

**‘to kill a mockingbird’,
prejudice and
discrimination**



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

A dominant theme in 'To Kill a Mockingbird' is prejudice and discrimination. Not just racial prejudice, but also prejudice that the people of Maycomb impose on each other because of family background and social status. Jem can see how Maycomb is separated into different classes of people: 'There's four kinds of folks in the world. There's the ordinary kind like us and the neighbours, there's the kind like the Cunninghams out in the woods, the kind like the Ewells down at the dump, and the Negroes.' 'To Kill a Mockingbird' is narrated by Scout. All of the events in the novel are seen from her point of view.

This also adds humour to the novel because sometimes she does not fully understand what is going on. For example, Jem gasps long before she does when they realise the items in the tree are presents from Boo Radley to them. The reader has to piece things together that Scout does not understand. Throughout the novel you can see how Scout changes. She begins to look at things from another person's view. For example, she begins to understand the feelings of Boo Radley. An advantage of looking at the story through a child's eyes is that the injustice in the community stands out a lot more because the children are aware of it for the first time.

Scout believes that no matter how the human race is split up into different types of people, everyone is the same: 'I think there's just one type of folks. Folks.' Boo Radley introduces the theme of prejudice. Stephanie Crawford describes him as: 'So upright he took the word of God as his only law' At the beginning of the novel, the children see him as a ghost or a monster: 'He was a thin leathery man with colourless eyes, so colourless they did not

reflect light. His cheekbones were sharp and his mouth was wide, with a thin upper lip and full lower lip. '

Gradually, the children realise that Boo is not the sort of person they imagined him to be. Boo shows acts of kindness to Jem and Scout. For example when Scout is watching the fire at Miss Maudie's house. Boo covers her with a blanket. Another example is when Jem tore his trousers of the Radley fence and then they reappear mended. The whole novel is about breaking down prejudices by understanding other people. The children understand Tom Robinson, but the community still remain prejudice. Even though it is clear that Mayella lied about the rape, Tom Robinson is still found guilty of a crime that he could not have possibly committed.

Judge Taylor does his best to make sure Tom Robinson has a fair trial by appointing Atticus to defend him. Atticus shows great bravery in doing this. He has a strong belief in the equality of people. Similarly, Miss Maudie's attitude to the trial differs from most of the Maycomb population. She believes that the verdict of the Tom Robinson trial was wrong, even though she knew that that a guilty verdict was inevitable. Miss Maudie explains to the children that a small step along the path to justice has been taken. This relates to the whole novel being about breaking down prejudices and understanding other people.

In relation to understanding people, Atticus can see why Mayella made up the whole story, even though he despises her and her father for what they have done. Miss Crawford is the opposite of Miss Maudie. Miss Crawford has the same prejudice attitudes that most of Maycomb have. Aunt Alexandra

also has similar prejudice attitudes as Miss Crawford. Aunt Alexandra is racially and sexually stereotypical. She requests to get rid of Calpurnia, but Atticus refuses. Atticus respects and values Calpurnia, but to Aunt Alexandra, Calpurnia is just a Negro. Mrs Dubose is a neighbour of the Finches' and she frightens the children with her unkind remarks.

One day Jem loses his temper and destroys her camellias. This makes Atticus very angry and as a punishment Jem has to read to Mrs Dubose for a month. Scout also goes with him. Scout realises that the reading sessions increase daily in length. The children used to think that she was horrible until they put themselves in her shoes: ' Jem and I hated her. ' Mrs Dubose had become addicted to morphine, and without realising it, the children helped her overcome her addiction. When she dies Atticus explains the important part Jem and Scout played in helping her. Atticus talks about Mrs Dubose as the bravest woman he ever knew.