

Harper Finch, a six-year old girl (lee,



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Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is set in a fictional Southern town Maycomb during the Great Depression. The narrator Scout Finch describes Maycomb as "tired" and "old" (Lee, 1998, p 6).

The main character says, "A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer" (p 6). In this way the author wants to emphasize an idea that this is a place where time virtually came to a standstill. Judging from the first eleven chapters, a reader can deduce that Maycomb is a very small community in which people know one another very well. Furthermore, Harper Lee shows that this is a town where racial prejudices and stereotypes are still prevalent (Lee & Bloom, 2010, p 71). Finally, it should be pointed out that these people live during the time of economic crisis which affects every layer of the population. To some extent, this only intensifies racial animosity in this place. Harper Lee explores a great number of themes in the first chapters of the novel, for example, integrity of a person and his/her ability contradict the norms, adopted in the community. This question is particularly important when one speaks about Atticus Finch and his willingness to defend a black man Tom Robinson even despite the fact that other people ostracize him.

Other important themes include the gender roles, the generation gap and relations between parents and children, class differences and racial stereotypes. A person, who has not read the novel up to the end, can hardly predict how the themes are going to develop. Yet, one can assume that the core of this novel will be the conflict between Atticus Finch's values and those ones of the community. The main characters introduced in the first chapters of the novel are Atticus Finch and his children Scout and Jem. The author let us know that Atticus raises his children on his own; his wife died

several years ago and he never remarried. To a great extent, Atticus is greatly assisted by a family's housekeeper, Calpurnia, to whom both this family feels greatly attached. Another important character is Dill Harris, a friend of Scout and Jem. Unlike his friend, Dill comes from a very poor family and he often lacks money even for food (Lee, 1998, p 9).

From the very start, Harper Lee indicates that Atticus will be at the center of the novel. For example, his children, especially Scout, continuously ask him for his moral judgment, and he produces an impression of being a very honest person. Thus, the readers want to find out if he will be able to adhere to his principles in the future.

As it has been said before, the main conflict described by the writer is the differences between personal values and moral principles and the norms adopted in the community. Yet, there are other conflicts in the novel, for example, the confrontation between the forces of modernity and conservatism. Additionally, we should mention the so-called clash of generations, in particular the willingness of parents to protect their children from any kind of threat, on the one hand, and children's willingness to explore the world and become independent. This story is told from the perspective of Scout Finch, a six-year old girl (Lee, 1998, p 9). However, she does not sound her age. If we look at her narrative from pure linguistic point of view, we can say her vocabulary is very rich, and her grammar is practically impeccable.

More importantly, Scout Finch is also able to capture complex moral issues and dilemmas, although she cannot solve them. Such attentiveness to the

complexity of ethics is not typical of a six-year old child. This suggests that Harper Lee's voice is more prominent, and that the author greatly relied on memoir technique while writing this book.

## **Reference List**

Lee H. (1988). *To Kill a Mockingbird*. NY: Grand Central Publishing.

Lee H. & Bloom H. 2010 *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Bloom's Guides.

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