

To kill a mockingbird paper



“... 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 man is trash. ” This is a key quotation, which demonstrates racial prejudice in the novel “ To Kill a Mockingbird”, by Harper Lee. The author uses different techniques to make the theme of prejudice clear. The setting of “ To Kill a Mockingbird” was in Alabama, in the fictional Maycomb County, in the 1930’s.

During this time black people suffered a great deal of discrimination from white people. This was the result of the American Civil War, which took place almost 100 years before. This caused a lot of racial tension and antagonism amongst black and white people. Despite the racial tension, there were no immediate signs of prejudice, until later on in the book. At the beginning, the author tries to give the impression Maycomb County is a peaceful and tranquil town, by creating a laid-back and slow-moving atmosphere.

A quote which shows Maycomb County’s atmosphere at the beginning of the book is: “ People moved slowly then. They ambled across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, took their time about everything. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry... ” This forces the reader to have a very positive perception of Maycomb County, by the author creating a very pleasant atmosphere. By the atmosphere being extremely slow-moving at the beginning of the book, it indicates that the residents of Maycomb County did not suffer from any stress.

The mood of the passage emphasizes on the town being quiet and somewhat dull, because an occurrence will take place that will change the entire town of Maycomb. This creates a false impression for the reader, as it seems that everyone in the town gets along with each other, when in actual fact some of them don't. The reason why this time is appropriate, to demonstrate the theme of prejudice is because there was a lot more racial tension during the 1930's. As the result of the story taking place less than 100 years after the American Civil War.

Harper Lee has deliberately chosen to have the setting of the book long after the American Civil War to make the theme of prejudice clear, by emphasizing the fact that people still had a great deal of prejudice, even in the 1930's. This shows how strong prejudice is, in the minds of Maycomb County's residents, which is something that has been embedded in the cultural of the town. During the beginning of the book, I got the impression Maycomb was a very tranquil town, so I was extremely shocked when I realised it wasn't.

The use of first person narrative allows the reader to experience the story from Scout's point of view. Six year old Jean Louise " Scout" Finch is the daughter of Atticus Finch, who sits on the Alabama State Legislature and acts as Maycomb County's leading attorney. The author has deliberately used first person narrative as Scout is completely innocent and naive; therefore she has no discrimination against blacks, as she is very young. By having Calpurnia, a black servant in the Finch's house, Scout has got accustomed to a black person's presence, and accepted her as a family member.

The reader can hear the story from an unbiased and unprejudiced point of view, as a result of experiencing the story from a young girl's eyes: Naw Jem, I think there's just one kind of folks. Folks. " This shows that Scout is quite mature, as she understands Atticus' belief that all humans must be accepted and treated equally. It also shows that she is extremely decisive, opinionated and certainly not narrow-minded. Despite the strong influence of Aunt Alexandra's racist and prejudiced view towards others, her standards are not present in Scout.

This indicates that Scout recognizes hypocrisy and injustice in her elders, and gives an accurate impression of what Scout will be like when she is older. It becomes more apparent throughout the duration of the book that she does not carry the derogative stereotypes and double standards that the majority of the town carries. This is not very surprising, considering that Scout is the daughter of Atticus. He believes that people should examine who people are and where they come from, and should not make any judgements based on race or social circumstances.

This is a view that has been clearly passed onto Scout from her father. This forces the reader to draw up a conclusion of Scout's character, that she has blossomed into a broad minded person, more like her father. I personally thought that the use of first person narrative successfully gave the book more depth, as it gave me a greater understanding of how Scout actually felt, as she was able to express her feelings. Harper Lee wrote the story as an adult looking back on her childhood.

This is effective as the author can give her opinion on experiences in her childhood, that she didn't really understand when she was younger. " But I never figured out how Atticus knew I was listening, and it was not until many years later that I realised he wanted me to hear every word he said. " This shows that when the author was writing the book, she actually had a much greater understanding about what had gone on than she did at the time. By using the technique of flashbacks, it allowed the author to express her views on certain events that had took place years before.

This shows that she knew what she was talking about. I think that Harper Lee used the technique of flashbacks very effectively and it helped to add more emotion to the story. I also thought the technique allowed her to make the theme of prejudice clear, as she can express how she personally felt about prejudice throughout the book. Harper Lee uses Atticus to make the theme of prejudice clear. An example of this is: " If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from their point of view.

Harper Lee has used Atticus to make the theme of prejudice clear, as he has built a whole value system around the idea that a person must examine and respect who people are and where they come from. This includes the most obnoxious characters like Bob Ewell and Mrs. Dubose. When others would rather forget about these people, Atticus takes the time to understand them. This is a value Atticus passes on to his children. Atticus is also a consistent man, as a result of behaving in the same manner when in the courtroom and on the streets. The code of conduct that he maintains for himself remains the same no matter what situation he is placed in.

This is the reason why he feels he is responsible to take Tom Robinson's case, and defend him to the best of his abilities. Tom Robinson is a black man, who has been wrongly accused of raping a white woman, Mayella Ewell. He suffers enormously due to the stereotypes that society has had for years towards black people, which becomes more apparent towards the end of the trial when he is finally accused of being guilty of raping Mayella Ewell. All these aspects of his character make the theme of prejudice clear, by him displaying acceptance towards all types of people, and strong views against prejudice.

The witnesses for the state... have presented themselves to you gentlemen, to this court, in the cynical confidence that their testimony would not be doubted, confident that you gentlemen would go along with them on the assumption – the evil assumption – that all negroes lie, that all are basically immoral beings, that all negro men are not to be trusted around women, an assumption one associates with minds of their calibre. Which, gentlemen, we know is in itself a lie as black Tom Robinson's skin...

You know the truth, the truth is this: some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, some Negro men cannot be trusted around women, black or white. But this is a truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men... In the name of God, do your duty. " Harper Lee also uses Atticus to make the theme of prejudice clear, in the courtroom. The quote shows that Atticus tries to appeal to the jury's sense of dignity, and in putting together the facts of the case; he stresses the simplicity of the evidence, which show that the facts point towards Tom Robinson's innocence.

It later becomes apparent that he doesn't really believe that the jury will set Tom free; even though he does hope they will, as evidenced by the manner in which he says "In the name of God, believe him," under his breath, at the end of his final speech. All he can hope for is to leave an impression upon the town, by exposing the truth for all to see. By doing this he is making the theme of prejudice clear, as he effectively demonstrates every jury member and the majority of the people in the town minds have been clouded by racial prejudice, which in turn, leads to Tom Robinson's unfair trial.

This means that they cannot differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. They do not take the time to understand Tom, but fear and despise him unfairly. I felt Atticus was the voice of reason in the town of Maycomb, and in the novel. I also thought that Atticus helped to bridge the gap between black and white people, by trying to defend a black person. By doing this he abolished some people's prejudiced views towards black people. The author also uses Jem, Scout's older brother, to make the theme of prejudice clear.

Since Jem is older than Scout, he is where Scout gets a lot of her views about prejudice from. At the start of the novel Jem has prejudiced views towards Boo Radley, as a result of him being a recluse. "Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom." This indicates there is prejudice shown towards someone just because they don't like appearing in public. As a result of Boo Radley preferring to stay indoors people make assumptions that he is evil, and think that he must be dangerous, when he is probably quite a harmless person. I was surprised by the amount of people that showed prejudice towards Boo Radley.

Even though racial prejudice is the main theme of “ To Kill a Mockingbird” the author also includes other forms of prejudice throughout the novel. One of them is prejudice against women: “ Miss Maudie can’t serve on a jury because she is a woman... ” “ You mean women in Alabama can’t...? ” The author has chosen to include this in the novel, to emphasize the fact that the majority of people are extremely prejudiced. It shows that women were still considered, in the eyes of the law, as inferior to men. I felt this quotation was disgraceful, since women nowadays are meant to be equal to men, and they are allowed to sit in juries.

Scout does not fully understand the prejudice she will have to endure and face, when older, as she has been treated exactly the same as her brother. Throughout the book the author uses symbolism to represent several different characters as mockingbirds, as they do nothing but good. One of these characters is Tom Robinson. When Tom Robinson is in the courtroom, he is questioned by Mr. Gilmer about what his motive was, when he helped Miss Mayella Ewell: ““ Yes suh. I felt right sorry for her, she seemed to try more’n the rest of ’em - ‘ ‘ You felt sorry for her, you felt sorry for her? Mr. Gilmer seemed ready to rise to the ceiling. ”

This quote effectively shows the racial discrimination faced by Tom Robinson. By simply being black he suffers enormously, by paying for the derogative stereotypes that Maycomb County has had for years, which had been embedded, deep into the culture of the town. Despite the fact that Tom Robinson does no harm, by feeling genuine sympathy for Miss Ewell, the majority of white people see this as a crime and not Tom Robinson simply just showing compassion towards Miss Ewell.

The idea that a black person could feel sympathy for a white person refutes all of Maycomb County's assumptions, therefore making Tom's comment extremely provocative in the courtroom. Black life is perceived to be, by nature, inferior to white life. The notion of an inferior black man seeing something more inadequate in a white person's life, than his own subverts everything that the town's social framework is based upon. In society every class looks down upon the class below it, so therefore black people are perceived to be inferior, compared with everyone else.

This is a strong view that white people have in Maycomb, which causes Tom Robinson's completely harmless comment to be wrongly turned against him, in the trial. This is a good example of symbolism to represent Tom Robinson as a mockingbird, as he does no harm to anyone, but he himself, is harmed by the prejudice people around him. I thought that Harper Lee effectively used Tom Robinson as a symbol of a mockingbird, by reinforcing how strong deep-rooted racism is within Maycomb.

I also felt extremely shocked whenever people referred to Tom Robinson as a "nigger" or a "boy", as I was not accustomed to hearing derogative language like that, used in the book. Atticus also explains the symbol of the mockingbird: "Remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird..." I asked Miss Maudie about it "Your father's right", she said "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy... but sing their hearts out for us." This shows the reason why it is wrong to kill a mockingbird, as they do nothing but sing.

The mockingbird symbol actually symbolizes prejudice against people who are perceived as harmful, but in actual fact are probably harmless. The author has included symbolism in “To Kill a Mockingbird” to make the theme of prejudice clear, and to convey a very subtle message, that prejudice is unacceptable. I thought symbolism was used very effectively, as it gave me a much greater understanding of prejudice. In “To Kill a Mockingbird” the author uses a number of different language techniques to make her themes clear. One of these techniques is the use of varying dialects of different characters.

An example of this is when Calpurnia varies her speech, depending on whether she is around black or white people: “They’s my comp’ny” This quotation shows that Calpurnia uses informal language when in the presence of black people, whereas around white people, she uses much more formal language: “Nowhere. Let’s see now, who taught me my letters?” This is effective in showing that black people are expected to speak in an inferior manner, and white people are expected to use formal dialect. This successfully indicates prejudice on both sides, as they don’t want to change.

Prior to Calpurnia talking in an informal manner, I had only experienced her talking properly, in the presence of the children, before the incident at the church. When I eventually discovered the truth, I was as surprised as the children to see her talking in an unfamiliar way, as it was not expected of her. Calpurnia uses formal language, when in the presence of white people, to show respect towards them. She also does this to show that black people are in fact quite intelligent and are certainly not the derogative stereotype

that the white people perceive the black people to be; as they think they are an inferior race.

Overall, I think that Harper Lee's novel was extremely effective, by making me a lot more aware of prejudice, which happens in the world. I even learned about prejudices that I never knew existed before reading the book. In my opinion, the technique of symbolism was most effective, since it brought out the good in people, in an overwhelmingly prejudice place. The author has successfully shown me that a lot of prejudice existed in the world during the 1930's and probably still exists in the minds of many people today.