

Prejudice in to kill a
mockingbird and goin'
someplace special



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Prejudice is a pre-judgement formed about something or someone – but it is more than this as well? This complex idea is highlighted in the novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and the picture book *Goin' Someplace Special* by Patricia McKissack (illustrated by Jerry Pinkney). The picture book is set in 1950s Nashville and features a young African American girl named Tricia Ann, who experiences much prejudice and eventually reaches a place of integration – the public library. Both these texts offer deeper ideas about prejudice, that challenge our past and present society.

Prejudice is a group-held perception that marginalises one. In *To Kill A Mockingbird*, one of the main characters who experience prejudice and is isolated from the rest of Maycomb is Arthur (' Boo') Radley. At the beginning of the novel, Jem and Scout explain to Dill who Boo is, or at least what they have been told. ' People said he existed but Jem and I had never seen him. People said he went out at night...' The repetition of ' people said' emphasises that these anecdotes are purely based on rumour, not fact. Maycomb's characterisation of Arthur is that he is inhuman, hence the derogatory term ' Boo Radley' is used. Lee makes it clear that Arthur is marginalised from the rest of society. ' The shutters and doors of the Radley house were closed on Sundays, another thing alien to Maycomb's ways...' The use of ' alien' reveals that prejudice is about difference. This contrast that Lee has made between Maycomb and the Radleys emphasises that prejudice is formed in a group, dividing one person.

Goin' Someplace Special conveys this same concept but in a much different way. One example is when Tricia Ann accidentally enters the crowded lobby of a hotel where " coloured people" are forbidden, an example of racial

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prejudice. Unlike the novel, Tricia Ann is not subject to prejudice secretly, like Boo Radley. McKissack writes, 'What is she doing here? It seemed as if the whole world had stopped talking, stopped moving and was staring at her.' This climatic sentence involves sibilance of 'st' which emphasises that these sudden movements were taking place as a group. In a double page spread, Tricia Ann is wearing bright blue and yellow contrasted being highly saturated, whilst with all the white people, the colour palette is limited with white and cream. Similar to where Boo Radley was 'alien-like', Tricia Ann looks and dresses differently. Furthermore, Tricia Ann is much smaller in comparison to everyone else, making it clear that subjects of prejudice are seen as inferior by an entire group. The vectors of the man's hands provide a reading path where we are led to look at Tricia Ann's isolation.

Prejudice is recognized through education and experience. Therefore, unlike children, adults are the ones who convey the prejudice attitudes. We see the development of Scout's understanding throughout the novel. For example, during the scene when Scout was at the Maycomb Jail, running towards her father who was surrounded by a mob of prejudiced farmers, she says 'I pushed my way through dark smelly bodies and burst into the circle of light'. The motifs of darkness and light are seen where the prejudice is symbolic of evil and Atticus, is the metaphorical circle of light, representative of goodness. Scout starts conversing with Mr Cunningham: 'Hey Mr Cunningham. How's your entailment gettin' along?' This provides comic humour where her child-like behaviour is dominant, and the confrontation conveys Scout's misunderstanding and how she has not yet recognised the full extent of prejudice. However, towards the end, Scout comes to truly

understand. This is evident when Scout is on the Radley porch, after walking Boo back home from saving Scout and Jem's life. ' Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough.' This aphorism is also a flashback, revealing how Scout has developed. She finally understands prejudice through her experiences and teachings from Atticus, assuming a grown-up moral perspective.

The picture book also conveys this prejudice concept. In the scene when Tricia Ann is in the Peace Fountain and wants to sit on a bench, she notices the bench says ' FOR WHITES ONLY'. The use of capital letters emphasises how important people think segregation is. Also, the backings of the bench are vectors drawing our eyes to the caption. "' Silly signs," she muttered as she strutted away on sober legs.' Sibilance is used to highlight her misunderstanding of prejudice but also her childhood innocence, which is similarly conveyed in the novel with Scout. Just like the motifs of light and dark in the novel, in the double page spread, Pinkney highlights the motif of flowers, symbolic of childhood innocence. Flowers are in the background, foreground and on Tricia Ann's dress and hat but not on the bench, indicating that this bench represents prejudiced adults. The salient image is this prejudiced bench which is evident through its straight, rigid lines and also its large size. As opposed to the novel, Tricia Ann never fully understands why prejudice is there, because unlike Scout, she is black and cannot relate to being prejudiced. These two texts show that prejudice is recognised through education and experience but never fully understood because it shouldn't be there.

Finally, both texts show that overcoming prejudice means to overcome ignorance. In *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Atticus is the wise, moral character and at the end of the novel, we see that through all of Atticus' teaching, Scout has learnt how to conquer prejudice. As Scout falls asleep, she is re-telling Atticus about the events of the book 'The Gray Ghost' '...when they finally saw him, why he hadn't done any of those things...Atticus, he was real nice... Most people are Scout, when you finally see them.' In this final aphorism, Lee reflects that by overlooking ignorance and really getting to know a person before pre-judging, prejudice can be overcome. This illustrates Atticus' moral outlook all along.

In *Goin' Someplace Special*, Blooming Mary is a similar character to Atticus. She is an elderly woman who is a subject of age prejudice because she takes care of the garden with neither permission nor pay. When Tricia Ann feels like reaching her destination is not worth it, because of all the prejudice she has experienced, Blooming Mary tells her 'You are somebody...no better, no worse than anybody else in the world...just keep walking straight ahead and you'll make it.' For the first time Tricia Ann is of equal size to someone and is on the right hand side of the double page spread, symbolic of the new. Also, Blooming Mary is highly saturated unlike previous white people we have seen. When Tricia Ann reaches the integrated public library. Here, the salient image is the library which is achieved through its large size and grand scale. Also, the colours reflected on the library are blue and yellow, the same as Tricia Ann's clothing. On the windows, in the background, on the car. Unlike the novel, this picture book has reflected places of equality as seen through '

PUBLIC LIBRARY ALL ARE WELCOME'. By overcoming ignorance, both texts show prejudice can be overcome as well.