

Mrs. dubose character analysis: a surprisingly complicated character

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



See in the mind's eye an onion, one with multiple layers more precisely. Peeling the skin and exposing the layers of the onion slowly working towards the core of it. Each second passing each layer is getting peeled off and then going into another layer and so on, much like getting to know a person. Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose is illustrated as a soul-sucking superannuated woman when the audience first catches a glimpse of her and her actions. However, as the novel proceeds the audience begins to unravel her layers and learns that though she may have a fiery demeanor, Mrs. Dubose is fighting and suffering to be beholden to nobody but is still, in a sign of her intolerance, grasping on to white tradition. Shifting the reader's perspective of Mrs. Dubose from a heartless, aging, repulsive racist to a determined fighter, one may say getting to know Mrs. Dubose is like an onion, layered. Though the saying 'sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me' implies that physical force can hurt a person but insults cannot, this was not the case with Mrs. Dubose. At times, Mrs. Dubose is depicted as a fire breathing dragon who holds on to old traditions where whites are superior to blacks and is not afraid to express her opinions to Jem and Scout. Due to this, the children have not only grown to fear her but to also despise her. "Jem and I hated her. If she was on the porch when we passed, we would be raked by her wrathful gaze, subjected to ruthless interrogation..." (132) It is important to notice the children's distaste of Mrs. Dubose is caused by the way she not only hurls insults at them, but her stare of disapproval as well which sends chills down their spines. As much as Jem and Scout loathe Mrs. Dubose, they know to respect their elders and thus do not retaliate and choose to ignore her. The children have been taught at a

young age by Atticus to not retaliate back at Mrs. Dubose, especially Scout who is known to act on impulse." Don't pay any attention to her, just hold your head high and be a gentleman." To put it differently, Jem advises Scout to be the bigger person and to ignore the snide remarks that Mrs. Dubose throws as them. In spite of this, Jem is the one who turns a cold shoulder on his words when Mrs. Dubose makes a snide remark of his mother. Jem goes on a heated rampage and storms through Mrs. Dubose's beloved flower garden, cutting off the tops of flowers with Scouts broken baton. He does so because even though Jem is young when his mother passed he still possesses memories of her and can not handle the frenzy of emotions that swells in him when Mrs. Dubose talks about his mother. She states that there was no lady lovelier than their mother and it was a shame that Atticus let them run wild. Which can be interpreted that she was implying that their mother would never approve of the way they are acting. Little did he know that the punishment of his actions will not only help Mrs. Dubose fight her morphine addiction, but it will also help the audience better understand her as well.

Under the conditions of reading to Mrs. Dubose for six out of the seven days of the week for two hours, the audience gets a glimpse of Mrs. Dubose's life for the first time. Despite being an old hag, as Scout would describe her, the reader learns that she is having suspicious fits that later on leads to the revealing that Mrs. Dubose was a morphine addict and wants to pass away a free person who does not have to depend on morphine to function daily.

Atticus tells the children, " She said she was going to leave this world beholden to nobody." For this reason, she is mean and vile as Jem and Scout

would say. Mrs. Dubose is an old widow who was a struggling morphine addict, consequently people tend to avoid her which lead to her loneliness that made her a crabby person. Mrs. Dubose knew death is inching closer with every fit she had, how could she be happy and positive?

Although Jem is at Mrs. Dubose's house because of punishment Scout is there to make sure that her brother would not be killed by Mrs. Dubose. Though at the end of their adventures they have had going to Mrs. Dubose's house and reading to her, they both intake the situation differently. The audience learns that when Mrs. Dubose dies, she sends a white camellia top to Jem which represents longevity and purity in life, much of what Jem represents. By doing this the audience can conclude that sending this flower was Mrs. Dubose's way of not only saying thank you, but also inferencing how the children did not know about her long morphine addiction, which then connects to their innocence and purity they hold. It connects to their innocence and purity because the children were too young to understand what a morphine addiction is and how it affects Mrs. Dubose. However, Jem because he is young did not make the connection, instead he thought the flower was "meidling him from the grave". However, Scout listens to Atticus when Mrs. Dubose dies and it broadens her understand of not only why Mrs. Dubose is the way she is, but also what real courage is. "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. It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do." This right here is what deeply impacts Scout's

understanding of people. That real courage is not gained by acting tough, but by pursuing a course to better yourself or society but is set on failure and that you never quit even when the toughest of obstacles stand in your way. Thus making this overall experience a life lesson for one of the Finches. In the final analysis, the audience learns more about Mrs. Dubose as the novel progresses. From starting as an old malicious lady next door, to learning that in reality, she is simply a courageous fighter who is battling her addictions, the audience learns that she has depth as a character even though she was only in one chapter. Though the audience sees the depth she carries as a character the reader may still have mixed feelings towards Mrs. Dubose.

By seeing her through Scout's eyes, the audience learns the secret double life that Mrs. Dubose lives. The audience gets to know why Mrs. Dubose is so vile to the townsfolk, because of her past of being a widow and fighting an addiction. Granted that she is a widow and alone, she does not have anyone to talk to and is grappling with loneliness. However, at the end the audience learns that though she may be tough, she poses a kind heart by sending Jem a thank-you gift even though he did not see it that way. The audience and Scout learn a greater lesson as well because of Mrs. Dubose, we learn what real courage is. The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* paints a picture of when old tradition clashes with the innocents of Jem and Scout whom were not brought up traditionally. The novel carefully depicts the struggle of Mrs. Dubose and as the audience reads on they peel away layer by layer of her and come to a understanding of who she is and why she is that way but leaves the reader with potentially ambivalent feelings towards her.