

Prejudice and
innocence in to kill a
mockingbird by
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The Destructive Thought

Prejudice is simply a thought, yet has the ability to do more damage to a society and its citizens than any other force. The novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee follows the story of young Scout Finch and her growing understanding of the prejudice in the small southern town of Maycomb in which her brother Jem and her come of age. Lee's use of symbols illustrates how societies prejudice has the ability to sabotage innocence, childhood, and friendship, and despite it being involuntary, prejudice destructs the lives of everyone who is exposed to the unjust reality it creates.

Innocence is all some people have, yet prejudice is able to take this innocence away from them, destructing their lives. From the beginning, prejudice surrounds one of the most innocent figures in the novel, Boo Radley. With no knowledge of the truth about Boo, Scout describes him in detail by saying " he dined on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch, [...] what teeth he had were yellow and rotten" (Lee, 16). Later, Lee uses the gifts that Boo leaves in the tree for Scout and Jem to symbolize the innocence of Boo and how Scout's prejudice towards him is far from the truth. This prejudice built around Boo destroys his innocence by making people assume he has none, forcing Boo to live a lonely life. The Cunningham family is another symbol of innocence sabotaged by Maycomb's prejudice. Despite their ability to see Tom Robinson's innocence at the trial, Aunt Alexandra still deems that " you can scrub Walter Cunningham till he shines, [...] but he'll never be like Jem" (300). Aunt Alexandra, along with the rest of Maycomb, is incapable of putting aside prejudice and only judges the Cunninghams based off of their poorness. The Cunninghams are proven

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innocent by being able to put prejudice of Tom aside, but their innocence goes unnoticed due to the prejudice others have of them. Tom Robinson's innocence also goes unnoticed due to prejudice. A symbol of Tom Robinson's innocence is Tim Johnson, the rabid dog. Tim Johnson is labelled as a dangerous dog, yet is only "lookin' for a place to die" (126), and is not causing any harm. This is similar to Tom Robinson because he is also falsely prejudiced in a dangerous manner. The unjust prejudice against Tim and Tom are both the destructive forces that kill them. The use of symbolism emphasizes how prejudice can take away innocence and alter innocent people's lives.

The theme that prejudice causes is loss of childhood innocence which is seen as Scout, Jem and Dill slowly realize how much the prejudice of the town affects lower class citizens. This loss of childhood innocence is much like the symbol of killing a mockingbird, since innocence is destroyed in both cases. Scout's childhood innocence is lost when she realizes the unjust prejudice that many whites have of Tom Robinson. After the incident with the lynch mob outside of Tom's jail cell, Scout declares that "the full meaning of the night's events hit [her] and [she] began crying" (208). When the unjust prejudice against Tom Robinson struck Scout, a piece of her childhood innocence is lost, making her cry. Likewise, Jem loses childhood innocence when he sees cement in the Radley tree, where Boo would leave them gifts. After Jem sees the cement in the knot-hole, Scout claims that "[she] saw he had been crying" (84). Jem is more mature than Scout, allowing Boo's kindness to make him realize that the prejudice of Boo is not true. This makes Jem sympathetic towards Boo because the tree symbolizes his

connection to the world, which is now destroyed. Jem's realization that Boo is wrongly prejudiced causes him to lose childhood innocence. On the other hand, Dill is the least mature and symbolizes childhood through his daintiness. When Dill cries at the trial, childhood innocence is lost not only within him, but the entire novel. After Mr. Gilmer's cross-examination, Dill begins sobbing and has to step outside. Outside Scout and him talk to Mr. Link Deas and Dill takes a sip of his cola thinking it is alcohol. This sip proves Dill's desperation to feel better after realizing the unjust prejudice in the courtroom. Dill's childhood innocence is lost in this scene, symbolizing the loss of childhood innocence as a whole, and therefore the killing of a mockingbird. Childhood innocence within Scout, Jem and Dill is lost throughout the novel because of their realization of the effect of prejudice on other people.

Lee uses several symbols to emphasize how Boo symbolizes friendship and how societies unjust prejudice of him makes it a struggle to have friendship. Boo has little form of communication, yet is able to leave gifts in the knot-hole for Scout and Jem as an act of friendship. When Scout informs Jem that she ate the gum from the tree on the Radley lot, prejudice forms Jem's response of " spit it out right now!" (45), since Jem is still naive and thinks anything on Boo's property is poisoned. The gum symbolizes Boo's attempt at friendship, and when shot down by Jem, one of his only possibilities of friendship is sabotaged because of prejudice. Later, Boo does another selfless act of friendship as he wraps a blanket around Scout when he sees she is cold. When Scout and Jem realize that Boo put the blanket on Scout, she feels sick. Lee uses the blanket to symbolize the warmth and goodness

in Boo, and how he tries to give warmth to Scout. Scout and Jem are unable to acknowledge this due to the prejudice of Boo scaring them away, leaving Boo's friendliness unnoticed. Only when Scout can form her own opinions and overrule prejudice, can she allow a friendship with Boo. After Boo heroically risks his life to save Scout and Jem, Scout reflects on all of the things Boo did for her and says that "[she] had given him nothing, and it made [her] sad" (373). This proves that Scout no longer fears Boo and can finally have a friendship with him since she has overruled prejudice. The friendship that Boo symbolizes struggles to exist due to prejudice and therefore creates a lonely life for Boo.

In conclusion, throughout the use of symbols, Lee argues the ability that prejudice has to sabotage many of the themes throughout the novel, and explains how this involuntary assumption destructs the lives of everyone who is exposed to the unjust reality it creates. This is seen as prejudice sabotages people's innocence, childhood, and friendships. This evidence lacking opinion that we call prejudice, is the most destructive thought.

Works Cited

Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird* New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1982. Print.