

An analysis of "to kill
a mockingbird" by
harper lee essay
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In the novel, "To Kill a Mockingbird," Harper Lee strongly criticizes prejudice of any kind, positioning readers to view prejudice through her invited reading, as well as a number of characters and discourses presented in the novel. Harper Lee positions readers to understand "To Kill a Mockingbird", as a story which highlights the serious issues of prejudice, discrimination and injustice which occurred during the cultural context of the 1930's, in Alabama and the Deep South of North America. The narrator of the text, Scout Finch, demonstrates her maturation she developed throughout the novel, an example of this is when Scout states, "Well, it'd be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird, wouldn't it?" (pg 304) Due to the privileging of this character, readers are positioned to respond to the issues of prejudice through the eyes of Scout. To answer this question the following aspects of the text need to be considered; discourses, gaps and silences, foregrounding and privileging and finally invited, resistant and alternative readings.

Discourses are cultural and social practices through which individuals and groups use language and establish their identities within their society. In "To Kill a Mocking Bird" Harper Lee uses 5 forms of discourses; race, gender, religious, family and class. Lee effectively shows how the racist views of Maycomb are socially acceptable for that time yet Scout constantly questions these perspectives and is represented as a more mature person compared to the bigotry of the townspeople. This quote from Atticus Finch, Scout's father, shows how he shares the same views as scout, "As you grow older, you'll see white men cheat black men every day of your life, but let me tell you something and don't you forget it, whenever a white man does that to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is or how fine a family

he comes from, that white man is trash." (pg 243) These words of Atticus demonstrate how Harper Lee uses Gaps and silences to depict Atticus as the voice of reason and wisdom.

Gaps and silences are the omissions in the text about the characters which helps create the author's view/message. Harper Lee utilises these gaps and silences through most of her characters, in doing so she is able to express the dominant ideology of racism, bigotry and social intolerance. An example of one of her characters, Bob Ewell, is that the omissions in the text are all positive aspects, that is, everything written in the text about him constructs an image of the typical racist, prejudice, intolerant person of that time. For example, when Bob says, " I ain't touched her, Link Deas, and ain't about to go with no nigger!" (pg 275) It is clear that due to the privileging of this character, readers are positioned to question the strong racial prejudice views that are associated with many of the white people in Maycomb.

Another important aspect of understanding the text is foregrounding and privileging. Foregrounding is the process by which our reading is guided by the use of specific language to create one meaning over another, whilst privileging, as a result of foregrounding, occurs when one meaning is given priority over another possible interpretation. Scout Finch was fore grounded to portray the very few just and fair people in Maycomb towards African Americans. This is exemplified when Scout states, " Naw, Jem, I think there's just one kind of folks. Folks." (pg 250) This specific language due to privileging leads the reader to believe Scout has overcome any forms of prejudice and instead guides the reader towards invited reading.

Invited reading is the preferred or dominant reading of the ideology in the text, resistant reading refers to the ideologies being directly opposed and alternative reading involves a compromise between the invited and resistant readings. Harper Lee puts forward the issues of racial prejudice, discrimination and injustice as the main ideologies. Through the eyes of Scout and as she matures, she discovers the way the 'White man' treats the African Americans, and to match the ideologies made by Harper Lee she finds that way of life unfair and unjust which positions us as readers to follow invited reading. Besides racial discourses, social or class discourses are also present in Lee's ideologies. When Scout was quite childish and naïve, she formed a prejudice attitude towards one of her classmates, Walter, as she believed herself better than him. This was exemplified when Scout stated, "He ain't company, Cal, he's just a Cunningham -" (pg 27) Therefore the readers would feel quite objective to scout at that point as it goes against the dominant ideologies.

Harper Lee strongly criticizes prejudice of any kind, positioning readers to view prejudice through her invited reading, as well as a number of characters and discourses presented in the novel. Through the eyes of Scout we are positioned to respond to the issues of prejudice, due to Harper Lee's ideologies and scout's character foregrounded as being strongly against the extreme prejudice views of Maycomb, we are positioned to take an invited reading towards her character as she shares the main ideologies of the text. As a wise man, Atticus, once said, " 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."