

Harper lee's to kill a mockingbird: character analysis

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



"Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird...." Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird" (90). Harper Lee uses the mockingbird to communicate her theme of the defense of the innocent. In Harper Lee's, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it is evident that in the small town of Maycomb, racial intolerance and gossip impairs the community's good judgments. She shows that, Arthur "Boo" Radley, Atticus Finch, and Tom Robinson do no harm; their only crime is singing their hearts out for what they believe in.

In order to understand why Arthur "Boo" Radley is a mockingbird, it is crucial to recognize how he silently watches Jem and Scout. He resembles a mockingbird because of his natural desire to please the children with the gifts he puts in the tree and his tender compassion for them when they stand outside shivering in the cold watching Miss Maudie's fire. When Sheriff Tate is determined to report that Mr. Ewell fell on the knife, it showed that he does not believe that either Jem or "Boo" Radley should face an inquiry about whether one killed Bob Ewell. Initially, Atticus resists Sheriff Tate's conclusion; however, as he listens to Sheriff Tate his mind is changed, "...To my way of thinkin', Mr. Finch, taking the one man who's done you and this town a great service an' draggin' him with his shy ways into the limelight—to me, that's a sin. It's a sin and I'm not about to have it on my head" (275). Scout goes on to say "Well, it'd be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird, wouldn't it?" (276) This assertion implies that, like killing a mockingbird, arresting Boo would serve no useful purpose, and harm someone who never

meant anyone any harm. But in chapter 10 when Atticus shoots the dog, it was okay because the dog was dangerous. Furthermore, the night Boo Radley saves their lives, Jem and Scout hear a mockingbird in the Radley's yard, " High above us in the darkness a solitary mocker poured out his repertoire in blissful unawareness of whose tree he sat in, plunging from the shrill kee, kee of the sunflower bird to the irascible qua-ack of a bluejay, to the sad lament of Poor Will, Poor Will, Poor Will"(254-255). Jem and Scout noticing that Boo was not home foreshadowed what was going to happen in the chapter. Harper Lee is trying to show that Boo is a prime example of a mockingbird in the novel but putting an actual mockingbird in Boo's yard. Boo Radley pours out his songs of joy or sympathy in a kind of blissful unawareness of the consequences.

Part of being a mockingbird demands a person that articulates the concept of it being a sin to kill a mockingbird. Atticus Finch and his family were subjected to anger without having done anything wrong. When Atticus was explaining his reasoning for taking on this stressful case he emphasized, " ' The main one is, if I didn't I couldn't hold up my head in town, I couldn't represent this county in the legislature.... Scout, simply by the nature of the work, every lawyer gets at least one case in his lifetime that affects him personally" (75). Atticus chooses the moral right above all else and leads his life to set an example for his kids. Once racial prejudice clouds a person's mind it quickly becomes impossible for that person to resemble a true mockingbird. That is why Atticus knows he must try to protect the innocent of whatever kind because if he does not, he may lose the spirit of the

mockingbird that lives in him. Atticus is one of few characters in the novel who is racially tolerant, so he wants his kids to understand that, " You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view - until you climb into his skin and walk around in it" (30). This quote shows Atticus giving Scout the crucial piece of moral advice that governs her development for the rest of the novel. The simple wisdom of Atticus's words reflects the uncomplicated manner in which he guides himself by this sole principle. His ability to relate to his children is manifested in his restatement of this principle in terms that Scout can understand, " climb into his skin and walk around in it". Scout struggles, with varying degrees of success, to put Atticus's advice into practice and to live with sympathy and understanding toward others. At the end of the book, she succeeds in comprehending Boo Radley's perspective, fulfilling Atticus's advice in Chapter 3 and providing the novel with an optimistic ending despite the considerable darkness of the plot. Atticus succeeds in demonstrating both the innocence of his client and the peculiar sickness of the Jim Crow society. He is almost like a mother mockingbird, defending its chicks.

Another character in *To Kill a Mockingbird* who resembles a mockingbird is Tom Robinson. As a black man in a time of prejudice, Tom had been shunned by society his whole life. Scout, thinking about Mr. Underwood's editorial about the death of Tom Robinson, thought, " Mr. Underwood didn't talk about miscarriages of justice, he was writing so children could understand. Mr. Underwood simply figured it was a sin to kill cripples, be they standing, sitting, or escaping. He likened Tom's death to the senseless slaughter of

songbirds by hunters and children..."(241). Tom's good character and total innocence make him resemble the harmless songbird. Not understanding that his best chance remains to bide his time and failing to grasp anything other than his crushing desire to escape, Tom seems like a frantic, caged songbird. Tom Robinson was always willing to help Mayella, and when he was explaining why he would assist her, he made a vital mistake. He replied, " Yes, suh. I felt right sorry for her, she seemed to try more'n the rest of ' em" (197). In those times blacks were not allowed to feel sorry for a white person. The lawyer treated him very unfairly during his interrogation, calling him boy the whole time. All Tom wanted to do was help, just like a mockingbird singing, and yet because of the color of his skin he was ridiculed for it.

Like innocent mockingbirds, Atticus Finch, Boo Radley, and Tom Robinson were all persecuted by society yet had done nothing wrong.