

**PG SEM II
CC-5
FILM & LITERATURE
TO KILL A MOCKING BIRD**

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Text

Link:<https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=YW5udXJpc2xhbWljc2Nob29sLm9yZ3xzaXN0ZXIta2F0ZWx5bnxneDo2NjVmZmE1NzNjNjc4NWM>

Summary and Analysis of Epigraph

A good part of this story's brilliance lies in the fact that it's told from a child's point-of-view. Through Scout's eyes, Lee is able to present the story objectively. By having an innocent little girl make racial remarks and regard people of color in a way consistent with the community, Lee provides an objective view of the situation. Harper Lee proves through the telling of the story that she was also once a child.

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Themes

1. The Coexistence of Good and Evil

The most important theme of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is the book's exploration of the moral nature of human beings—that is, whether people are essentially good or essentially evil. The novel approaches this question by dramatizing Scout and Jem's transition from a perspective of childhood innocence, in which they assume that people are good because they have never seen evil, to a more adult perspective, in which they have confronted evil and must incorporate it into their understanding of the world. As a result of this portrayal of the transition from innocence to experience, one of the book's important subthemes involves the threat that hatred, prejudice, and ignorance pose to the innocent: people such as Tom Robinson and Boo Radley are not prepared for the evil that they encounter, and, as a result, they are destroyed.

The plot outlines Scout's moral education and the theme of how children are educated—how they are taught to move from innocence to adulthood—recurs throughout the novel. This theme is explored most powerfully through the relationship between Atticus and his children, as he devotes himself to instilling a social conscience in Jem and Scout.

2. The Existence of Social Inequality

Differences in social status are explored largely through the overcomplicated social hierarchy of Maycomb, the ins and outs of which constantly baffle the

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children. The relatively well-off Finches stand near the top of Maycomb's social hierarchy, with most of the townspeople beneath them. Ignorant country farmers like the Cunninghams lies below the townspeople, and the white trash Ewells rest below the Cunninghams. But the black community in Maycomb, despite its abundance of admirable qualities, squats below even the Ewells, enabling Bob Ewell to make up for his own lack of importance by persecuting Tom Robinson. These rigid social divisions that make up so much of the adult world are revealed in the book to be both irrational and destructive. Lee uses the children's perplexity at the unpleasant layering of Maycomb society to critique the role of class status and, ultimately, prejudice in human interaction.

3. Prejudice

Discussions about prejudice in general, and racism in particular, are at the heart of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Conflicts over racism drive some of the most compelling and memorable scenes in the novel. Racial conflict causes the two dramatic deaths that occur in the story. On one level, *To Kill a Mockingbird* represents a simplistic and moralistic view of racial prejudice. White people who are racist are bad, and white people who are not racist are good. Atticus risks his reputation, his position in the community, and ultimately the safety of his children because he is not racist, and therefore good. Bob Ewell falsely accuses a black man of rape, spits on Atticus publicly, and attempts to murder a child because he is racist, and therefore bad.

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4. Law

Though the trial of Tom Robinson takes up only about one tenth of the book, it represents the narrative centre around which the rest of the novel revolves. This trial seems intended as an indictment of the legal system, at the least as it exists of within the town of Maycomb. Procedurally, the judge carries out the trial properly. Tom Robinson's guilty verdict exemplifies the limitations of the law, and asks the reader to reconsider the meaning of the word "fair" in the phrase "a fair trial." While Atticus understands that the legal system is flawed, he firmly believes in the legal process.

5. Lying

There are two lies at the heart of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Mayella Ewell says that Tom Robinson raped her, and Heck Tate says that Bob Ewell accidentally stabbed himself. The first lie destroys an innocent man who occupies a precarious social position in Maycomb because of his race. The second lie prevents the destruction of an innocent man who occupies a precarious social position in Maycomb because of his extreme reclusiveness.

Symbols

1. Mockingbirds

The title of *To Kill a Mockingbird* has very little literal connection to the plot, but it carries a great deal of symbolic weight in the book. In this story of innocents destroyed by evil, the "mockingbird" comes to represent the idea of innocence. Thus, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is to destroy innocence. This connection between the novel's title and its main theme is made explicit several times in the novel: after Tom Robinson is shot, Mr. Underwood compares his death to "the senseless

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slaughter of songbirds,” and at the end of the book Scout thinks that hurting Boo Radley would be like “shootin’ a mockingbird.”

2. Boo Radley

As the novel progresses, the children’s changing attitude toward Boo Radley is an important measurement of their development from innocence toward a grown-up moral perspective. At the beginning of the book, Boo is merely a source of childhood superstition. As he leaves Jem and Scout presents and mends Jem’s pants, he gradually becomes increasingly and intriguingly real to them. At the end of the novel, he becomes fully human to Scout, illustrating that she has developed into a sympathetic and understanding individual. In saving Jem and Scout from Bob Ewell, Boo proves the ultimate symbol of good.

Style of Mocking Bird

The style of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is generally humorous and conversational, but also deceptively sophisticated, which reflects the mix of straightforward storytelling and complicated ideas. Language and speech play significant roles throughout the book. Scout and Jem misuse words, guess at the definition of words they don’t understand, and remark on their father’s “last-will-and-testament” diction and the elegant sentences of Miss Maudie. Language both reveals and conceals, as when Calpurnia’s grammar becomes “erratic” when she’s furious, or Dill tells lies to get the kids out of trouble. Atticus, a lawyer, trips his children up in their own narratives. The contrast between what people say and what they mean is echoed by the style of the story itself, which conceals adult subjects in the apparently simple story of children.

Use of Language

The novel also includes a great deal of Southern vernacular such as “ain’t,” “I reckon,” and “yonder” to show the ways the characters all belong to the same

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community, yet occupy different positions due to class and education. The Finches tend to use long words (such as “provocation”), signifying their education, while Calpurnia speaks like the Finches in their home, but adopts a more vernacular style at her church. When Scout questions her about “having command of two languages,” Calpurnia says “folks don’t like to have somebody around knowin’ more than they do.” The least educated characters are unable to shift speaking styles in this way.