

Biological info about the author english literature essay

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Author: Harper Lee Date of Publication: July 11, 1960 Genre: Coming of age

Historical Info

To Kill a Mockingbird was set in the early 1930 in Maycomb, Alabama.

Maycomb, Alabama is a racist white community. So when an African American man named Tom Robinson is accused of rape the town doesn't look to kindly upon him. Usually when an African American man is accused of anything he is sent to jail. In this novel a white man named Atticus Finch defends Tom in trial. Atticus' innocent children Scout and Jem have their eyes opened as they see the racism in the community.

Biological Info about the Author

Harper Lee was born on April 28, 1926 and grew up in Monroeville, Alabama.

Her parents were Frances Cunningham Finch and Amasa Coleman Lee.

Harper Lee being born in the South influenced her to write To Kill a Mockingbird. Her father Amasa was also a lawyer and used to be a newspaper editor. She imagined him to be her character Atticus in the novel To Kill a Mockingbird. Her early jobs were being a ticket agent at Eastern Airlines and working for the British Overseas Air Corp. These careers didn't influence her to write her novel however when she was in the city she ran into her old friend Truman Capote. Her friend Truman Capote was also a writer and he inspired Harper to write her novel. Harper Lee knew Truman since she was a kid.

Genre

The genre of the novel is Coming-of-Age. A Coming-Of-Age novel is about someone's journey from being a child to becoming an adult. In the book Scout is a narrator telling the story about when she was little and how she matured. To Kill a Mockingbird is also a courtroom drama. It has a scene where Tom Robinson is put on trial for the rape of Mayella Ewell. That scene is climax of the story. It is also a Southern drama because the setting is a fictional town in Alabama.

Plot Summary

The narrator of the novel is Scout Finch who is six and lives with her brother Jem and their only parent Atticus. In the summer a young lad named Dill who is visiting their town on summer vacation. Scout, Jem, and Dill become friends and they play acting games. After some time Dill finds out about Arthur Radley and becomes obsessed with him. Arthur Radley's nickname is Boo is he lives in a house that is owned by his sibling Nathan. The rumor is he is a crazy man and he has never come out of his house in many years. The three friends try to make Arthur come out of his house but nothing works. After a while they realize they should just leave him alone. After the summer it is Scout's first day at school and she hates it. Scout and her brother start finding items in the hole of a tree that turn out to be gifts for them. Dill comes back for summer vacation and they continue their acting game. This time they pretend to be the Radley family. However Scout's father makes them stop. However despite Atticus effort to make them "walk in someone else's shoes" before Dill the three kids sneak on the Radley's

property but quickly escape after being shot at by Arthur's brother. After the winter Atticus decides to defend Tom Robinson in trial. He was accused of raping a white woman. However, Tom is black so the white people in the community look down upon Atticus because of his decision. Even his children are subjected to verbal abuse for Atticus's decision. During the trial Atticus have enough evidence to prove that Tom did not commit the crime and that it was Mayella's own father who beat her and probably raped her too. Even with all this evidence the all-white jury convicts innocent Tom of the crime. While in prison Tom was shot to death for trying to scale the fence. Mayella's father Bob Ewell should have been ecstatic that he won the trial but he was very upset. He swears revenge on the judge and Atticus for making a mockery out of him. He gets his revenge by harassing Tom's wife, attempting to intrude into the judge's house, and breaking Jem's arm on Halloween night. However that final evil deed ended in his death. Arthur helped Jem and killed Bob himself. The sheriff and Atticus decided to go with the story that Bob tripped and fell on his knife. After that they let Arthur go home and he doesn't come back out of the house. After these events Scout's eyes have been opened. She can conceive in her mind what it feels like to be Arthur. She has also seen the prejudice in her community. But she will follow her father words and be sympathetic to other people.

Memorable Quotes

1. " Atticus said to Jem one day, " I'd rather you shot at tin cans in the backyard, but I know you'll go after birds. Shoot all the blue jays you want, if you can hit ' em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird." That was the

only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something, and I asked Miss Maudie about it. "Your father's right," she said. "Mockingbirds don't do one thing except make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corn cribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird." - Pg. 199. This quote is important because Tom, Jem, and Arthur Radley are all mockingbirds in the novel. None of these characters deserved to be hurt in any way.

2. "It's never an insult to be called what somebody thinks is a bad name. It just shows you how poor that person is, it doesn't hurt you." - Pg. 144-145. This is an important quote to me because no matter what anyone said about Atticus he still defended Tom Robinson the best he could.

3. "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 see it through no matter what." - Pg. 149. I believe this quote is important because not only does it represent Mrs. Dubose's situation it also describes Atticus's. He knew he wouldn't win the trial however he defended Tom in court anyway.

4. "If you just learn a single trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it." - Pg. 39. Scout learns how to do this by the end of the book. She realizes she was wrong about Arthur Radley. Atticus uses this logic with Tom Robinson.

5. "Naw, Jem. I think that there is just one kind of folks. Folks." - Pg. 304. This quote shows Scout Finch's innocence.

Characters

Atticus Finch

Atticus Finch is a protagonist in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He defends Tom Robinson in the courtroom. Atticus is fair man because he defended Tom even though he was black. He is old, but he is also talented and kindhearted.

Jean Finch

Jean also called "Scout" in the novel is the narrator of our story. She is also the main character. One way she helps her father Atticus is by accidentally saving Tom. A mob had come to hang Tom but Scout made one of the men see how foolish their decision was and they went away. This character is important because we see the story through her eyes. Jean is one of the most innocent characters in the novel. She is also immature. She is also defensive when someone tries to say something about her father.

Jeremy Finch

Jeremy also called "Jem" in the novel is Scout's older brother. Since Scout had to leave the courtroom she missed most of Tom's trial. Jem informed her about what happened during the trial. Jem is much more mature than Scout. He is also defensive when someone offends their father. He is protective and playful with his sister.

Charles Harris

Charles also called "Dill" is a small boy who stays in Scout's town each summer. He is also immature like Scout. That is obvious when he tries to

make Boo Radley come out of his house. He is also curious. He is important because without him Boo Radley probably wouldn't have paid any attention to those children and saved their lives.

Calpurnia

Calpurnia is Atticus's servant. Calpurnia is a motherly figure to Scout and Jem. She can be stern at times, but she is very kind. She is an important member of the family because Scout and Jem don't have a mother. Without her life would be much more difficult for Atticus.

Arthur Radley

Arthur also called " Boo" in the novel plays a big part in the novel. He is known to be a crazy man who lives in his house and never comes out. However, at the end of the book where Bob Ewell attempts to murder Scout and Jem; Arthur saves them both by killing Bob. Arthur turns out to be a nice, caring person. He's just shy and doesn't want to be criticized about the rumors that have been spread about him. He is also a protagonist in the novel.

Maudie Atkinson

Maudie is Atticus's neighbor and friend. She has known his family for a long time since they grew up near each other. Scout is able to go to Maudie whenever Jem won't play with her. Jem also goes to speak with Maudie. In the novel she is respectful towards the two children. In chapter eight her house burns down. This is an important moment in the book because Scout is watching the house outside with Jem. When they are outside Arthur Radley

puts a blanket around Scout's shoulders. She is also a strong and courageous woman. She didn't complain once when her house burnt down.

Robert Ewell

Robert is the main antagonist in the novel. Bob Ewell accused Tom Robinson of beating and raping his daughter Mayella. Robert is an alcoholic. He is an evil and cruel man. During the trial readers discover that it was Robert who had beaten his own daughter. Tom Robinson is convicted of the crime anyway just because he's African-American. Even though he won the case Robert feels he has been humiliated and attempts to get revenge. In his last attempt to get revenge he tries to murder Atticus's children, but Arthur saves them and murders Robert.

Mayella Ewell

Mayella Ewell is Robert's daughter. She accused Tom Robinson of abusing her when it was her father that did it. She is a sad, lonely, and pitiful character, but you can really feel a lot of sympathy for her because she got a man murdered for something he didn't even do.

Tom Robinson

Tom is the black man who was accused of rape. He is a respectful citizen and is one of the "mockingbirds" in the novel. Atticus defends this man in trial and it is obvious that this polite and helpful man is innocent. He is convicted anyway and taken to prison. While in prison he is shot to death by the guards because they say he was trying to escape.

Alexandra Hancock

Alexandra is Scout and Jem's aunt. She decides to leave her home to stay With Atticus. She feels like Calpurnia isn't good enough as a motherly figure. She tries to make Jem and Scout a gentleman and a lady. She may seem stern and pushy but her intentions are good.

John Finch

John is Atticus' little brother. He is a fun and humorous uncle but in Scout's opinion isn't fair. He spans her for punching Francis without letting her tell him why she did it. She teaches him a lesson by telling him to listen to every ones side of the story. Francis Hancock Francis is Alexandra's grandson. He is annoying to Scout because he's boring and cruel. He isn't interested in any of the things she is. In the book he calls her father a " nigger-lover" and in return she punches him in the mouth.

Henry Dubose

Mrs. Dubose is a mean old lady who is very racist. So like most of the town she looks down upon Atticus' decision to defend Tom and she tells his kids what she thinks. Jem gets so angry at her that he destroys her flowers. Atticus makes him apologize for what he did. Mrs. Dubose makes Jem read to her for a month and a week to help her get through her morphine addiction. Jem does it and she dies not being addicted to morphine.

John Taylor

John is the judge for Robinson's trial. He is an old man and has a growly voice. He is a fair judge and tries to give Tom a fair chance. However there was nothing he could do about the jury's decision to convict Tom Robinson.

Heck Tate

Heck is the Maycomb's sheriff. He is a tall man who is very protective over his town. He helps Arthur Radley by not exposing him because he killed Bob Ewell. That shows that he has a nice side.

Horace Gilmer

Horace is the prosecutor in the Robinson case. He seems to be racist because he was harsh and disrespectful when he spoke to Tom. However it seemed he wasn't being as mean as he could have been. Perhaps it was because he knew Tom didn't commit the crime. Dolphus Raymond Dolphus is a rich white man who has kids with a black woman. He is tired of the white people in the town because of their prejudice so he lives with black people. He pretends to be an alcoholic so there will be an excuse for his behavior but he doesn't even like alcohol that much. Scout thought he was an evil man until she figured out he didn't drink whiskey. The only thing in the paper bag was Coke. Miss Caroline Fisher Caroline is Scout first grade teacher. She is young and sensitive. This is obvious when she starts to cry when Burris Ewell insults her in front of the whole class. She tries to introduce a new learning style to the children but soon realizes that Scout is far more intelligent than the rest of the class. She knows how to read and write. Caroline doesn't know how to deal with this predicament so she tells Scout to stop reading

and writing. They won't learn those skills until third grade. Helen Robinson Helen is Tom Robinson's wife. After Tom's trial she can't find a job so Link Deas helps her out. After the trial Bob Ewell harasses her as part of his revenge. Nathan Radley Nathan is Arthur's brother. He lives with Arthur. He is a mysterious character and he rarely comes out of his house. It is difficult to determine if he is me or just overprotective towards his brother. When Dill, Scout, and Jem sneak onto his property Nathan shoots at them with his shotgun. Mrs. Grace Merriweather Grace is a very religious person, but she is also very whiny. She complains a lot. She is also hypocritical and gossips with women. She is the producer of the pageant where Scout is a ham. Walter Cunningham, Sr. Mr. Walter is a poor farmer. His son is Walter Jr. which is Scout's classmate. He is one of Atticus's client. He shows that he is smart and nice by how he pays Atticus for his service. Since he doesn't have any money he pays Atticus in goods. Walter might be racist because he was part of a mob that tried to hang Tom before the trial. Scout spoke with Walter and that made him and the mob go away.

Setting

The setting of the story is in Maycomb, Alabama, during three years of the Great Depression. " Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. ... There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County." - Pg. 6. I think this setting was appropriate. Harper Lee chose this time and place as the setting because most people in the town were racist. If the setting was not in a racist community or during a

time black people didn't have all of their rights Tom wouldn't have been convicted of the rape.

Significance of the opening scene:

The opening scene mentioned Jem getting his arm broken. When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm broken badly at the elbow. This first sentence hints on some things that are going to happen in the novel. This made me want to read the whole book to get to the part where Jem got his arm broken and what led to that happening. The closing of the novel is when Jem gets his arm broken.

Significance of the closing scene

The closing scene of the novel is when Jem has his arm broken by Bob Ewell. " We were nearly to the road when I felt Jem's hand leave me, felt him jerk backwards to the ground. More scuffling, and there came a dull crunching sound and Jem screamed. This scene is important because Bob Ewell said he would get revenge on Atticus someday, and Bob did by harming his son. This is the scene that every reader awaits once they see the first sentence of the novel.

Theme

One of the Major themes in To Kill a Mockingbird is Racial Discrimination. For example Tom Robinson was convicted of a crime he didn't commit because he was black.

Conflict:

I think the major conflict in the novel is man vs. society. To be more exact Atticus vs. the town. In the novel Atticus is criticized for his decision to defend a black man in court. Even after the criticism Atticus defends Tom in trial but he loses because Tom is black and the jury is all white.

Importance of the novel:

I think this novel is important because it shines light on the problem of racial discrimination. It might not be as bad as now but there is still racism around today. It is also a good book to read to show African-Americans how lucky they are today. We used to not have a fair jury in court but now we do. We also have many other rights that we didn't have before.