

# Courage in to kill a mockingbird



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Harper Lee's novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" explores how courage can be shown in several important characters in the novel. They are Mrs. Dubose, Atticus, Jem and Maycomb County itself. Also Cal, Miss Maudie and Scout show moral and physical courage during the novel. Courage exists in several forms as cleverly depicted in the novel, such as childish courage, moral courage. I believe that courage definitely plays a major role as a theme in scenes throughout this novel.

For a younger child though, like Scout, courage is most often associated with some type of physical act, which involves danger. It is difficult for younger children to grasp the concept that greater courage is most often required in other aspects of life. Scout learns that the greatest courage can be found in a situation where a person knows that they are going to lose, yet still continues to fight the battle. "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.

It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what." Harper Lee portrays the idea of courage by first having Scout observe her father perform a physical act of courage when he shoots the mad dog. Although Atticus didn't consider the act very courageous and was completely uninterested in proving anything to his children, Jem and Scout were proud of, and impressed by, his courage in such a precarious situation. But shooting something wasn't really Atticus' idea of courage.

He viewed courage on more of a moral idea, not as something that can be proved with a weapon. An iconic character in the novel known for her split personality and great moral courage is Mrs. Dubose. She was a morphine

addict and was addicted to morphine as a painkiller prescribed by her doctor for many years. Despite her being an old, frail lady, who could have just "make (made) things easier" by just continuing to take morphine as Atticus put it, she chose the other path contrary to popular beliefs.

Instead, she persevered, choosing to "die beholden to nothing and no one", showing her sheer determination and will to live. When Mrs Dubose bad-mouthed Atticus, Jem decided that the best way to settle things was to ruin Mrs Dubose's camellias. Jem believed that he was demonstrating courage in defending Atticus though when Atticus learned of this stunt, Atticus wanted Jem to read to Mrs. Dubose not only as a punishment for his misdeeds, but he also wanted to show Jem what true courage really was.

He wanted to show Jem that a courageous person is not "a man with a gun in his hand", and that Mrs. Dubose was an excellent example and Atticus looks up to her despite her prejudiced remarks against him such as "nigger-lover". When Jem and Scout was reading to her, they were terrified of her "undulating lips" with "chords of saliva" dripping out of her mouth and that it had a "separate existence of its own". What the children failed to see in the beginning was what lied underneath those gruesome series of withdrawal fits - true moral courage. Upon the death of Mrs.

Dubose, Atticus also mentioned that "she won", not by having a gun in her hands, but with her sheer will power and determination. He hoped that Jem and Scout would be able to respect such a courageous old lady she was. Harper Lee also did not choose a principled character such as Miss Maudie in the portrayal of such courage, but instead used Mrs. Dubose to portray courage instead. This made Mrs. Dubose an interesting and outstanding

character with contrasting characteristics in the eyes of the reader. Lee also indirectly trying to show that there is goodness in everyone, despite their evil natures.

Lee tries to present Miss Dubose as a character that when we first encounter her that we dislike her foremost characteristics and catty principals but when we learn her true circumstances the reader begins to be able to show empathy towards the complicated character Harper Lee creates. Another character that portrayed different kinds of courage is Jem. However, his perceptions of courage changed throughout the course of chapters 1 - 16, as he began to mature. Lee tries to present Jem at the start as an innocent young child oblivious to the prejudices and changing relationships around him.

Though as he matures Lee starts presenting Jem as a character that will grow in to a man very like his father and at his current age struggles to understand the different events going on around him. In the beginning of the novel, Scout mentioned that Jem had " never declined a dare" in his entire life, which exhibits his childish perceptions of courage, that courage was merely accepting dares presented to him. In addition, he " loved his honour more than his head", which exhibits his stupidity rather than his bravery, because this shows that he accepts dares blindly and never thought about his safety nor consequences of performing a dare.

His new-found 'bravery' led him to commit ridiculous acts of 'courage', such as running up to the Radley's Place, touching it, and running back because he " wanted Dill to know once and for all that he wasn't scared of anything". This was obviously not respected and tolerated by adults in Maycomb,

evident from Atticus' response to the children causing a ruckus in the Radley's Place by warning Jem to "mind your (his) own business and let the Radleys mind theirs". However, upon entering adolescence, Jem began to show acts of moral courage.

Such an example is when Dill was found hiding under Scout's bed when he fled home, and his first reaction was to inform Atticus, as Dill "ought to let your (his) mother know where you are (he was)". This was a turning point in Jem's maturity in his perception of courage, as he was able to put himself in the shoes of Dill's parents and he knows that they will be worried. Showing moral courage, he "broke the remaining code of childhood", and even though it was not in favour of Dill and Scout, he stood up and related to Atticus about the issue.

From this occasion, we can draw similarities with Atticus, who went against the ordinary and what was deemed 'popular' by the Maycomb community, and took up the trial to defend a Black man, Tom Robinson, just like how Jem went against Dill and Scout to do what is right. This brings us to understand that moral courage is having the courage to do what is right, and not what is popular, even though it might anger those around you. Another character which illustrates forms of courage in this novel is Atticus. Atticus is a principled lawyer who was a role model in the novel.

Despite being called "nigger-lover" by many people in Maycomb, he still had the moral courage to take up the Tom Robinson case and defend Tom Robinson. He even mentioned that he would not be able to tell Jem and Scout "to not do anything" anymore should he give up on the trial case. This shows his determination to continue with the trial "Real courage" is when

you fight for what is right regardless of whether you win or lose. Atticus Finch defines "real courage" and demonstrates it several times throughout the novel, in addition to the lessons that he teaches his children.

He shows them mainly in the long period of time during Tom Robinson's case. It first started when Atticus took the case. He went against Maycomb, a generally prejudice town, in order to defend Tom. He understood that taking the case would make him an object of ridicule and that no one would forgive him for believing in a black man's word rather than a white man's. Even his own sister expresses disapproval of his decision, practically telling him he was bringing disgrace on the family.

But, no matter how much his reputation suffered, he did not change his mind. Standing up for his morals and ethics was more important than what people thought about him. Atticus knows he will not win the case and like Mrs. Dubose in her battle against morphine, he is "licked" before he begins. Atticus's strong sense of morality and justice motivates him to defend Tom Robinson with determination, and giving it all he has got. He shows this when he says, "Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try and win. He wants the people of Maycomb to hear the truth about Tom, "That boy may go to the chair, but he's not going till the truth's told." In conclusion for his character, Lee presents Atticus as having praiseworthy courage and behaviour, in many instances, throughout the story. Not by fighting or killing, but by standing up for what he believed in a civilized and determined way. His strongest motivation, however, were his kids. He wanted to be a good example to his kids and instil in them a strong sense of moral values.

One time he was asked by Scout why he had taken a case he knew he wasn't going to win and he responded by saying, " For a number of reasons. The main one is, if I didn't I couldn't hold up my head in town, I couldn't represent this county in the legislature, I couldn't even tell you or Jem not to do something again. " In other words, he would not have been able to preach to his kids about justice and standing up for what one believes when he himself had not stood for what he believed in. But, most of all he does it to uphold his self-worth.

He wants to know that there's no reason for him to hang his head in shame and shy away when he's walking down the streets. He wants to live without regrets, and to him that's the only way you can say you are really living. We also see some examples of both physical and moral courage from some of the minor characters like Cal and Miss Maudie. When the children spotted the rabid dog lose on the street, they first run to Cal showing how they believe in Cal to be physically brave enough to deal with the problem.

Though we see Cal shows the children a different type of bravery when she runs to tell everyone putting aside her own fears to help others. The children may see this as physical bravery though for Cal this action wasn't something she had to make herself do to show others how brave she was, this was a moral decision as she felt she needed to warn other people of the danger they were all in. We also see moral bravery in the form of Miss Maudie when her house is burnt down.

When Jem asks Miss Maudie is she upset she answers ' No... she could rebuild a house with more garden. This must have taken moral courage to answer as not that long ago she lost all her possessions and her house. She

was totally homeless with nothing to her name. Through this we see what strong character Lee builds throughout the novel and we also see how Lee presents the town of Maycomb because even with its built up prejudices everyone that night was out to help a neighbour. From all these examples of courage the one I would most admire would be Atticus. When Atticus is offered the Tom Robinson case he must know what the townspeople will think of him.

Atticus will have realised that he will go from being a respected member of the community to a man that everyone knew as a 'nigger lover.' Atticus also had to consider the lives of his two children and what he would be putting them through as many people would see them as easy targets for bullying and as ways to get at Atticus. Though from the scenes in the novel that we see Atticus displaying courage we only once see it being a physical courage. Atticus displays true values and courage and is very honourable and tries to pass this on to his children.

In conclusion even the most subtle act of courage makes a difference; to be courageous it doesn't take to be powerful or to be intelligent. Courage is just doing what you are afraid of. That's why telling the truth instead of denying it it's an act of courage, or being in minority and say no. Also making changes it takes to have courage to do it. In the end only the kind of courage that gets you from one moment to the other is the courage that really matters. Therefore, it can be depicted in Harper Lee's novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" that courage is a prominent characteristic among the people in Maycomb.