

# To kill a mockingbird critical response

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



To Kill a Mockingbird Critical Response “ Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit ‘ em, but remember it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird” (119). Harper Lee introduces the theme of hurting innocents near the beginning of the novel, pointing out that you shouldn’t hurt something that only tries to help you, and doesn’t harm anyone, like a mockingbird. She portrays this theme through many of the characters, such as Arthur Radley, and Tom Robinson, by comparing them to a mockingbird, and their innocence. One of most prominent examples of harming innocents in the novel was the character of Arthur Radley (Boo). He is like the mockingbird mentioned by Atticus; he doesn’t bother anyone, and only tries to help. The story of Boo develops when the children start finding the treats left for them in the tree, put there because Boo wanted to see them happy, very much like innocent mockingbirds sing for our own enjoyment. Arthur also cares for Scout by putting a blanket around her during the fire at Mrs. Maudie’s house. The last thing Boo does is save the children from Bob Ewell, who tries to kill Scout and Jem. Although it is believed that Arthur possibly stabbed Bob, Heck Tate, the sheriff of Maycomb County, refuses to arrest him. Scout understands in the end that arresting Boo, “ Well, it’d be sort of like shootin’ a mockingbird, wouldn’t it? ” (370). In this case, the mockingbird, Arthur Radley is allowed to live, and is let back into his normal life. However, the right thing does not always happen, as shown to us by Harper Lee by the character of Tom Robinson. Tom is a hardworking, coloured man living in Maycomb. Even crippled, Tom is a good man, and helps support his family. Wrongfully accused of a crime he never committed, he goes into the court, simply because of a prejudice against coloured people. Because of this prejudice, he

is unfairly found guilty, and sentenced to death. These events also symbolize killing a mockingbird; Tom is an innocent man, trying to live his life in peace, quite like a mockingbird, and killing him is a sin, because he has done nothing wrong. Even Mr. Underwood, publisher of Maycomb's newspaper, writes an editorial pointing out this fact. In it, " He likened Tom's death to the senseless slaughter of songbirds by hunters and children. " (323). Harper Lee shows us that people often do harm innocents, be it because of prejudices, or something else, even though they may or may not know it is the wrong thing to do. It's hard to tell if Maycomb really thought Tom to be guilty during the trial, as it was the jury who made the final decision on the evidence. Overall, I believe Harper Lee had an exceptionally realistic view on harming innocents during the book, and represented the theme very well. By showing both sides of what could happen, killing the mockingbird, and showing the mockingbird survive, she shows readers what strong prejudices can do, and that by changing our own views on something that may not be completely right, it can make the difference between life and death. Hopefully this also reminds readers not to be too narrow minded, and to relook some of their own opinions, for depending on some prejudices that people have today, they might also be harming innocents.