

Atticus is a great father

Literature, American Literature



Throughout the novel of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee uses drama, compassion, and grammatical features to present the characters of Atticus, Scout and Jem, and the special relationship Atticus has with his children. In this assessment I will explore, evaluate and explain this bond that Atticus shares with his children. The story takes place during three years of the Great Depression in the fictional 'tired old town' of Maycomb, Alabama. The narrator, six-year-old Scout Finch, lives with her older brother Jem and their widowed father Atticus, a middle-aged lawyer. Atticus's relationship with his children is fundamentally based on his unique personality and his traits as an individual. The character of Atticus is well summed up by Miss Maudie when she calls him 'civilised in his heart'. He is known throughout Maycomb as he is respected, tolerant, friendly, and honest. Atticus is an epitome of moral characters and he believes and lives by his ethics. Harper Lee shows Atticus as an outstanding father, which brings out the special bond between his children. His unique relationship with Scout and Jem is built on equality and respect. The simple act of calling him "Atticus" and not "father" brings Scout and Jem to the same level as Atticus, not giving Atticus a higher status than the children in any way. They are people, not children. As a father, Atticus stands in contrast to Bob Ewell and Mr Radley, who both treat their offspring horribly. Harper Lee uses those characters to show how incredible Atticus is as a character. Scout and Jem both have perfect confidence their father. He is their connection to the real adult world. They feel comfortable to talk to him about anything. Atticus tells them to feel free to interrupt for any instance. A good example of this is when Atticus truthfully defines rape for Scout. Here Atticus shows he respects his children and as most parents

would hide the truth, this enforces the relationship between Atticus and Scout, and Scout knows to always trust her father. Atticus' role as a father is complex. Harper Lee presents him as an educator, disciplinarian and a role model to his children. Most of the children's knowledge comes from Atticus. During the novel, Atticus implies his morals on Jem and Scout, in hope they learn to apply the morals in real situations, things that they can't be taught from blackboards. An important lesson he teaches is perspective. In chapter 3, Atticus gives Scout some advice when her new teacher Miss Caroline tells her to stop reading: ' You never really understand a person until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.' This marks one of the philosophies that Atticus tries the hardest to teach his children, that you should look at things from others' points of view before judging them. One example of this is at the end of the book where Scout escorts Boo Radley back to his house. She turns around and surveys the neighborhood from his perspective. She imagines how he has witnessed all the happenings of the recent years, her childhood Boo Radley games, Miss Maudie's fire, the incident of the rabid dog, and finally, Bob Ewell's attack. As she steps into Boo's shoes, Scout gains a new respect for his life, and understands that his experience is just as valid as hers. With this understanding, she is humbled. The reader, at this point Atticus teaches through example. His lessons in morality and ethics come in the courtroom, when he's defending Tom Robinson. ' You know the truth, and the truth is this: some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, some Negro men are not to be trusted around women black or white. However, this is a truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men. There is not a person in this courtroom who has never told a lie,

who has never done an immoral thing.’ This is part of Atticus' closing statement to the jury. During this episode Atticus teaches Scout and Jem and the rest of the courtroom that justice is not fair. That justice is not done if a black man is convicted because he is black, and a white man walks free because he is white. The fact that Atticus even took the case shows that his moral values exceed higher than other, as he knew that he would receive hatred from the people in Maycomb, but Atticus stood up for what he thought was right. This will have a considerable affect on the future actions of Scout and Jem. When Tom is found guilty purely because he's black, Jem is crushed: ‘ I peered at Jem, his hand were white from gripping the balcony rail, his shoulders jerked as if each guilty was a separate stab between them.’ This shows how Atticus' morals have a serious affect on his children as Jem becomes more like his father as he matures, and this helps the reader appreciate the relationship between them. Atticus also teaches courage to his children. In chapter 11, Mrs Dubose insults Atticus by calling him a ‘ nigger-lover’ and Jem reacts by cutting up all her flowers in her front yard. His punishment is to read to Mrs. Dubose for a certain time every day. She is an old woman, very set her in ways, and she is entirely alone in the world. After Mrs. Dubose dies, Atticus reveals that by reading to her each day, the children were helping her break her morphine addiction. Atticus explains that Mrs Dubose was fighting to regain sobriety, even as she stood on the brink of death. Because of this, to Atticus, she is the ‘ bravest person he has ever known.’ Even with all the criticism he receives from her, Atticus still respects 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.’ Here Atticus is

trying to teach his children what the meaning of true heroism is, that a man that goes in a battle with a 'gun in his hand' has no fear of the outcome, whereas Mrs Dubose is tackling her addiction head on with no knowledge of what will happen. Atticus treats his children as adults and respects them as he lets them evaluate the situation for themselves. This is another example of Atticus' unique parenting and how effective it turns out to be. However, the children's perception of Atticus is not always positive. At the beginning of the book, Scout describes Atticus as 'feeble' and 'too old,' whereas the majority of Scout and Jem's classmates' fathers play poker, hunt, fish, drink or smoke. As Atticus does none of these things, the children find it hard to build a relationship with him. For example, Jem was 'football crazy' and Atticus can't deliver. Furthermore, as the story progresses, the reader learns that Atticus used to be 'the deadliest shot in Maycomb County' as he shoots the rabid dog. Atticus no longer uses a gun unless in an emergency as 'he realised that God had given him an unfair advantage over most living things'. After this, Jem is bewildered why Atticus never told the children that he was an expert sharpshooter. To that, Miss Maudie replies, "People in their right minds never take pride in their talents." Atticus is a very modest man who doesn't like to show off because he doesn't think that it is right to take pride in something that is "a gift of God." This in itself is a lesson that Atticus teaches his children. Jem learns to see Atticus as a gentleman and respects him. This strengthens the initial bond between Atticus and his children as they can now take pride in their father.