

How tom robinson is a "songbird" t

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The Slaughter of a Songbird The reason behind the title of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is that it is a sin to kill a mockingbird. Mockingbirds are considered innocent and selfless creatures. In Chelsey Philpot article *The Long Life of a Mockingbird* it stresses the importance of a mockingbird and the impact it has throughout *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Harper Lee's definition of a mockingbird is seen continuously in the novel. It is that a person may be compared to a mockingbird if he is virtuous or without fault. Tom Robinson is an innocent man falsely accused of a crime and forced to defend his character. The false accusations that were forced upon Tom Robinson's innocence reveal him as the greatest example of a "Mockingbird" in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Firstly, a citizen of Maycomb County, Miss Maudie, thoroughly explains what a mockingbird is and what it means saying, "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy... That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird"(Lee 119). To fully realize the mockingbird in Tom Robinson, the reader learns quickly that he is harmless. Adam Smykowski explains in *Symbolism and Racism in To Kill a Mockingbird* by saying, "A mockingbird symbolizes Tom Robinson, and underprivileged black people in general. They are innocent, and would never harm anyone." Tom Robinson is a hardworking, African American. He lives with his wife and six children in a simple home in Maycomb County. An accident that occurred when Tom was young left him with absolutely no use of his left arm whatsoever. Laurie Champion explains in an article called *Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird* that, "Tom's left arm "hung dead". "Even with the disability of his arm, Tom is a great example to his six children considering what terrible hardships had been placed on him throughout his life for no reason. The way

that Tom conducts himself not only in private but also in public reveals his good character and genuine love for other people no matter what race or social class. Furthermore, Tom Robinson's status as a mockingbird is seen through his kind and attentive actions toward others regardless of race. Tom's actions toward Mayella Ewell reveal his status as a mockingbird. On his way to work, Tom frequently is asked by Mayella, a low class white woman, to come in and help her with chores and errands around the house. Just like a mockingbird expects no payment or reward for singing, Tom would not accept any payment at all for his kindness and help towards Mayella. She intern misinterprets Tom's kindness and puts him in a difficult situation where she tries to seduce him. Tom immediately refuses. As a result she falsely accuses him of raping and assaulting her in order to hide her inappropriate sexual advances towards him. Moreover, Tom Robinson represents a mockingbird when he endures being verbally abused and harassed on the witness stand even though he is an innocent man. During his testimony, his handicapped arm is brought to the attention of the court while he is on trial. This proves that it would be impossible for him to have committed this crime due to the fact that her bruises from the assault were made by a man that, " led with his left hand" (Lee 177). Tom Robinson was proven innocent on many accounts. However, after a deliberation by the jury, he is convicted and will be killed in a futile attempt to escape from prison. In conclusion, Heck Tate summarizes Tom Robinson's mockingbird symbolism when he compares Tom's death to the " senseless slaughter of songbirds" (Lee, 323). Just like it is wrong to kill a mockingbird, it is wrong for the citizens of Maycomb to have killed Tom Robinson. The loss of his

innocence is the reason he is the greatest example of a mockingbird in Haper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Work Cited Champion, Laurie. " Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*." *The Explicator* 61. 4 (2003): 234+. Literature Resource Center. Web. 19 May 2011. Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1982. Print. Philpot, Chelsey. " The long life of a mockingbird." *The Horn Book Magazine* 87. 3 (2011): 51+. Literature Resource Center. Web. 19 May 2011. Smykowski, Adam. " Symbolism and Racism in *To Kill a Mockingbird*." *Readings on " To Kill Mockingbird"*. Ed. Terry O'Neill. San Diego, Calif.: Greenhaven Press, 2000. 52-56. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 194. Detroit: Gale, 2005. Literature Resource Center. Web. 19 May 2011.