

To kill a mocking bird

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the novel *To Kill a Mocking Bird* Harper Lee uses the characters Boo, Scout, Jem, and Dill to illustrate the theme of innocence and courage. Throughout the this novel, Jem, Scout, and Dill find ways to use the limits with their imaginations, to amuse themselves. The children seem to be the ones who change the old town and make it full of unexpected events. The adults of the novel also play games that come from their imaginations and, they themselves are the ones who provide the fear for everyone in the county to fear.

" Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself"(Lee, 12). The adults and the children share the fact that they both play games, but a difference also exists between them. As most children do, Jem, Scout, and their new friend Dill find ways to pass the days. When they first meet Dill, they are beginning the " day's play in the backyard"(Lee, 12). This implies that it is a routine for them to play each day. When Dill joins them in their daily adventures, they create more elaborate activities. Many days they spend improving the tree house, " fussing"(Lee, 14), and acting out parts of plays.

Their games of *Tom Swift*, *The Rover Boys*, and *The Gray Ghost* are the source of their pleasures for days upon end. Once these games seem overplayed, they decide to try and make Boo Radley come out. The mystery of Boo Radley is more appealing for their imaginations to grow. That's when the " Boo Radley" plays begin. These plays are innocent in their motives and the consequences are virtually nonexistent. Although these plays are simply for amusement, in the end, they teach Jem, Scout, and Dill lessons about respect, courage, and understanding.

The " Boo" games begin with a simple dare that Jem has to carry out in order to gain respect from his Scout and Dill. By touching the Radley's house, he is almost a hero for a brief moment. Scout also has her turn to prove herself to the boys, but the opportunity comes to her as a surprise. As she rolls uncontrollably in a tire into the Radley's front yard, her fear heightens with every turn and the smartest thing for her to do is to run away as fast and as far away as possible. Scout and Jem both learn about courage in the first Boo games they invent by testing their levels of fear.

The next stage in their Boo pursuits comes from discussions with the neighbors about " B-Mr. Arthur's" past (50). The children have their own ideas about Boo from the wild stories and vague answers they receive from Miss Stephanie Crawford , Atticus, and Miss. Maudie. The stories only further their imaginations because Boo is still a mystery. The children go through different phases in the Boo games. They act out different versions of Boo stabbing his father in the leg with scissors and other horrible, violent acts on Boo's part.

As the games and stories become a routine, they change it up by seeing Boo as a positive figure. To them, Boo is a potential friend, so they embark on another quest to try to communicate with Boo. The idea of placing a note on the windowsill of the Radley Place goes south when Atticus walks into the scene. Despite Atticus' warnings, the children's thirst for knowledge of Boo's life drives them to their most dangerous adventure thus far. Mr. Nathan Radley catches them at a critical point, the three kids realize how far they have gone away from the " game."

Before that night, Boo is simply a game. The incident included the reality of a shotgun and of Jem's pants stuck at the trespassing scene. The game has turned into a dangerous adventure that leaves all three of them shaken and shocked. Jem shows his courage by going back for his pants in the middle of the night and Scout has to display courage to be able to stay home, not knowing if her brother would return alive or dead. Jem and Scout learn about courage but, more importantly, they're beginning to see the reality of their games.

That night seems to be a large obstacle in their pursuit for Boo until Miss Maudie's house goes up in flames. The white-covered, black snowman they built before the fire turns into a messy pile on the ground, showing that mixed black and white cannot last. The snowman is also another game Jem and Scout create that pokes fun at Mr. Avery's size. This mockery by means of the "morphodite" snowman turns around on the children as they watch the burning house and Mr. Avery stuck in the window. Jem and Scout have another realization in this terrible mishap when they see that their snowman ridicules Mr. Avery for the very same reason he is stuck in the burning house.

Boo also makes another appearance to Scout and Jem unknowingly, until they return home with an unidentified blanket around Scout's shoulders. Boo's unseen presence at the fire showed him in a different way in Jem's and Scout's eyes. The burning house and Boo's reappearance show Jem and Scout more pieces of reality and push them closer and closer to the adult world, losing their innocence. Jem and Scout continue to have lessons of respect from Atticus and Mrs. Dubose.

As the trial closes in, Scout and Jem have to test their self-control in accepting or ignoring the large amount of "n*****-lover" comments they face, by adults as well as children. Scout eventually loses all control when she beats up her cousin Francis, but does not completely understand her mistake. Uncle Jack, who has to punish her, also plays a role in another realization by the children. He brings them air rifles for Christmas (that are from Atticus) and Atticus tells them that they can shoot at anything but that it is a sin to kill a mockingbird.

Although they don't understand what it means at first Miss Maudie explains that mockingbirds do no harm except provide beautiful music for everyone to enjoy. This makes Jem and Scout respect Atticus and the mad dog incident heightens that respect. The mad dog shows Jem and Scout how powerful and dangerous a weapon is and that Atticus is not as old as they think. Soon, "Boo Radley became passe"(103) and the pressing matters of the day are school, Mrs. Dubose, and the trial. School for Scout is a boring necessity because she is smart for her age. Jem has to read to Mrs.

Dubose every day and eventually he learns an important lesson. Jem and Scout learn about death and they gain an understanding for the type of person Mrs. Dubose is when they see how her views on life have an effect on her death. The most difficult time for Jem and Scout to understand soon comes to be the trial. They have been faced with ignorant people calling them "n*****-lovers" but they do not get a full understanding of the slang term until the trial is upon them. The night Atticus spends reading in front of the jailhouse, he is actually guarding Tom Robinson's cell.

The mob of men from Maycomb gathers around Atticus, threatening his and Tom's lives. Once Scout, Jem, and Dill enter the scene, it becomes harder for the men to conduct "business." Scout, still in her innocence, breaks into the crowd by recognizing Mr. Cunningham and, she talks about his son Walter without a thought to the fact that Mr. Cunningham has come to hurt Atticus. In her innocent gesture, Scout makes Mr. Cunningham realize that he is a father, and, in a way he "walks around in Atticus' shoes" for a minute. Scout does not realize the extent of her actions until later on and the understanding losing more of her innocence.

The entire trial is an adult game in itself. The players play the game Mayella and Bob Ewell have an advantage and the disadvantage to Tom Robinson, the entire Finch family, and every colored person in Maycomb County. The 'winners' (the Ewells), begin the game with the false accusation of rape against Tom, only to stop the reputation Mayella would gain if people know that she has flirted with a black man. The people of the county create the game based on the racial issues of the day and the rules are clear: if one is black, he is guilty, no questions asked.

Scout and Jem personally see this terrible game of discrimination and the consequences that result in an eventual end to Tom's life. The official trial is full of games the lawyers play so each one could present his side of the argument. The children have a bias toward their father but, as they watch and listen intently, they acquire a higher respect for him. It is evident that Atticus is playing the game but his version has rules of respect and regard for the ones involved, innocent or guilty.

Jem and Scout gain an understanding of the case and respect for Atticus through his behavior in court and it is the understanding that makes it harder for them to accept the verdict. Atticus explains as best he can so the children have some indication of both opponents' reasons for the actions they see in the courtroom. The trial itself creates a separated reality for the children because it occurs in the courthouse and Atticus tries not to let it come home with him and affect the kids life at home, and protect them best he can from the terrible reality of Maycomb.

In the last major event in the novel, Boo Radley comes back into Jem's and Scout's lives. It begins when Scout, at the school agricultural play, feels mortification due to her own carelessness. In the beginning of the novel, she probably would not have cared what everyone thinks of her mistake but, through her experiences thus far, she learns to care about what others think and she feels ashamed that she misses her cue to come out on stage. Jem, also grown through his experiences, becomes a fine young gentleman who is following in his father's footsteps and also assumes the role of Scout's protector.

Their almost fatal walk home the night of the play, that Aunt Alexandra unknowingly predicts earlier, proves Jem's courage and becomes life-saving for Scout. Scout realizes her brother's heroic actions and acquires a higher level of respect for him. As Boo Radley appears in the last part of the novel, Scout clearly has a new understanding for his character, finally has the courage to speak to him, and has enough respect for him to walk him home. The violent last scene becomes the complete reality and causes Jem and Scout to lose their last bit of innocence.

Despite Atticus' efforts, Bob Ewell still invades the Finches' lives and initiates the children into the adult world. The children make the transition from the world of innocence to the reality of the adult world. The " Boo" games begin Jem's and Scout's journey to gain some of the most important values in life: respect, courage, and understanding. Through the adults, the children learn to hold the values, of which the most important one is life itself.