

Mockingbird case report essay

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To Kill A Mockingbird was written in the 1950s by Harper Lee. It's central theme revolves around the issues of prejudice and discrimination. The novel is powerful and well read and in a research pool of 5000 people were asked to list the top three books that made a difference, To Kill A Mockingbird was second only to the Bible.

The allure of the novel is the way the story is told. The story gradually unravels through the eyes of one of the youngest characters in the novel, Jean Louise Finch or "Scout". She is a nine year old tomboy growing up in 1930s Alabama.

These messages and lessons about racism are interspersed in between childhood endeavors and personal conflicts. This offers a very soft handed approach to the subject of racism which was an imminent political and social problem during the 1950s. Scout's father, Atticus is a lawyer and a good man.

He believes in education, equality, and his actions support his beliefs.

However, the Finch family lives in a relatively poor and low education area in Alabama where prejudice is almost ingrained in their community's social structure. The majority of the story is told in a flashback which means a very grown up and successful Jean Louise is recounting her childhood years with intelligent wit. This is an interesting literary device employed by Harper Lee. While the story appears to be from a juvenile perspective it is often injected with wisdom far beyond the years of the nine year old story teller. The first part of the novel is a very lighthearted and sentimental look at growing up in the south in the 1930s.

Of course growing up in southern Alabama during this time was not all smiles. One of the most important elements of fiction is the setting. This is certainly true in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Harper Lee breathes life into the setting and it becomes a living companion to all the action in the novel. The plot is set in Alabama during the 30s. The 1930's was a plague of poverty, massive unemployment, and the Great Depression. Franklin Roosevelt had just become president and the nation looked to him to restore America's potential. People are starving, and hard working men are losing their land.

White collar workers offer services in exchange for produce. It is important to make clear that this novel takes place in southern Alabama. Northern Alabama is growing at this time, full of industry and education at the state college. Southern Alabama had not been so lucky. The region is full of disappointment still over losing the Civil War, the antebellum movement, and the decreasing market for cotton growers. All these things led to racism and suspicions of outsiders. The second part of *To Kill A Mockingbird* is strikingly different from the first.

It makes good use of the setting and tells the story of Tom Robinson. Tom Robinson is a black man accused of raping a white woman. He is placed on trial, proved innocent but is murdered just the same. Atticus is the lawyer defending Tom. When Atticus, in court, reveals it is her father who (probably) has raped her as well as beat her; his nastiness is almost over the top as a Negro-hating, drunken redneck and incestuous father. The community is shocked and chaos ensues but Tom is convicted anyway (250-256).

Shortly after, the father tries to attack Scout and she is saved by Boo Radley. Both Boo Radley and Tom Robinson are outside the mainstream community of the town. While *To Kill A Mockingbird* is Harper Lee's only novel it is obvious she is a skillful writer. The simple plot allows for the deep development of a number of characters within the text. Each character is analyzed by the perceptive Scout, and as the story continues each character is fleshed out with details about their lives. The details to the young narrator seem incidental but as you read the text it is clear to the adult reader the character position or disposition within the Southern community. The novel is quick to point out over and over again that society often and sometimes unknowingly chooses to exclude some from society while idolize others not because of depth of character but for less than upstanding reasons like the color of someone's skin, and how much money they have.

Mayella is the rape victim and she is the symbolic victim of the world (181-192). Mayella is extremely lonely and wishes only to find something nice in this harsh world. She is abused both sexually and physically by her uneducated father. Robinson, the black man on trial for her rape, is the only person in the whole community who chooses to be her friend. Mayella attempts to return the friendship the only way she knows how, through sexual advances (245). When Robinson rejects her she is forced to accuse him of rape. While the charge is completely without evidence or reason, the trial does occur.

Harper Lee not only focuses on skin color as a form of prejudice but other society issues as well. A rich aunt visits the Finch family, and she instructs

Scout on how to be a true Southern woman. The theme is reflected in the gender prejudice Scout suffers in the book. She is a girl that acts like a boy, and is constantly having an internal conflict between what she is supposed to be and what she wants to be. As an avid reader, she is a freak in her first-grade class. As a tomboy, she is without little girl friends.

As an independent-minded daughter of Atticus Finch, she is the object of brutal ridicule in the genteel ladies' missionary society (129-137). *To Kill A Mockingbird* is an in detail examination of society by the unknowing and innocent Scout Finch. It is through her honest approach that we, as adult readers, realize how society gets it wrong. We often forget that is was just fifty years ago that black people suffered greatly at the hands of normal everyday people just like your neighbors and peers today.

While society and people have come a long way in fifty years, wounds often take more than a lifetime to heal. Her major argument is that racism and prejudice is based only on one thing: will. That as active participants in society we may have no control over our place in society – like our parents, where we live, or how much money we have. However, none of those things should be used to judge a person's character or value as a human being.

This is a book which can be read by school age children, the message of prejudice and victimization is gentle enough. However, the text is one in which can be reread throughout a lifetime. Much of the wit and complex character explanations is not obvious to younger readers, and even for myself I had to reread a couple of passages again to gain the full effect. Much of the text is enriched by the understanding of the life and times of

1930s Alabama and any personal experiences with racism. The greatest feature of this novel, especially to an adult reader like myself, is the humor.

I can only guess that Harper Lee wanted not to full on attack society for it's role in racism but reveal it slowly beside more lighthearted events. One of my favorite parts of the book is when Jem, Scout's brother, is building a snowman which is supposed to look like Mister Avery. However, the snowman seems to have female attributes even though it is supposed to be a man. The adults comment about it being a hermaphrodite. However, nine year old Scout thinks they said " morphodite" (72) and uses it later in a very humorous way (78). It is this innocence contrasted with deep intelligence that makes the reader connect with Scout and open to what Harper Lee has to say. One of the most important and reviewed portions of the book is Atticus famous speech about how you should never kill a mockingbird because they never do any harm to anyone and sing beautifully.

Of course this relates to the two most victimized people in the story, Tom Robinson and Boo Radley. I think a more telling passage comes in Chapter 3, " If you can learn a simple trick, you'll get along better with all sorts of folks. 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" (160). This is the bulk of Lee's message slimmed down to just two sentences.

Lee's preaches, in subtle ways, ideas of acceptance, tolerance, redemption and forgiveness in her timeless classic To Kill A Mockingbird. And I agree with. I believe that racism is still an issue in the world and especially in America. The issue of racism is problem that involves skin color, but

gender, money, and power. I also feel it is important to revisit classics like *To Kill A Mockingbird*, not just academically but personally. We often become so wrapped up in personal issues we forget that we can actively effect the people around us and subsequently the world. Works Cited Lee, Harper.

To Kill A Mockingbird. Philadelphia: Harper & Row, 1960.