrapped up in a warm place. I always thought

Maycomb folks were the best folks in the world, least that's what they seemed like" ( Lee 215).

Here Jem is revealing how his life has been sheltered from the true injustice that lies within Maycomb. Jem's terrible personal pain that he felt clearly symbolizes a mockingbird who suffers at the hands of his own town's unjust decisions and behavior. Like Jem, Boo Radley can be considered a true mockingbird because he suffers the loss of his innocence from stereotypes made by the community of Maycomb. Before the story begins, Boo was punished for a minor incident in which he was involved. His father locked Boo up in his house and did not allow anyone to visit him or have the slightest contact with him.

Eventually Boo's mental state triggers him to stab his father with a pair of scissors. Boo's father causes Boo to suffer innocently by stealing his childhood experiences away from him. This indicates that Boo is a mockingbird because he did very little to deserve this torment and isolation that his father inflicted upon him. Then, Jem and Scout from the beginning of the story never fully understood Boo's past life at all, yet they judged him on things they hear about. They suspect he was basically an evil monster that never comes out of his house.

Scout starts the stereotyping by creating a nickname " Boo" for the innocent Arthur Radley. This nickname robs Arthur of his true name and identity, causing him to suffer. Furthermore, Jem and Scout constantly pester Boo in an attempt to discover his actual identity. They tell their best friend Dill that Boo is like a zombie. Jem describes Boo as being: " About six-and-a-half feet

tall, judging from his tracks; he dined on raw squirrels and any cat he could catch, that's why his hands were bloodstained-if you ate an animal raw, you could never wash the blood off.

There was a long jagged scar that ran across his face; what teeth he had were yellow and rotten; his eyes popped, and he and he drooled most of the time" (Lee 13). The stereotypical image created by Jem completely robs Boo of his true identity and gives people like Dill a wrong and inaccurate impression of him. Nevertheless, despite their disrespectful ideas, Boo does try to prove his innocence to the children and demonstrates the qualities of a mockingbird. To begin, when Jem, Scout and Dill are caught in their attempt to sneak up to the Radley house and get a look at Boo, they are scared and forced to retreat.

Jem's pants get caught on the fence and he is forced to leave them behind. Later when Jem returns to untangle his ripped pants, he finds them sewed and nicely folded across the fence. Here Boo exemplifies the trait of a mockingbird: he helps people out. Prior to sneaking up on the house of the Radleys, Jem and Scout had been finding objects in a carved out knob of a tree close to the Radley house. Jem suspected that someone was either hiding objects in the tree, or was placing them for him and Scout to find. Scout is too young and very gullible, and did not think twice about how the objects got to the tree.

She believes that they should simply take them because they found them. However, after Jem finds his pants untangled, sewn and folded, he is beginning to think that Boo is trying to befriend them-that Boo, is placing the

objects in the tree for them to be found by the children. By doing this, Boo again illustrates the characteristics of a mockingbird as he causes no harm nor pain to anyone or anything. Just as a mockingbird he sings his heart out to people by helping them and by being very kind. Nathan Radley put a stop to Boo's kind acts by filling the knob with cement.

Once again Boo experiences innocent suffering. Jem finalizes his suspicions about Boo being a kind and caring person when Scout is supplied with a blanket on the night that Miss Maudie's house burns down. Jem is sure that the blanket belonged to Boo Radley and that he kindly places it around Scout while she was gazing at the fire. It is not until Boo saves her life that Scout truly sees his suffering innocence. When Boo Radley carries Jem back home, he hid behind the door to escape the light. Scout realizes that Boo had been locked up so long that he forgot what being exposed to light felt like.

His skin and eyes were so used to the darkness of the Radley home. After this, Heck Tate was telling Atticus that Bob Ewell fell on his knife. Once Atticus understood that it was Boo who stabbed Bob Ewell, he dropped the idea of having a trial. After a while Scout spoke up and explained to Atticus, "Well, i'd be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird wouldn't it?" (Lee 276). Scout meant that if they made Boo Radley go to court over this incident they would be destroying his dignity and last bit of character he had left.

Atticus understood what Scout was implying and in the end, "Thank you for my children, Arthur" (Lee 276) was all Atticus said to Boo. Boo asked Scout if he could see Jem once more so Scout led him to Jem's room. Boo let his hand pet Jem's head softly and showed Scout that all he ever wanted to be was a

friend. Then it was time go home and Boo asked Scout, " Will you take me home? " (Lee 278). Scout's reply was, " I would lead him through our house but I would never lead him home" ( Lee 278). At this moment Scout attempts to repay Boo for his kindness by restoring some of Boo's dignity and self respect.

Scout did not only guide Boo home but actually took his arm and escorted him home. Scout had truly realized that Arthur Radley was a true mockingbird who had suffered immensely by losing innocence through various stereotypes. Along with Jem and Boo, Tom Robinson can also be considered a mockingbird. He suffers an obvious loss of innocence through racial prejudice. Tom Robinson is a black man who worked in the cotton fields to support his family. He lived a rather peaceful life down by the county dump. Tom could be described as as kind, honest and very hard working man who never causes trouble.

Yet Tom Robinson is accused and being put on trial for raping Mayella Ewell. Although he has been in trouble with the law before, it was not serious or believed his fault. Regardless, Tom Robinson was once again in trouble with the law and his side of society, the blacks, believed he was innocent. Atticus fought for Tom Robinson in court and proved to Maycomb county that Tom was more than likely innocent. However, in the end the jury robbed his innocence by convicting him guilty. Tom Robinson is considered a mockingbird because he never hurt anyone or anything.

In this situation Tom had been helping Mayella with several of her chores and had never accepted pay of any kind. Then, one day Mayella took

advantage of Tom Robinson and when things went wrong she accused him of rape and abuse. This causes Tom's pain and suffering because he felt sorry for Mayella and never hurt her. Mayella also caused Tom Robinson to feel pain and suffer because he was sent to jail for unjust reasons and was unable to see his family. This eventually drove Tom Robinson mad and when he tried to escape, he was shot seventeen times.

They did not even attempt to injure him, but without remorse, killed him. Atticus declared: " We had such a good chance. I told him what I thought, but I couldn't in truth say that we had more than a good chance. I guess Tom was tired of a white man's chance and preferred his own" (Lee 235). Atticus is implying that he felt Tom had a good chance of getting off on the appeal. However, Tom Robinson was tired of leaving his fate in the hands of a white man. He had gotten the impression that all white men would not treat him fairly.

This caused Tom Robinson to try and escape from prison which ultimately caused him pain and suffering through seventeen bullets. The stripping of Tom's innocence began when; Mayella screamed rape, continued to the trial unjustly and ended in prison when the guards shot him seventeen times. The fact of the matter is, Tom Robinson never harmed anyone and always helped people in need. He brought out all his characteristics of a mockingbird. In conclusion, it can be clearly seen that Jem, Boo and Tom Robinson are all victims of suffering innocence.

Whether it was suffering through pain of injustice juries, stereotyping from neighbors, or racial prejudice from the community, these characters all lost



their innocence. These three characters display the traits of a mockingbird because in each of their own personality traits, they all followed the words of Miss Maudie: “ Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat up people’s gardens, don’t nest in neat corn cribs, they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird” (Lee 90).