

Argumentative essay on rhetorical analysis: to kill a mockingbird by harper lee

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



Introduction

Nelle Harper Lee, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *To Kill a Mockingbird*, thrived in an era in which racial injustice against African-Americans flourished. *To Kill a Mockingbird* drew several references from the life of Harper Lee, whose father, Amasa Coleman Lee, was a lawyer and state legislator of Alabama who once served in the defense of two African-Americans (the Scottsboros) accused of murder. Rotating around themes of racial injustice, class and gender issues, *To Kill a Mockingbird* stood as a heavy social critique by Harper Lee against American society, which was undergoing turbulent changes such as the African-American civil rights movement that coincided with the release of the novel in 1960. The significance of the mockingbird often described in *To Kill a Mockingbird* refers to the fact that it metaphorically represented innocence, or the lack thereof, throughout the novel. This study seeks to elaborate on the metaphorical analysis of the mockingbird in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as it relates to the socially relevant themes on race, class and gender that have affected various people alluded by the characters described by Harper Lee in the novel (HarperLee. com; Johnson 15-21, 83-91).

Analysis of the Mockingbird in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

The mockingbird in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a significant metaphorical object used to underline the importance of innocence. Harper Lee chose the mockingbird due to its quality of innocence; hunters tend to shoot down mockingbirds for no reason other than sporting purposes. Innocence, as metaphorically represented by the mockingbird, has emanated in three

notable scenarios described in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, detailed in the succeeding sections (Lee; Mulligan).

Atticus Finch, a lawyer, gave his children Jem and Scout air rifles for Christmas, which they used to learn shooting. Finch told Jem and Scout that they may shoot all kinds of birds as they which except mockingbirds, which are known as harmless creatures that create songlike melodies with their tweeting. One may reasonably think from the given context that killing a mockingbird, as the title of *To Kill a Mockingbird* explicitly states, directly refers to destroying innocence, as mockingbirds are described as innocent birds. The mockingbird, in the given context, highlighted the attitude of Finch against hurting the innocent (Lee; Mulligan; Shields 112-135).

Harper Lee further wielded the metaphorical influence of the mockingbird in describing the trial and conviction of Tom Robinson, an African-American man represented by Finch in court. Accused of raping a white woman named Mayella Ewell, Robinson faced severe condemnation because he is an African-American, in turn causing Finch and his family great disrepute emphasized by the label “ nigger-lover” constantly thrown to them. Despite compelling findings of innocence favoring Robinson, particularly with the discovery that Mayella actually lured him and that Bob Ewell, her father, has beaten her up for it, the conviction of the court still went against him.

Robinson, who vehemently maintained his innocence, attempted to escape from prison but died when police shot him (Lee; Mulligan; Shields 112-135).

The mockingbird figured prominently in another scene of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, wherein Bob attacked the children of Finch, Jem and Scout, after the trial and conviction of Robinson. Bob, greatly incensed by the

humiliation he claimed to have suffered in court, targeted Jem and Scout – both of which were innocent. Boo Radley, the reclusive yet friendly neighbor of the Finch family, came to rescue Jem and Scout from Bob. Despite talks of charging Radley for murdering Bob, who died in the encounter with his knife stabbed on his own chest, he went out without any charges as both Scout and Finch agreed with one another that convicting him is tantamount to “killing a mockingbird”. Radley is an important character in his own right, as Harper Lee designed him to represent the fear of the people to stand up for justice, given his isolated nature and brave act of saving Jem and Scott from Bob (Lee; Mulligan; Shields 112-135).

Overall, the mockingbird is prominent as a metaphorical tool symbolizing innocence in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which Harper Lee intended as a literary masterpiece fighting against injustices on the grounds of race, class and gender. Harper Lee notoriously pointed out the unjust trial of Robinson as a representation of the reality of her time, which heavily leaned against African-Americans and the denial of their innocence based on the color of their skin. The overwhelming indications pointing to the innocence of Robinson proved untenable to the white-dominated jury who wanted nothing other than his conviction and execution. Preceding and succeeding events, characterized by the air rifles and attacks against Jem and Scout, further clarified the metaphorical representation of the mockingbird borne out of the literary nous of Harper Lee (Johnson 1-14; Lee; Mulligan).

Conclusion

In several ways, the mockingbird in *To Kill a Mockingbird* stood as a highly significant metaphorical object in the novel. The features of the mockingbird – harmless and well known for its lovely tweeting, duly embodied innocence throughout *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The sordid events in *To Kill a Mockingbird* featured the destruction of innocence mainly through the trial and conviction of Robinson, alongside its effects on Finch and his family. Harper Lee duly succeeded in making *To Kill a Mockingbird* a powerful literary masterpiece noting how discrimination involving race, class and gender could destroy innocence, which in turn is a strong manifestation of injustice.

Works Cited

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