

The Main Themes in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*

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The Main Themes in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*

The themes of *To Kill a Mockingbird* are relevant in modern society. People are still struggling with the same questions that Lee has raised in the novel, such as what constitutes justice and equality, and what responsibilities individuals have when they witness injustice. Discrimination can lead to dire consequences, and the novel clearly shows why society must put an end to it. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not a classic growing-up novel, but rather a complex story that explores the themes of good and evil, justice and law, and racial and sexist prejudice, along with children's growing up.

Exploration of the Main Themes in the Novel

The author uses the first-person perspective of a child to define the innocent view of the society that is trying to suppress them. The novel is narrated by Scout, who is six years old at the beginning of the story (Lee, 1960). Over the course of the story, Scout grows up, and her earlier assumption that the world is a fair place is torn to shreds. Therefore, the most intense themes of the story, including prejudice, justice, and moral misunderstandings, are portrayed through Scout's eyes.

Growing Up

Children have to grow up in the story both physically and mentally because their maturity comes from learning the truth about the society that they have been living in. Scout and her brother, Jem, get wiser while overcoming pure child innocence (Hamimed, 2025). They begin to connect themselves with the outsiders' community in their small town. Children learn that even legal questions may contradict the principles that the society claims to follow. As Scout and Jem are learning about the rules governing the world, they open their hearts and minds and start to love Boo Radley, one of the community's outsiders whom they were terrified of at first (Lee, 1960). Scout bonds with Boo Radley, later coming to the realization that she is an outsider in the society herself.

As the plot develops, children are gradually exposed to the difficult and hypocritical world, which they never knew about earlier, staying behind the protection of the walls of their father's house. Errors of judgment that children make help them confidently establish the concept of maturation (Boen et al., 2022). Scout and Jem are confused by the reasoning and motives behind the actions of adults. By the end of the story, children learn to distinguish the causes of adults' behaviors.

Justice and Law

The principles and codes that were shouted from every corner in the town of Maycomb, where the story unfolds, were not actually followed by everyone. At least, the laws were contradictory for the outsiders of the community, people of color. Children discover that society depends on legalities, but these laws are being broken by the same people because they follow the hidden social codes (Lee, 1960). While the law must protect the mockingbirds from the evil and injustice, the vulnerable people, who are symbolized by these birds, become victims again and again (Lee, 1960). At the same time, children are raised with a belief in strictly following the law and religious principles.

In the novel, the reader can clearly see how standing by the rules only works in one direction. When white people in Maycomb's community need help, they immediately receive it. However, when Boo Radley behaves loudly in the public square, he gets arrested. When the law comes to deal with people of color, the society assumes they are guilty. Despite the circumstances, so-called 'justice' is only applicable to white people. In the end, in gratitude for saving Scout and Jem, the lawyer and sheriff break the law to save Boo Radley from jail (Lee, 1960). However, the law is not working for protecting black people equally, even in the modern world, more than seven decades after the book was published (Agan, 2024). The example with the children being attacked also shows that the law could not protect their lives either, which prompts that the law is not an equivalent to justice.

Racial Prejudice

Scout and Jem were still convinced that society is driven by kindness when Tom's trial happened. After it, children came to the realization that there is much evil hidden within people, and they both had to face the reality of racism. Calpurnia, a housekeeper who looks after the siblings, is a black woman. She is somewhat of a mother figure for them, and Atticus treats her with respect. On the other hand, Tom Robinson suffers from racial prejudice as he is charged with the rape of Mayella Ewell, a white woman, without any evidence.

Atticus quickly learns that Tom was convicted based solely on his skin color. Jem's and Scout's father reveals the truth to them, saying that the white man always wins in courts because it is the word of a white man against a black man (Lee, 1960). This represents how discrimination by race can define the decision of the jury. Bob Ewell portrays racial prejudice in the story, while Atticus represents justice (Dare, 2023). The social hierarchy of Maycomb is not merciful to the black people, placing them in a very low position. Scout's character is evolving through time, and she has grown from someone who should have been prejudiced to someone who is ready to put up a fight to stand for justice (Kowalska, 2023). Black people in the book are innocent, but are demolished or hurt with only one reason behind it, which is that the Maycomb community is driven by prejudice. The society of the town does not want to determine who is truly in the wrong.

Moral Complexity

Lee presents various complex, morally wise decisions throughout the story. Atticus risks his reputation, position in the town social hierarchy, and even his children's safety. He does all of that because of his bravery and strong sense of what is right and wrong (Dare, 2023). He will later on even break the law for Boo Radley to bring justice. In opposition, there is Bob Ewell, who accuses Tom of rape only because of his race and threatens to kill Atticus's children. Ewell is not completely a villain, just like Atticus is not completely a hero.

To Kill a Mockingbird reveals crucial social, religious, and individual moral values. Although most of the people of Maycomb look up to Atticus for being respectful to everyone and standing up for a black person, the community does not fancy borrowing his beliefs.

Conclusion

To Kill a Mockingbird is a first-person novel, which shows the struggles of growing up, as Scout faces the ugly side of the world: evil, injustice, and prejudice. By the end of the story, she matures into a girl who sees the society as it is, with good and evil, justice and injustice, and everything in between. Atticus shows his children how important it is to respect one another, without regard for race, gender, or any other quality that might be different from what is seen as normal in the community. The novel is ultimately about growing up, but in another way. It is in the form of inner growth and gaining courage to fight discrimination that will destroy society if it is not stopped.

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