

An evaluation of to kill a mockingbird as a timeless classic

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



A timeless classic is a novel that resonates with readers and does not fade with time. No matter how old the book is, the novel is relevant and prominent in today's society. For instance, if the book is in the historical genre, then the book should be historically accurate so that future generations can get a sense on how the time period was like at that time. Furthermore, the characters should be complex and multidimensional to add drama and plot twist to the storyline. To Kill A Mockingbird is a novel narrated by a little girl named Jean Louise " Scout" Finch and takes place in a small town in Alabama during the Great Depression. This story attempts to exhibit racism during an unfair trial involving an innocent black man, who is defended by Atticus Finch, Scout's father. Although To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee is widely acclaimed and is taught in most high schools across the country, this novel definitely should not be considered a timeless classic because the book fails to be historically accurate to the time period and lacks unique and multidimensional characters.

To Kill A Mockingbird should not be considered a timeless classic because the book is unsuccessful in accurately portraying historical groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Atticus, Scout's father, is reminded by Jem about some previous Klan activity in their town of Maycomb. Atticus corrects Jem by saying how the " The Ku Klux [is] gone... [and] it'll never come back". Atticus continues as he explains how " way back about nineteen-twenty, there was a Klan, but it was a political organization more than anything. Besides, [the Klan] couldn't find anyone to scare" The klan allegedly went to Atticus' Jewish friend's house and "[the friend] made [the klan] so ashamed of themselves they went away" (Lee 147). The phrase " couldn't find anyone to scare"

underscores Atticus' belief that the Ku Klux Klan was a harmless organization that was not powerful or prominent in the South. This statement is completely false. According to the Encyclopedia of Alabama, Keith S. Hebert of the University of West Georgia writes that by the year 1925, " more than 2. 5 million Americans had joined the Ku Klux Klan, with more than 115, 000 members in Alabama" (Ku Klux Klan in Alabama from 1915-1930). Also, Hebert mentions how many African Americans and Jewish people continued to be targeted by this hate group. He describes how the " Klansmen often physically assaulted whites and blacks who had dared to sit together on a bus or train. In two notable incidents, Klansmen publicly beat a black physician in Ensley, Jefferson County, who had treated white patients and [in return, the klansmen] murdered three black farm laborers in Shelby County who had left their white employer's farm in search of higher wages." Hebert writes how the members of the Ku Klux Klan had seriously harmed innocent members for such trivial matters like people "[sitting] together [on] a bus or train." This evidence completely disproves Atticus' statement about the KKK being modest and not prominent. In fact, the Klan proved to be devastating to the minorities of the South. According to Hebert, there is discrepancy between the book's description of the Klan and the actual historical evidence. To Kill A Mockingbird is historically inaccurate, as it belittles the importance of the Klan during that particular time period. Another example of how Harper Lee does not accurately portray the Ku Klux Klan is when the main character Scout, a young girl, is able to stop an angry, supposedly Klan members from killing Tom Robinson. Scout single handedly turns back the carloads of men who had come to lynch Tom Robinson, an innocent black

man, by “[kicking a] man swiftly” and asking Mr. Walter Cunningham, a familiar face, about “ how [his] entailment gettin’ along” (Lee 153). Harper Lee tries to make the angry mob filled with white men seem unimportant by making an eight year-old girl make them go home. This is an impossible situation. It is completely unaccurate that a little girl can stop an angry mob ready to lynch an innocent man by kicking them and casually asking about how “ [a person’s] entailment gettin’ along.” This situation is improbable and very inaccurate. The implication of a novel not being historically accurate is that the reader will not be able to see what actually happened during the time period. To Kill a Mockingbird is historical fiction, and therefore must a historically accurate novel. A timeless classic needs to describe the historical context in a realistic and accurate way and not in an idealized way because it can educate the reader and give a true sense of reality. Harper Lee constantly belittles the Ku Klux Klan, even though, they played a major role in troubling minorities throughout Alabama, and the rest of the South. Therefore, To Kill A Mockingbird does not meet the criteria of having historical accuracy.

A timeless classic should have round and three-dimensional characters, however, To Kill A Mockingbird does not meet this criteria since multiple characters such as Atticus Finch and Bob Ewell are shown as flat and stereotypical. Atticus Finch is portrayed as a hero, and a man of great courage and strength because he defends a black man in the city of Maycomb. However, there is no other dimension or attribute to his character. Atticus Finch is a flat and stereotypical character in the novel, and is shown

as the “ wise old man”. One out of many examples that portrays Atticus this way is when he explains to Scout how “[he does his] best to love everybody” (Lee, 107). This phrase ultimately represents behavior that is too perfect to be believable, making Atticus Finch also unrelatable. In addition to being a one-dimensional character, Atticus is also static. He does not change his opinion or beliefs about racism during the course of the novel, and especially during the dramatic court case. The brave and courageous father and lawyer is not the only character that is stereotyped; Bob Ewell is another. Ewell is a character that was constantly regarded as disgusting and low throughout the novel. Ewell is put into the “ evil villain” category. During the trial of Tom Robinson, Atticus explains the Ewells and how “ Every town the size of Maycomb [has] families like the Ewells. No economic fluctuations changed their status— people like the Ewells lived as guests of the county in prosperity as well as in the depths of a depression. No truant officer could keep their numerous offspring in school; no public health officer could free them from congenital defects, various worms, and the diseases indigenous to filthy surroundings” (Lee, 170). Harper Lee uses wording like “disease” and “worms” to highlight the Ewells as stereotypes of being evil and foul. Additionally, the phrase “congenital defects” suggest that they were born with that trait and will never change. Harsh words such as “filthy” give an essence into his personality by explaining his characteristic of being dirty and cheap . Harper Lee does not bother to give Atticus Finch or Bob Ewell multiple dimensions of personality. Humans, whether in a story or in real life, are more than just good or bad, they are complex beings. Having round and dynamic characters is important with stories with character-driven plots to

give the story more depth and plot-twist. The characters Atticus Finch and Bob Ewell are one-dimensional and static, and do not meet the criteria of having unique and multidimensional characters, proving To Kill A Mockingbird not a timeless classic.

Popularity is an amazing quality to have. It can make or break a book. If a piece of literature is so great, but is not discovered, the book is unfortunately is not going to be recognized. However, if a book is well-known, for whatever the reason, it gets discovered and has a higher chance of becoming a timeless classic. This is the case for To Kill A Mockingbird. Many can argue that this story is popular, and therefore should be considered a timeless classic. The novel has been prominent since it has over 30 million copies sold to this day. Strangely enough, the book was only originally estimated to sell around two thousand copies (Rella, Emily)! However, the increase of popularity of this book is due to the extravagant Hollywood production of the movie, starring Gregory Peck, an amazing actor of that time. In 1995, the film was listed in the National Film Registry and ranks twenty-fifth on the American Film Institute's list of the greatest American movies of all time, proving the film to be one of the best of its time (American Film Institute). Being a famous and well known novel is an important criteria of being a timeless classic, however, To Kill A Mockingbird, is popular no doubt because of the movie. Without the movie, the novel would have unmistakably fell short of the criteria for being a popular book. Allen Barra from the Wall Street Journal writes how " one estimate credits the book with over 30 million copies sold-many no doubt due to the enduring popularity of the hugely

successful 1962 film version” (Barra, Allen). Barra specifically claims that the novel has been popular due to the fantastic movie production. However, a novel must gain its own popularity through its literary merit. to be a timeless classic, but To Kill A Mockingbird is only popular because of external factors such as the movie, and not its actual writing itself. Although To Kill A Mockingbird is popular, the novel did not become popular because of its literature but only because of the extravagant hollywood movie. Therefore, the novel is definitely not a timeless classic.

To Kill A Mockingbird is on the list for the ten most read books in all high schools across the country (Federman, Mark). Whether for the right reason or not, this popular novel is part of the curriculum in Cupertino High School. To be taught in a school, a book must have relevance in today’s modern society, as well as, it must have a unique storyline with dynamic and three-dimensional characters, to add twist and turns to the story. Because To Kill A Mockingbird fails to have relevance in today’s society, even though it intends to describe the issue of racism, which is a prominent issue today, the story is not as relevant due to historical inaccuracy. Not to mention, the novel also has stereotypical and flat characters such as Bob Ewell and Atticus Finch. Therefore, To Kill A Mockingbird should not be a timeless classic, or be part of the high school curriculum. One book that meets this criteria is the novel is I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban by Christina Lamb and Malala Yousafzai. This book should definitely be part of the Cupertino High School curriculum because this story is about a real life hero who faces a modern issue in today’s society. I am Malala can be

used as a lesson to educate the world in problems people face and empower students to make a change. Unlike To Kill A Mockingbird, this fascinating and educating tale does cover a relevant topic with historical accuracy, and has a real-life three-dimensional character. To Kill A Mockingbird is a popular book, no doubt, but fails to be useful for students in today's society.