

# To kill a mockingbird analysis

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In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the author Harper Lee has explored themes and ideas through the characters, settings and plot of her novel.

Through investigating the troubled situation of America's South in her novel, Lee has demonstrated the various aspects of human evil and how they have shaped a profound impact on the small community of Maycomb. The forms of human evil that Lee has explored are the destruction of innocence, hypocrisy and racial segregation. The destruction of innocence is constantly shown throughout the characters of the novel.

Lee has emphasised the purity and innocence by ingeniously symbolising these characters as 'mockingbirds'. 'Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make us music for us to enjoy, this is why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird'. Lee has utilised the technique of symbolism in this quote to emphasise the purity of innocent beings and how wrong it is to bring death to innocence. The two mockingbird figures in the novel are Boo Radley and Tom Robinson. These two characters were never harmful to Maycomb, yet they were needlessly tormented and persecuted by the society. 'Shoot all the bluejays you want, but if you can't hit them, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird', the use of analogy has cleverly emphasised the wrong in killing innocent beings. In Tom Robinson's case his innocence was sacrificed in order to uphold the rigid and invisible racist code of America's South- 'all Negroes lie, all Negroes are immoral beings and all Negroes are not to be trusted around white women'.

The use of repetition in this quote reinforces the evil stereotypical view of black people at the time. Similarly, Boo Radley never caused any harm to

society, yet he was the 'monster' in Jem's and Scout's fantasies. Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom.

Any stealthy crimes committed were his work, the use of exaggeration and metaphor in the quote emphasises the extent of antagonism Boo had to face from inside the prison of his home. Both characters were essentially good, but their innocence was damaged by the town's inhumane cruelty against them. From the novel Lee has shown the responder the inner malice hidden within the human hearts and their capability of causing the destruction of innocence. In Maycomb this inner evil have resulted in the unnecessary downfall of innocent and good people. Another idea that Lee has explored was hypocrisy. In the novel, the court system upheld the noble code of equality for all and special privileges to none, shown by the use of second person pronouns in 'in our courts all men are created equal'.

However this is juxtaposed with the reality when Tom Robinson was faced with an unfair trial that he could not possibly win, shown by 'In the secrets of men's hearts Atticus had no case. Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed'. This contrast has highlighted clearly the hypocrisy and the failure of the court system to serve its purpose.

The human hypocrisy is further emphasised by the personality of Mrs Gates. Within the novel Mrs Gates detested Adolf Hitler for his inhumane and brutal exploitation of Jews (her view is demonstrated by the use of hidden irony in 'over here we don't believe in persecuting anybody'), yet contradictively she despised the blacks with the same intense hatred. Her

hypocrisy can be seen by the use of rhetorical question in Scout's quote: "How can you hate Hitler so bad and turn around be so ugly about the folks at home?" From these examples Lee has demonstrated to the responder the strong presence of hypocrisy within Maycomb and it showed that, without realising, the wickedness of racism has already been integrated as part of the social norm of Maycomb. Racial segregation is portrayed as a major social issue in Maycomb. Despite the fact that slavery has abolished, the physical segregation and animosity between the races were still present. This was most evident in the case where blacks and whites occupy different places of worship, yet with a twist of irony they belonged to the same religion.

"They got their church, we got ours. It is our church, ain't it?" The use of second and third person pronouns in this quote shows that there was a clear distinction between a black and a white church. The separation is further emphasised when it became clear to the responder that the whites and blacks speak in different dialogues despite their common language being English.

"Why do you talk nigger-talk to your folks?" The use of rhetorical question highlighted the huge gap that existed between the two races. Furthermore the physical and cultural segregation meant that the blacks are always disadvantaged within the society. "When it's a white man's word against a black man's word. The white man always wins", the comparison in the quote serves as a deep reminder that in Maycomb blacks are always perceived as inferior. From the novel the author has

demonstrated that racism is a major issue and despite their similarities, racial tension was ever present. It has created a huge gap of hostility and misunderstanding in race relations while distrust and fear existed side by side, resulting in a strong sense of xenophobia. In conclusion, through her novel Harper Lee has exposed the various aspects of human malice that are present within the Maycomb residents and she has demonstrated the capability of our inner evil to generate antagonistic attitudes towards different people and races.

Lee's novel warns about the dangers of human's inhumane treatment towards fellow humans and this serves a major warning for future generations to come.