

To kill a mockingbird
– themes and
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There are various issues and themes presented in the novel "To Kill A Mockingbird" by Harper Lee and "The Rabbits" by John Marsden and illustrated by Shaun Tan. These themes are being smoothly conveyed through the use of different language techniques including complex metaphors, similes, hyperboles, imagery, personification and symbolism. Among the main themes used in the novels are courage, prejudice, hypocrisy, justice, education, social inequality, poverty and perspective.

"Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow it was hotter then: a black dog suffered on a summer's day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oaks on the square. Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o'clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum"; a quote Harper Lee uses to describe the fictitious town of 'Maycomb, Alabama' where the story is set.

The story takes place in the 1930s during the time of the Great Depression and the writing reflects some of the economic problems some people were having at that time. The narrator and main character begins her story at almost six years old. A rebellious tomboy, Scout has a fierce disposition toward any who challenge her, but at heart she believes in the goodness of people. Joining Scout in her exploits is older her brother Jem, who is nearly ten at the beginning of the story. Jem is quieter and more reserved than his sister, and has very high standards and expectations for people and Dill, A friend of the Finch children, who is a little older than Scout, quite short for his

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age, has an active imagination, and exhibits a strong sense of adventure., Atticus Finch, Scout and Jem's is a lawyer and an extremely morally upright man who strives to deal with everyone fairly.

Other significant characters include Boo Radley; a mysterious recluse who had captured the imagination and curiosity of Jem, Scout and Dill, Tom Robinson; the gentle, crippled black man who stands falsely accused of the rape of Mayella Ewell, Calpurnia; caring house keeper of the Finches, Aunt Alexandra; Atticus' sister who is very strict and prejudice, Bob Ewell; Mayella's father and an terrible, ignorant man who belongs to the lowest point of Maycomb society and Mrs. Dubose; a very old, sick, morphine addicted lady who is generally very mean and unkind to Jem, Scout and Dill.

In the 1930s, when the novel is set, commonly, people had very racist views and the whole town of Maycomb (excluding Atticus) was prejudice against Black people. In the court case, Tom is asked why he helped Mayella for not a penny in return and he replied, " I felt right sorry for her, she seemed to try more'n the rest of 'em-" which was a grave mistake on Tom's part as a ' Black' man feeling sorry for a ' White' girl was a total outrage in the prejudice town of Maycomb. Tom Robinson is wrongly accused, and loses his life due to the racism of the community. Even though it is obvious, to every person in the jury, that Robinson could not have committed the crime, and that he is an upright and religious churchgoing man, he is still accused of rape, and jailed. This shows that the Maycomb community have only one set of mind, which is white man over a black man no matter what the case. This is how they have been taught and have been teaching their younger

generations to think, it could take many, many generations before this belief is abolished.

Courage or bravery takes many forms in TKAM. Atticus is brave to defend a black man in the face of criticism and threats of violence. Atticus urges Scout to be brave and prevent herself from fighting those who criticize her or her family; “You’re gonna hear some ugly talk about this in school. But I want you to promise me one thing: That you won’t get into fights over it, no matter what they say to you.” Atticus holds up Mrs. Dubose as the ultimate definition of bravery, as she fights against her morphine addiction in order to be free from it before she dies, even when she knows she will die in the process, “I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand.” Bob Ewell represents the greatest cowardice, as he both lies in the courtroom to protect himself and resorts to attacking children in the darkness in order to make himself feel more of a man.

When Scout first starts school she already knows how to read due to the teachings of Atticus and Calpurnia but Scout’s school teacher believes that she shouldn’t know how to read and write as it is not taught in school until later, “Your father does not know how to teach. You can have a seat now”. This is the first clear conflict between institutionalized education and education in the home. Also perspective plays an important role in To Kill A Mockingbird, the author’s decision to use a child to tell the story is a very important element in To Kill a Mockingbird. Scout had no comprehension of the complex issues of the interaction of a black man and a white woman.

Scout in her innocence looks beyond the 'colours' and sees it as a matter of simple justice.

Social inequality is also evident as one of the themes in the novel and an issue in Maycomb as there is a class divide of the rich and the poor an example being the Cunninghams as they do not accept anything from anybody due to the fact they won't be able to pay them back. Hypocrisy is also present, Mrs Merriweather from the missionary group as an example. She goes on to talk about how poor and disadvantaged the Mrunas are in Africa and then nearly in the same breath she turns around to bad-mouth the black people in her own neighbourhood, people who also have a deplorable situation that she could actually do something about but chooses not to, "you live your way and we'll live ours."

Harper Lee uses many language techniques to further reinforce her story line to create a better understanding of the text. Metaphors and similes are used frequently and add to the interest of the text. The introduction of Maycomb paragraph has many examples of metaphors and similes within it an example being "by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum." Uses of alliterations are also evident such as 'sweat and sweet' and 'flicked flies'.

Personification is used to further describe a subject reinforcing the use of imagery, "some tinfoil was sticking in a knot-hole just above my eye level, winking at me in the afternoon sun", "the court house sagged in the square". Hyperboles are used to further express the feelings of the narrator, "two geological ages later, we heard the soles of Atticus' scrape the front

steps.”” Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.’ Harper Lee effectively uses symbolism in To Kill A Mockingbird. The mockingbird itself is a symbol, the symbol of innocence. Tom Robinson is an example of a ‘mockingbird’ in the novel as he is shot down even though he was innocent and never did anything to hurt anybody.

Boo Radley is another example of a mocking bird, he is the symbol of good that exists within people but no one ever understood that, “ 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.” Uses of irony also exist in the text including the use of the name Robert E. Lee Ewell, a brave confederate general, as the name of the white trash, evil man who accused Tom Robinson of raping his daughter. Also irony is present when Scout's teacher Miss Gates tells them to repeat that “ we are a democracy” and don't believe in prejudice, but Scout had just witnessed an innocent black man being sentenced for life.

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