

Courage to confront prejudice

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



" Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksand's of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood" (Martin Luther King, Jr.). Some of the nation's greatest fictional characters epitomize this passage in their everyday lives. Jem, Scout and Huck not only have the courage to affect our nation, but they do so as children. They, along with countless others, show their courage through the actions of their hearts. According to them, courage is not the absence of fear, but the willpower to face it. These characters, from the novels *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, exemplify the positive importance to have the courage to confront all kinds of prejudice in society, family, and oneself. Society proves to be a big faction in the lives of the characters of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The characters are constantly obliged to be like the others of their communities, otherwise they have a chance of being rejected because they are simply different. However, they decide to stand up for what is right, and they act on the parts of those who really are different and cannot defend themselves on their own. However, prejudice is not only exposed to African Americans in the novels as many people believe. It is also made known to the people of different class or social ranks. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, many people prove their own prejudice towards not only the Ewell's, but also to the Cunningham's, and the same thing happens in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, where society tends to spurn Pap. Although, most of the time, the Ewell's deserve the prejudice that has come upon them, they sometimes do have the right to prove themselves to be the good, fine people that anyone can be. Pap is characterized as the drunken, no-good father of Huckleberry, but no one really gets a chance to

find out what real potential he might have as a fine individual (Twain 1251-1253). The Cunningham's, nonetheless, are discriminated against because they are farmers and they are lower-class people. When Aunt Alexandra narrow-mindedly judges Walter Cunningham, Scout's friend, and groups his family as a "yappy" bunch, Scout stands up to her and says that even though he may not be like Jem, he still is a good person who deserves to be treated like one (Lee 223-224). Scout, here, begins to realize the hypocrisy and prejudice that some of her own family has against other people who are different from them. The chief effect of having courage to face prejudice takes place while defending black individuals. In some instances, not even the main characters are the ones who stand up for these people and their rights. "[...] In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the African-American characters are field hands, maids, and garbage collectors. Only two of them have ever been taught to read" (Johnson, *Understanding* 85). Although they might not be identified, the people who taught these two colored folks how to read had the audacity to treat these people as their equals, even though no one else considered them that way. They believe that since these colored folks are their equals, they should have the same, or near the same amount of education as that of a white person. Another occurrence in *To Kill a Mockingbird* when a secondary character helps a colored man happens with Judge Taylor. Jem finds out that Judge Taylor was also on Tom's side in the trial since he appointed Atticus to the position of defending Tom (Lee 215-216). Jem realizes that because of the judge's actions, Tom would have had a better chance of winning the trial, and therefore, proving that Judge Taylor did in fact stand up to prejudice in the courtroom. Another secondary

character, Mr. Dolphus Raymond, also shows his courage to defy prejudice in society by marrying a black woman. He explains to Scout and Dill that no explanation, other than whiskey, would get the people of Maycomb to understand why he married a black woman (Lee 200-201). Jem reacts to this kind of prejudice by arguing, " If there's just one kind of folks, why can't they get along with each other? If they're all alike, why do they go out of their way to despise each other?" (Lee 227). All of the youngsters become conscious of the fact that everyone is the same at heart, no matter what skin color, status, or age the person may be. For example, Dill, from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, realizes that prejudice is a major crisis in civilization, which he and many others have contributed to when he starts crying in the courtroom (Lee 201). In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, " Although Jim was black, Huck learned that race didn't matter, and that Jim really loved him and would protect him from harm" (" The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Mark Twain" 2). Similar to the characters of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Huck learns for himself that he shouldn't judge people based upon uncontrolled and materialistic facts. Some of the characters overcome their fear of prejudice for friendship as well. Huck Finn learns that although society has taught him to regard black people as inferior, he believes he should listen to his own opinion, even if it means sacrificing his reputation and being labeled. He realized this when he befriended Jim and went out of his way to secure Jim's freedom, by risking his own safety and name (" The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Mark Twain" 3). Another occasion when Huck defends his friendship with Jim is when he goes to shore as a girl to get news about his and Jim's disappearances. When he does this, he finds out from the woman he is talking to that a group of

men have gone out to look for Jim, whom they know of only as a runaway slave. When Huck finds Jim, he defends his new friend by starting a fire as a decoy, but they leave so as not to get caught (Twain 1281-1282). Another event similar to this situation was when Huck finds two men searching for escaped slaves. Huck has the courage to lie to them by saying that the man that is lying down in the raft under the blanket is his father who has smallpox, but who is really Jim (Twain 1306-1307). Here, Huck is again faced with the decision of whether or not to turn Jim in, but decides that because of their friendship, he would have felt just as bad as he did for not turning him in than if he did. In all of these incidents, Huck prevails over racism which "is a barrier at first between himself and Jim, which they eventually realize and overcome" ("The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Mark Twain" 2). Atticus is the main figure in *To Kill a Mockingbird* who braves prejudice. As a main character of the novel, Atticus not only withstands prejudice, but he attempts to rid it for good with an honest effort to win Tom Robinson's case: Atticus is the man who faces up to the racism in his community: In the first instance, he sits unarmed outside the jail where Tom Robinson is incarcerated, waiting for a lynch mob to arrive, and then encountering them head on; in the second instance his courage is demonstrated in his open determination to give Tom Robinson the best defense he can muster in the face of fierce community opposition. (Johnson, *Threatening Boundaries* 93)

Jim, from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, has a similar intrigue to overcome prejudice in slavery. By having the courage to run away from Miss Watson after hearing that he is going to be sold for 800 dollars, Jim finally grasps the fact that he is not a property to be sold, but in fact a human being that

should be treated as such (Twain 1270-1271). " Human beings can be awful cruel to one another" (Twain 1394) according to Jim as he sees the duke and dauphin being chased by an angry mob. However, when he says this, Jim doesn't realize that this regards all types of prejudice that he never understood before as acts of cruelty. In both stories, there is an instance in which a character resists prejudice to protect someone they love. Scout, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, stands up for Atticus at Finch's Landing when her cousin Francis calls Atticus a " nigger-lover" (Lee 83). Even though Scout doesn't understand what a " nigger-lover" is, she still defends Atticus because she recognizes this comment as derogatory. It is not until later in the novel that she realizes that this is prejudice on Francis' part because, in Atticus' case, being a " nigger-lover" is not necessarily a bad thing. Sophia Grangerford, from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, defends herself and the one she loves in roughly the same manner. Although her family is in a constant combat with the Shepherdson's, she has the courage to confront the prejudice of the feuding families by running off with Harney Shepherdson (Twain 1322). The prejudice of the situation is that neither family knows why they are fighting the other, but they still judge each other based on how they are told to by everyone else. Instead of following the dire examples of her kin, she decides to confront them by running away with a Shepherdson; she does so to show her family that just because someone may say that another person is horrible, does not mean that one must believe them. Family also is an important element in having the courage to withstand prejudice. In one way, it can be a good thing, in which one's family would defend and protect them. On the other hand, it can be a bad thing, in which one must confront

their own family members to defend one's own beliefs. Both behaviors are shown in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, "Huck's idea of racism is based on his upbringing, but he himself questions the validity of these statements of black inferiority" ("The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: Mark Twain" 2). Once Huck starts learning that Jim is just like him, with no differences except in age and skin color, he begins to disregard his upbringing about being discriminating towards blacks. Although raised by an adoptive parent, Huck also learns that his upbringing and teachings on discrimination would probably have been the same if he was raised by Pap. Pap shows prejudice to many people throughout his appearances in the novel, including Huck. When Pap appears in Huck's room at the beginning of the story, he is prejudice against Huck's lifestyle with the Widow Douglas, even though it is better than his own. Huck doesn't care what Pap thinks and is conversely happy with it. He also has the courage to tell Pap that he is going to stay in school and continue to read, as well (Twain 1255-1256). Huck, at this point, stands up to his father's prejudice towards him and other people who are educated and civilized. Courage is an underestimated thing among many people. Courage is, according to Atticus, not a man with a gun in his hands; it is having the audacity to do something after one already knows they are "licked" (Lee 112). This is shown throughout society in both novels. Although the characters show courage through physical bravery, they also show courage mentally by facing prejudice, and by doing what many other people would not do. As the children grow up, they also realize the prejudice they have always had in themselves against certain people whom they have

never truly gotten to be familiar with. Jem and Scout, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, along with the other children of their neighborhood, show "[...] prejudice against Boo Radley. No one bothers to find out about the real Arthur 'Boo' Radley. He may seem a little scary but the town ridicules him and shuns him from society. All the children have been raised to fear him as the town freak. If they took the time to see the world from his eyes they might not be so prejudiced to his situation" (Ahmad 8). They also do the same to Mrs. Dubose, whom everyone knows of as the mean old lady who doesn't like anybody. Once Jem and Scout find out the truth about her, they realize that they had been judging her from the start, without knowing the real explanation to the way she acted, which was the cause of her morphine addiction (Lee 105-112). Huck has the same kind of prejudice in himself about Jim when he first sees him on the island. Huck constantly would put Jim down without ever regarding his feelings. Once Huck learned that Jim was also a human being, he regretted ever teasing him or putting him down. "It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger- but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards neither" (Twain 1296). However, later in the story, Huck contradicts himself just to seem like a "normal" person to Aunt Sally. When Aunt Sally finds out that Huck's ship blew out a cylinder-head, he responds by saying that no one got hurt; the explosion only "killed a nigger" (Twain 1388). He shows prejudice here for a brief moment because the black man who was killed in this instance was also a person, and Huck treats him as an inferior. Although many characters never realize it, most of them appreciate that everyone is the same at heart, no matter what skin color, status, or age the person may

be. In most cases, they finally overcome the constant pressures of being racially and socially prejudiced to those who may seem different or unusual. Before confronting anybody else, these characters had to recognize the prejudice they had in themselves, which led them to fight for their beliefs among other individuals and civilization. In the entirety of the novels, the characters overthrow the pressures of going back to the ways of prejudice and discrimination in many scenarios to support their beliefs. As children and as some of the key individuals that have contributed to the rebirth of the nation, Jem, Scout, and Huck learned throughout the course of the novels that everyone is different in their own way; however, skin color or social class should not be a factor in determining that difference. The novels *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* have affected our nation in its ways of misjudgment. Although these novels were written after the slaves were given liberty, they have helped the nation better understand what how terrible injustice can be. Whether it be judging a man guilty in a court of law for something he didn't do, or constantly chasing a man to be sold as property for profit, discrimination is something that all people need to have the courage to fight against. If this was not a significant cause to undertake, our nation would not have some of the greatest leaders in history, including Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and many others. In closing, having the courage to stand up to and face prejudice and discrimination took a lot of audacity on the behalf of the characters who were involved because they would be remembered, like the factual characters of this nation, as people who transformed a diverse people into a single, loving population. Works Cited Ahmad, Wasim et al. " Title: To

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