

# Example of harper lees to kill a mockingbird thesis

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



## **Abstract**

The coming of age novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee uses her experience as Southerner to examine the ethical issues during the great depression taking the readers to a time when discrimination dominant. Setting the story in the southern town of Maycomb country, where the story is viewed through the eyes of a young girl trying to learn that life is a blur of good and bad. Through the innocence of Scout, Harper Lee presents the varying aspects of intolerance and racism evoking the vivid racial discrimination around the melodramatic town of Maycomb; provoking the distinctive characters to challenge their values to the extent of their abilities.

## **Introduction and main thesis – racial injustice and the disruption of innocence**

Harper Lee's classic novel is built on two main themes, racial injustice and the disruption of innocence which are skillfully interwoven together to create a complex web of intricacies that continually develop throughout the book. The theme of racial discrimination is rampant in the old Southern town of Maycomb in Alabama which positively reeks with the heat of injustice. However Lee is interesting in the sense that she manages to create a link between the innocence of children who do not think about racism in their heart of hearts but can observe it first hand through the noble doings of their father, the lawyer Atticus Finch.

## **Finch as a person of nobility in a racist community**

"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 but make music for us to enjoy . . . but sing their hearts out for us. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.”

Atticus Finch is a lawyer in the small town of Maycomb, Alabama and although he is white, he is certainly not a racist. He decides to take on the case in defence of the negro Jim who is accused of raping a white woman by a dirt poor farmer. One has to understand the psychology of the poor white farmer in the Deep South in the midst of the Great Depression who was observing his family get poorer and hungrier by the minute and the only person he could take it out on was the negro who was both poorer than him and definitely the last one on the social ladder. The episode where Finch goes to talk to Jim’s relatives in their shack at the edge of the town demonstrates the unhappiness and fear in which the black person lived. This is reflected also in the noble way in which Finch defends Jim whose impassioned plea in court is to no avail.

### **Innocence achieved and regained**

The relationship between Scout and her brother is also an important one as it establishes the fulcrum of the whole story. Their sense of discovery is constantly apparent even when they visit the courthouse steps during Jim’s trial, this demonstrates how they do not really know what is going on.

Another intriguing episode is when they end up in the black section of the court and watch their father carry out his work defending Jim. Their sense of innocence is palpable yet they have to know what is intrinsically going on even though they are actually detached from it all.

Scout who is also a sort of tomboy begins to sense that what is happening to

Jim is wrong even though she has no clue of what he is standing there for. Her inquisitiveness is also felt when she begins asking her father certain questions about the trial and Atticus does his best to steer clear of any direct references to racism.

### **The attempted lynching incident**

The socio political groupings in the early 20th century Deep South saw a rampant type of racism against black people which was nothing short of disgusting. Every year hundreds of lynchings took place in the South and these were quite the order of the day in almost every state but particularly in Alabama and Mississippi. The lynching incident which almost takes place shows the strong feelings that Harper Lee had about this subject as she describes the posse of men which turn up to 'do their duty' quite attentively and with considerable detail. The scene is indeed a tense one as only the Sheriff and Atticus Finch stand in the way of the lynch mob but with considerable persuasion, these eventually go about their own way. It is indeed a powerful scene which demonstrates the importance of persuasion in heated situations which do not always end up as one would perhaps wish but in this scene, the right course of action is definitely achieved.

### **The Deep South as social commentary**

Harper Lee's original viewpoint is that she demonstrates the inherent racism present in Maycomb through the eyes of a young girl who is perhaps not so clear on the views of right or wrong. Everything comes together clearly though as one may observe the intrinsic foibles which form part of the Deep South such as the institutionalized racism inherent in society, the ignorance

of the poor white man and the general air of sleepiness and all pervading ignominy which affects the whole scheme of things.

### **The innocence of Scout tried and tested**

“ A boy trudged down the sidewalk dragging a fishing pole behind him. A man stood waiting with his hands on his hips. Summertime, and his children played in the front yard with their friend, enacting a strange little drama of their own invention. It was fall, and his children fought on the sidewalk in front of Mrs. Dubose’s. . . . Fall, and his children trotted to and fro around the corner, the day’s woes and triumphs on their faces. They stopped at an oak tree, delighted, puzzled, apprehensive. Winter, and his children shivered at the front gate, silhouetted against a blazing house. Winter, and a man walked into the street, dropped his glasses, and shot a dog. Summer, and he watched his children’s heart break. Autumn again, and Boo’s children needed him. Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough”.

Scout is an innocent girl and she has to face some of the most complex of problems in her early life as she grapples with the racist undertones of Maycomb as a town. Perhaps the most potent part is the courthouse scene where she is put among the black people in the gallery and here she attempts to observe all that is going on with an open eye. Obviously the situation is not so easy as one would expect but she does grasp what is happening in bits and bobs. The fact that Lee chooses Scout to personify the narrator also has to do with the hallowed and almost mystical view of Southern womanhood which is a consistent leitmotif in every story about the

deep South. In fact the supposed rape is a fire catcher for all Southern men in the town who are obliged to rise up and defend the female's honour and no real checking is made to confirm if the case actually happened or not.

### **Conclusion: To Kill a Mockingbird as social legend**

Harper Lee's romantic novel is definitely one of the finest ever to be written emanating from the Deep South. It is full of those classic cases of bigotry and subtle racism especially with regard to Jim whose innocent fate shows how powerless black people were even obviously at the time of writing which was 1960 and which demonstrated how brutal racism can actually be.

However the fact that the story is told through the eyes of a young girl further amplifies the catchment of the novel which inherently demonstrates the importance of sticking together when still children. The final discovery of the simple big boy in the end is one of the most touching scenes of the book and all in all it demonstrates that love and affection can triumph over hatred and bigotry. 'To Kill a Mockingbird' is surely one of the best books ever in this respect and will remain a classic for many years to come.