CONTENTS

TO KILL A MOCKING BIRD

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THE NARRATOR - JEAN LOUISE FINCH (SCOUT)

1

Written in 1960, the story is actually set nearly 30 years earlier and related by a six year old girl, less well-behaved than her brother, Jem, and (hence) easier for readers to identify with. An impulsive, hot-tempered tomboy, she gets into all kinds of trouble, often because she sees everything, quite literally, in black and white. She is also rebellious and always stands her ground, fighting for it, if necessary. Scout constantly falls out with Calpurnia but once she starts school, their relationship slowly improves, with compromise on both sides, and she eventually tries to live up to Calpurnia's high standards: there was some skill involved in being a girl. Similarly, although to a lesser extent, she is influenced by Aunt Alexandra whom she finds somewhat formidable.

Scout idolises her father and her brother, so at first, they appear to have virtually no faults. She and Jem rarely mix with other children but seem popular at school where Scout is automatically a spokeswoman. They are usually content with each other's company, despite squabbling, but start to grow apart as they get older. He bullies her, infuriating her with his maddening superiority; at times he is positively allergic to my presence. However, when he is attacked, she feels she has waited ten forevers, she is so anxious to find out if he is all right. Scout is warm-hearted but can be thoughtless, showing up Walter Cunningham; she is also generous and kind; particularly with Dill. She is the first of the three to worry about making a game of the Radley drama but her panic gives way to remorse by the end of the book. Nonetheless, her natural empathy has grown with her so she knows instinctively how sensitively she needs to treat Boo Radley in order not to frighten him.

Scout's cleverness almost proves her undoing when she starts school and although she had never looked forward to anything more in my life, it nearly ruins her love of learning. Her teacher, Miss Caroline, is not impressed and will have to try and undo the damage. This narrow-minded attitude shows how children can become prejudiced from an early age, a process they rarely question. Conversely, they are apprehensive about their teacher because she is a stranger - from a different part of Alabama. She certainly seems to have a lot to learn but Scout is told off for explaining the Cunningham's situation. The child is also astute enough to realise why the teacher's choice of story will not appeal to the class, being outside their experience. However, she is shown to have matured because in Third Grade, she is aware that Current Events can divide the town children from those from the country, since the latter do not have access to newspapers. It is also clear to her that though the class condemns Hitler's deeds, this makes their own beliefs no less prejudiced; Cecil Jacobs does not understand why Jews are being persecuted because, after all, they are white.

As for bravery, she is more curious about the 'snake' in her room than scared, and volunteers to accompany Jem to the dreadful Mrs Dubose's. Atticus doesn't want them getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun is his hand but it is his shooting the rabid dog which makes them appreciate his bravery. Scout's pride is often her undoing and because of the trial, she feels she has to defend the family honour. However, while still so young, she learns to conquer her pride, in contrast to those adults whose ingrained intolerance leads to a verdict of guilty and condemns Tom Robinson to death.

EXERCISE:
Pick one instance of Scout and Jem falling out which clearly illustrates 'growing up and growing apart'.

ATTICUS

2

The name ‘Atticus’ derives from ancient Greece’s Attica, whose citizens were known for their refinement and elegance. The two children use his first name (or ‘sir’) which reflects their unusual relationship; he often treats them as equals and always insist they be told the truth. He is not demonstrative, ruffling their hair is his one gesture of affection but he calls Scout ‘Baby’ and ‘Hon’, allowing her to sit on his lap. She and Jem find him ‘satisfactory’; she says his attitude was one of 'courteous detachment’ and the relationship seems casual yet there is much mutual respect. There is no description of him, other than his age (about 50); he is a big man with black hair turning grey and who wears glasses, with little sight in his left eye. He does not actually appear until Chapter 3.

What is known comes from reports of what he has said and done on various occasions. The very first mention shows his diplomacy, when he solves the children’s disagreement by saying they are both right. He is rarely at a loss, vulnerable only where the children are concerned i.e. when he is facing the lynch mob or when persuaded by his sister to try and instil some ideas about ‘gentle breeding’ into them. He never went hunting, he did not play poker or fish or drink or smoke but is always smartly dressed. Strict, he keeps to a routine, rising early and exercises by walking to work, which is regarded as extremely odd. Scout has never seen or heard of anyone falling out with him and saw him scowl only at the mention of Hitler. She has never even noticed him sweat, except during the trial.

Atticus practises Christianity though he rarely preaches and his comments are frequently of a moral nature but rarely judgmental: I do my best to love everybody. However, he is prone to be stubborn and holds himself aloof, cool and detached in person as he is in his profession as a lawyer. A figure of authority, highly respected by the community (to most of whom he is related), he is the epitome of a gallant Southern gentleman, if a rather quieter and more admirable version. His decision to defend Tom Robinson causes him to be reviled in every quarter, as if he has fallen from grace. During the trial, Atticus expects his children to behave with dignity, practising the self-control they have learned from visits to the terrifying Mrs Dubose. He himself shows considerable courage: rescuing Miss Maudie’s chair from the fire, shooting the rabid dog and facing up to the lynch mob. Reliable and steadfast, he is determined to do what he knows to be right and is always chivalrous and kind, as well as generous, paying for his younger brother’s education. He is moved by the generosity of others, like the payment in kind he receives from the black community even though Tom Robinson is found guilty.

Sometimes I think I’m a total failure as a parent is an admission which makes him more human, as does his dry wit and his impatience with his sister. He does not share the townspeople’s flaws: prejudice, hypocrisy and pride, and you may feel the disadvantage of such a saintly hero is that if he cannot succeed in overturning the forces of evil, what chance does the average person have? However, Atticus is seen at his most human when he agrees with Heck Tate to cover up the murder of Bob Ewell. This is rather contrived, especially as he first thinks that Jem did it and insists his son must face the consequences, but to be so distraught shows his great love for the children. A last minute moral dilemma, it is rather hastily solved by suggesting that Atticus, despite his belief in upholding the law (we trust him to do right), is so thankful that his children were saved by Boo Radley, he is too merciful to insist that the latter should stand trial.

EXERCISE:
Draw up a list of Atticus’ good and bad points.

JEM

3

Jem is the main illustration of the 'rites of passage' theme, starting off as a mischievous little boy, very like his sister, and maturing into a miniature of his father in Part II. He even uses Atticus' words: 'It's not time to worry yet'. One of the main threads of the story is the changing relationship between the two. Scout does not remember her mother, who died when she was two, but Jem evidently still misses her and needs to be on his own at such times. She does feel, however, that Calpurnia favours 'Mister Jem'. Fundamentally, brother and sister are very close; he is very protective and also proud of her. When they meet Dill, one of the first things Jem tells him is that she's 'been readin' ever since she was born', which also has the useful purpose of putting the rather boastful Dill in his place. But he is sensitive enough to make her shut up when the other boy is upset by questions about his father. Jem is always very courteous and ready to help others, from inviting Walter Cunningham to lunch to offering to clear Miss Maudie's garden after the fire.

As he grows older, however, discussing his good points sounds like a school report for the model student. When Dill runs away, he and Scout are horrified because Jem broke the remaining code of our childhood and tells Atticus. He rarely gets into trouble and when he does, for example, ruining Mrs Dubose's flowers, takes his punishment like a man. There are very few incidents when he misbehaves and he soon learns his lesson, seemingly wise beyond his years. After Dill tells him off for lighting matches under the tortoise shell, Jem is careful not to harm the earthworms when building the snow-man and tells Scout off for tormenting an insect. He is exceptionally mature for his age in the degree of thoughtfulness he displays; Scout notes he was becoming almost as good as Atticus at making you feel right when things go wrong when he is kind to her after the pageant. Similarly, he warns her not to upset Atticus when he is worried.

He is very intelligent and can see almost from the start the significance of Atticus' questioning Mayella about her face. Nevertheless, he is so sure that his father must win the case, defeat comes as an overwhelming shock though it makes him even more determined to work to put things right. He is also quite sensitive for a young boy and weeps for Boo Radley when his brother cuts him off communicating with them by cementing up the tree.

Neither he nor Scout seem to be particularly jealous of each other, though she does sometimes get left out of the games with Dill, though he is nearer her age than Jem's. The latter often bullies her and can be very condescending as he grows older, in a phase of self-conscious rectitude. It is a sign of her own maturity (plus Atticus' words of wisdom) that she recognises he is just being an older brother and tries not to take it personally. He is inclined to be boastful and, like Scout, has the usual ideas of what makes a brave Southern gentleman: he loved honour more than his head is how she explains his inability to refuse a dare. He is brave, however, choosing to face the unknown when retrieving his trousers from the Radleys', rather than incur his father's anger, a decision which Scout is too young to understand: Jem and I first began to part company. Yet he under-estimates Atticus, though when his father shoots the mad dog, he begins to understand his quiet brand of courage as well as the heroic nature of his work. With his own interest in the law, it seems that he is destined to follow in his father's footsteps.

EXERCISE:
Describe one situation which shows how much Jem cares about Scout.

DILL

4

Jem virtually credits Dill Harris with the start of the whole story so the reader has certain expectations but he does not exactly live up to them. On first meeting the children, he immediately tries to impress them with his full name and the information that he can read, telling them he won a Beautiful Child contest and went to the picture show twenty times with the money. Dill was a curiosity, is how Scout sums him up and his odd looks match his behaviour: he is shorter than her, although a year older, with a fat cherub face and his hair is snow-white with a cowlick which he has a habit of pulling, rather like a servant respectfully tugging his fore-lock. However, events are triggered by his strange longing, his fascination with the Radley house, starting when he dares Jem to sneak in and touch it. When he next visits, since the children enjoy re-enacting favourite stories and films, Jem decides to add the story of the Radleys to their repertoire of made-up dramas.

Something of an underdog himself, Dill's existence is completely unsettled though he appears resigned to the fact that his parents get on a lot better without me. His visits to Maycomb seem to be the highlight of his life and provide his only security i.e. when in the Finch household. He is well aware that Aunt Rachel, to whose house he is shipped off, is not the best person to look after a child. Not only is she a secret drinker, she has little interest in him, other than hoping he doesn't misbehave and have the neighbours talking.

He insists his family ain't mean but his need for love and security makes him reckless; when he runs away from home, his account turns it into a saga. Full of weird and wonderful ideas, always ready for adventure, he enjoys games of make-believe because he has a knack for acting. He is also anxious to plan far ahead, a secure future married to Scout and having children. He is quick-thinking enough to come up with reasons to get them out of trouble (not always successfully - suggesting strip-poker to account for Jem's torn trousers) and his extravagant lies must give him a sense of self-importance. When telling stories, his laugh was sudden and happy. His inventiveness is a form of escapism: his grandaddy was General Joe Wheeler and left him his sword but Scout understands the reasons, why Dill is not too concerned with telling the truth: Beautiful things floated around in his dreamy head.

Due to his insecurity, Dill finds cruelty as unbearable as Jem does. Despite the age difference, the two boys are very close; both of them prone to be sensitive; what he and Scout have in common is their enjoyment of make-believe and she calls him a pocket Merlin. He leaves the courtroom in tears: It made me sick, plain sick because he can't bear the way Tom Robinson is treated. Unlike Jem, who believes the legal system can be reformed, Dill's view is far more pessimistic. He is convinced the world is a terrible place and will never improve so he may as well be a clown and laugh all the time. Clowning is a standard means of defence for unhappy children, particularly those who are victimised. When Jem corrects him: Clowns are sad, it's folks that laugh at them, it is an unthinkingly apt description of Dill. Good-hearted, harmless, he is nevertheless one of the most pathetic characters in the book, inundated with presents rather than love and promises which never materialise, like the fishing-boat. Dill's unhappiness is one of the best illustrations of the author's belief in the importance of a secure family life.

EXERCISE:
How would Dill have described Bob Ewell's attack on his friends?

BOO RADLEY

5

Arthur Radley is seen only as a shadow and does not actually put in an appearance until the end of the book, coming to the children's rescue. He never says a word, except to whisper to Scout: Will you take me home? Nonetheless, his ghostly presence is felt throughout. Like Dill, he is mentioned on the first page and his family history follows shortly after; he is doomed because of the misery of that house. The Radleys are regarded as outsiders because they never mix with the townspeople, or attend church (Boo is not even allowed to go to his mother's funeral), although the father, a thin leathery man, is a strict Baptist, regarded as someone who took the word of God as his only law. Their doors are kept shut; unlike every other house, there are no screen doors so nobody can see inside.

Nearly the whole of the first part concerns the children's obsession with Boo Radley, plotting to make him reveal himself. They know he was imprisoned by his father because he got involved with a gang of Cunningham boys when he was a teenager (even the Maycomb gossips hadn't the nerve to tell tales to Mr Radley); they were hauled before the judge and sent to a state school as punishment. Mr Radley's pride forbids him to allow his son to undergo the same treatment, something which might have benefited him. Once the old man dies, an occasion accompanied by little sympathy but great pomp because of his social standing, the elder brother Nathan takes over as custodian. Boo's affection for the children is the only thing which tempts him outside: he covers Scout with a blanket on the night of the fire and even tries to sew up Jem's trousers. Although she is too young to work out where the gifts came from, later on, both she and Jem feel regret because they think they gave him nothing in return.

A malevolent phantom, regarded as a freak by the town, a whole mythology has sprung up around Boo Radley, as can be seen in Jem's gruesome description. But Miss Maudie recalls that he was a pleasant, polite boy and Atticus forbids the children to torment him. When Jem pictures him chained to a bed, he tries to explain that there were other ways of making people into ghosts. Now in his early forties, Boo is simple-minded and very child-like; his choice of gifts (gum, coins and so on) is the kind of things children like. They also include a spelling medal, which seems to indicate he must have been quite good at school. But he could be seen as dangerous because his actions are unpredictable, although he stabs Bob Ewell in order to save the children. The previous attack on his father is seen as justified because of Mr Radley's cruelty and the latter does not press charges but will not agree to send him to an asylum though he reckons it was all right to shut him up. He seems quite prepared to leave his son locked in the damp courthouse basement and the town council have to ask him to take Boo back or he could end up dead.

The ending of the story is perhaps not entirely satisfactory because all the ends are not properly tied up. However, were Boo Radley brought to trial for murder, he is so reclusive, he would undoubtedly undergo suffering which would be a far greater punishment than he deserves. It is suggested that he is in such poor health, he has not long to live.

EXERCISE:
Would you find Boo Radley innocent or guilty? Describe his trial, with Atticus defending him.

CALPURNIA; TOM ROBINSON, AND THE BLACK COMMUNITY

6

Calpurnia is indispensable to Atticus and he holds her in such high regard he flatly refuses to dismiss her on Aunt Alexandra's suggestion. She even takes on the responsibility of warning the neighbourhood, including the Radleys, about the mad dog. Looking after the children, she balances strictness with kindness, comforts them and entertains them although Scout resents the way she treats her precious Jem and feels she is picked on: I seldom pleased her and she seldom rewarded me. She constantly rebels against Calpurnia's tyrannical presence, though she knows Atticus will take the latter's side.

Calpurnia has very high standards and is horrified at Scout's behaviour when Walter Cunningham comes to dinner; her comments on his bad manners are even worse manners. Scout admits that Calpurnia's grammar was as good as anyone's in Maycomb County; ironically, the girl is told off by her teacher on first going to school for writing instead of printing, something Calpurnia has taught her. But she does miss Scout and as the girl grows up, she begins to understand that it is all done for her own good and her respect for Calpurnia's moral attitude encourages the child to follow her example.

Tom Robinson is also an admirable character, industrious, humble, intelligent, reliable, patient, compassionate, dignified and courteous. These qualities are revealed at his trial, and vouched for, for example, by his employer, Link Deas, gaining the reader's sympathy. It is still not enough to sway the jury into returning the rightful verdict of Not Guilty. One of the worse examples of prejudice is that: nobody liked Tom Robinson's answer when he admits he felt sorry for Mayella; it's as if he is found guilty in order to teach him his place.

The Black Community

Tom is shown as the epitome of all that is good about the black community, which is so very favourably depicted, it is rather idealistic, in the same way as Scout's idolised Atticus and Jem. Other than the hostile Lula, there is just Jim Hardy, who misses church and the quarrelsome Constance Jackson. Even though it rightly shows up much of the white community in a bad light, it is not very realistic. However, it acts as a counter-balance, emphasising how far-fetched and unjust the white society's prejudiced views can be since they condemn the whole of the black community for immorality, stupidity, laziness. These are, in fact, the sins of families like the Ewells and many others; Aunt Alexandra's husband is indolent and there is even an Idlers' Club. The women in particular feel threatened by the black community, that they cannot sleep safely in their beds for fear of assault.

Religion is one of the main differences between the two communities. Hypocrisy abounds in the white community, most of whom are far too full of pride and prejudice to act like true Christians or even entertain charitable thoughts. The black congregation rally round those in need, contributing money to help the Robinsons; they welcome the children to their church yet none of them would be allowed to join the white community at prayer. Even though they are poor, no other jobs being open to them other than the most menial, they take a pride in themselves and keep the building clean and tidy, as they do their homes (which are away from the town, beyond the dump), and tend to the cemetery. The church itself is called First Purchase, bought with the first earnings of freed slaves but even this building is not entirely theirs since white men gamble in it during the week.

EXERCISE:

Try to imagine Mayella Ewell on trial, with the whole situation reversed.

THE CUNINGHAMS, THE EWELLS

7

The Cunningham family represent the next to lowest strata of white society. Nearly as poor as the Ewells, they have enough pride in themselves to try and keep much better standards and are far higher up the moral scale. Their pride is such that they won't accept charity from the Government or the Church, they hadn't taken anything...off anybody since they migrated to the New World. Atticus' explanation stresses the Southern ideals of honour, though we may think them impractical. Their straitened circumstances are not due to fecklessness but because of circumstances: the Depression. Industrious and honourable, the extent of their poverty is quite horrifying. Scout's classmate Walter has no shoes and never brings any lunch; malnutrition has stunted his growth just as poverty has restricted his education since his father relies on him to help out on his farm.

A set breed of men, debts have to be settled as a matter of honour, although this is invariably done in kind; Atticus' legal fee is paid off with donations of firewood and vegetables. The family is also very loyal: once you had earned their respect they were for you tooth and nail. The main reason the verdict takes so long is because one of the jury members is a Cunningham and therefore supports Atticus. Ironically, prior to this, Walter Cunningham headed the lynch mob, disarmed only by Scout's innocuous reminder of what her father had done for him when he went to law. The Cunninghams are realistically portrayed, symbolising the respectable families stricken by the Depression, but they have their failings, chief amongst them prejudice, especially racism.

The Ewells
A dirty, diseased and illiterate family even Atticus calls absolute trash because they live like animals. His judgement of Mayella is more merciful because he pities her; she does make some effort, keeping herself clean and growing flowers. Otherwise, perhaps rather simplistically, they have no redeeming features whatsoever. Bob Ewell's son Burris puts in a brief appearance on Scout's first day at school: the filthiest human being I had ever seen. The father is on welfare, which he spends on drink, and gets away with hunting out of season because otherwise the children would starve. When he finally finds a job, he manages to get himself dismissed almost immediately for laziness. Racist to the point of being virtually unbalanced, he actually claims that the neat, clean houses of the black community devalue the filthy shack (formerly a Negro cabin) in which he lives, surrounded by filth and garbage. Foul-mouthed and arrogant, he is a drinker and a vicious bully; Tom Robinson hears him call Mayella a goddamn whore and he doesn't bother to seek medical help for her. She seems to be accustomed to him abusing her.

Even though he succeeds in having Tom Robinson found guilty, he hates Atticus for taking a black man's side against him and becomes obsessed with revenge. He dare not attack Atticus directly, other than to spit at him, and breaks into the Judge's house, thinking it is empty. But he harasses Helen Robinson who, as a black woman, is helpless to retaliate and finally attacks two defenceless young children. The portrait of Bob Ewell may be somewhat over the top, apart from giving a true picture of prejudice.

EXERCISE:
Imagine you are the Cunningham who tries to persuade the jury that Tom Robinson is not guilty.

AUNT ALEXANDRA, MISS MAUDIE AND MRS DUBOSE

8

Aunt Alexandra
Upright, uncompromising; her royal prerogative was to arrange, advise, caution and warn. Scout cannot escape her sharp-featured aunt's disapproval because, like Everest she was cold and there. Undemonstrative and highly critical, she is snobbish and prejudiced and does not even approve of her brother, making her feelings clear about the trial (according to Jem): Atticus was disgracin' the family. He finds her constantly irritating but has called upon her for help, to look after his children. Aunt Alexandra is eventually seen to have her good points - besides being an excellent cook. She is loyal to her brother and shows she cares about him, telling Miss Maudie: it tears him to pieces, and the children; Scout goes from being called 'a problem' to 'darling' after Bob Ewell's attack. Hearing about Tom Robinson's death, she puts on a brave face at the tea party, displaying such dignity that her niece immediately does her best to act the same way.

Miss Maudie
Another excellent cook, the Finch's neighbour seems to become almost part of the family, like a grandmother, although she is not that old: You're the very best lady I know, Scout tells her, having got to know her better when Jem and Dill leave her out of their games. She thinks the world of the children and lets them play in her garden; she always has time for them and is a very good influence. They have a lot of respect for her and often seek her advice. Note, however, although she is said to take no interest in their private lives, later they apparently inspire a 'lively and cordial interest'. She is philosophical and humorous, taking everything in her stride, even the fire. She can be waspish and comments on the unpleasant remarks at the tea party: His food doesn't stick going down, pointing out the hypocrisy of criticising Atticus whilst making the most of his hospitality. Unlike the other Maycomb ladies, she is neither snobbish nor prejudiced.

Mrs Henry Lafayette Dubose
The meanest old woman who ever lived, although the complete opposite of Atticus, is in a similar situation as he is during the trial; she cannot hope to defeat death but she does at least have the courage and determination to stick to what she believes is right and retains her dignity and self-respect. She is incredibly offensive towards him, yet he calls her: the bravest person I ever knew. Her lies and her evil tongue incense Jem so much he smashes up her garden and Atticus punishes him by making him go and read to her each afternoon, though later, he rewards the children for agreeing to go. Jem learns self-control, resisting the temptation to react to continual insults and displays of bad temper. Like a true gentleman, he lives up to his father and is courteous to her because she is a sick old lady. Scout shows courage and her affection for Jem in forcing herself to accompany him; they both learn the importance of tolerance.

Mrs Dubose is particularly obnoxious and her dreadful behaviour contrasts so strongly with that of the Finches it makes the reader even more sympathetic towards them. Being in constant pain and close to death, she is far more outspoken than most of the townspeople. When she makes her prejudices clear; she is voicing their thoughts and with showing how deeply, and unjustly, black people are despised, it sets the scene for the trial and its outcome.

EXERCISE:
Are all these characters vital to the plot? Which is the most indispensable?

STRUCTURE - STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

9

Setting

In 1930s' Alabama, Maycomb is an indolent, run down town where there are few newcomers and parts of the story read like a history lesson since the people are determined to preserve every physical scrap of the past. Indeed, current events intrude so little that the reader at first has little idea of when it is set, until near the end of the book. This not only evokes a sense of timelessness, an essential of classic literature because it guarantees relevance, it explains how the residents are so set in their ways- why the length of time the jury take to decide Tom Robinson's fate is but 'a baby step'. It could hardly be smaller but at least it is the right direction.

All the events take place in and around the town and one of the reasons this is such a readable book is its charm, the way Maycomb and its inhabitants are so evocatively described, with both affection and humour, seen through the clear-eyed gaze of a child.

Structure

At first reading, it is clear that the book is divided into two parts but they seem to have little to do with each other. However, Part One provides a solid background and carefully builds up to Part Two, setting the scene for the trial of Tom Robinson and its aftermath. It also shows Scout and Jem coming to maturity and, as the story opens with the statement about Jem's badly broken arm and ends by explaining how it happened, the way that events turn full circle. This is symbolic in itself, since what Atticus is fighting for is to break free from a vicious circle, what could be called a tradition of racism.

The Radley family are introduced almost immediately, in particular the incident where the son stabs his father, which anticipates the killing of Bob Ewell. A parallel can also be drawn between Boo Radley and Tom Robinson, both of whom are victims, cast out by Society and suffering great injustice. Similarly, Scout's description of her first days at school not only introduces the Ewells and the Cunninghams but depicts families in general and attitudes in particular, reflecting Maycomb society. Three other incidents in Part One provide valuable lessons for the children, particularly those of courage and toleration, and also showing them the danger of being judgmental: the fire at Miss Maudie's, the shooting of the rabid dog; the death of Mrs Dubose. These all stand Scout and Jem in good stead, giving them the strength to withstand the insults and criticism which result from the trial.

Part Two opens with Calpurnia taking the children to the black church which brings in the black community, providing background information prior to the trial and adding to the portrayal of Tom Robinson. Aunt Alexandra looms large, an illustration not only of family life but also social attitudes. The scene with the lynch mob occurs just before the trial; the description of which takes place over the next six chapters, then the story widens out, in a sense, when the Current Events class at school discusses Hitler's treatment of the Jews. Bob Ewell's behaviour becomes more threatening and the novel reaches a second climax in his attack on the children after the pageant and his death. The sheriff steps in to protect Boo Radley and the novel ends with Atticus watching over the injured Jem while Scout sums up everything that has happened.

STRUCTURE - STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Storytelling is a tradition in the South, which may account for some of the main incidents the reader is told about, rather than shown: Boo Radley's history, the assault on Mayella, Tom's death, the latter being revealed by Dill in the manner of a Greek chorus. Nevertheless, there is considerable tension which is sustained throughout by key events (such as the killing of the rabid dog), the juxtaposition of tragedy and comedy and in many of the chapter endings. The humorous portrayal of Aunt Alexandra's tea party creates a greater contrast with the tragedy of Tom Robinson's death while the farce of the pageant make Ewell's savagery all the more horrifying. This is also the case with many of the chapter endings, compelling the reader to carry on. The most dramatic is the last sentence of Chapter 27: Thus began our longest journey together i.e., more melodramatically, to the gates of Hell or the jaws of Death. Chapter 4 has an intriguing revelation: somebody inside the Radley house is laughing while Chapter 2 ends more comically, with six year old Scout's incongruous comment about her teacher, who is 'a pretty little thing'.

Language

Even these days, many children speak two different languages, depending whether they're with friends or family; Scout is reprimanded by her Uncle Jack for swearing, something her father is quite sure she will stop if he pays no attention. There is a wide variety of dialogue in the book, revealing as much about the situation as it does the speaker. The children chatter and make up stories, Aunt Alexandra and the ladies pontificate, Atticus utters solemn words of wisdom, Bob Ewell screams threats and obscenities.

Calpurnia, as Scout notes, talks differently, depending on whether she is with the black community or the white. Tom Robinson's careful choice of words when under oath shows his intelligence and the necessary tact he has had to utilise, as a black man, in order to avoid stirring up trouble, rather than accusing Mayella of lying, he says she is: mistaken in her mind. Similarly, the words used by the white community when describing the black illustrate a particular attitude, invariably patronising and frequently racist.

One of Atticus' most endearing traits is the droll way he speaks, using pompous language to comic effect. He is usually formal, as befits a lawyer, but does not talk down to his children. As regards Scout, the vocabulary of the storyteller cannot be restricted to that of a little girl's viewpoint, though this is used at times to heighten effect. It is the incongruity of her courteous enquiry to Walter Cunningham in the scene with the lynch mob, straightforward and innocent in contrast to their intentions, which helps to defuse the situation. The author is writing retrospectively and with the benefit of hindsight, which is made clear because she understands now why Jem's behaviour and some of the things he says as he gets older tended to mystify his younger sister.

There is a strong contrast between dialogue and description. Southern speech is frequently humorous and colourful - even dogs have surnames. Full of quirky home-spun sayings, there are also unusual words like 'fussing' i.e. 'arguing', and 'scuppernong' , a type of grape. Both Jem and Scout share the author's love of words; her down to earth remark: he'd gone frog-sticking without a light is not only amusing but illustrates Atticus' frustration when trying to question Bob Ewell. Descriptive passages are often lyrical. Scout recalls 'rain-rotted grey houses' when she and Jem go to Mrs Dubose's; verb and adjective conjure up decay but it is the alliteration and the shortness of the words which emphasises that it is inexorable.

Symbolism

The main symbol comes from the title. The mockingbird is celebrated in song and stands for happiness, security and innocence; to kill it is equated with the evil of destroying innocence. It stresses the enormity of the death of Tom Robinson. He is killed, not because he did wrong but because what people believed was wrong. Towards the end, the bird perches in the tree in the Radley's garden and shortly after, Scout claims that to punish Boo Radley would be sort of like shootin' a mockingbird. Unlike Tom, he is not innocent but meant no harm and by killing Bob Ewell, he saved the children.

The mockingbird, with its blissful unawareness, often appears in order to reinforce a point. Atticus warns the children when giving them guns that it's a sin to kill a mockingbird and Miss Maudie elaborates, stressing their harmlessness. Unlike many other birds, they don't even damage crops, in fact, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. Its ability to imitate other birds illustrates Atticus' advice to his children, to learn to understand other people, to climb into his skin and walk around in it. It also adds to the atmosphere since its silence is a sign of danger, like the day the dog goes mad, something which Scout later recalls in the courtroom, again adding to the tension.

The rabid dog, with its uncontrollable madness, can be seen as symbolising racism itself, as well as the lynch mob and the jury.

The Grey Ghost is a book which could stand for Boo Radley; like him, it is mentioned both at the beginning and at the end.

Many of the settings in the book are symbolic. The unhealthy, decrepit Ewell house stands out all the more because of Mayella's attempts to brighten things up with red geraniums while the rack and ruin of the Radley's house is more sinister, a condemned building, like its inhabitants. The purpose here is twofold: to provide a further interpretation of the characters and to intensify the atmosphere. It can also widen our understanding, helping us to appreciate the circumstances which have motivated the characters - our pity for Mayella is the greater because of her pathetic attempt to have something good in her life, something of her own.

Scout admires Dill's imagination, which sometimes surpasses hers. Her speech is coloured by vivid pictures, describing what she can see and also relating to the other senses: taste, hearing, smell and touch. Since these images are grounded in ordinary life and everyday objects, they are immediately recognisable and therefore even more striking. The elegance, languor and uselessness of the ladies of the town is captured early on when Scout claims that they resemble: soft tea-cakes with frostings of sweat and talcum'.

Irony and Humour

Irony can be used simply for comic effect, usually as a result of Scout's childish interpretation of events. Its more serious motives are either evoking an emotional response, such as indignation, or providing greater insight. As a literary device, it is not that easy to explain and harder to understand; example is the easiest means of demonstration: the villain, Bob Ewell, is named after the General Robert E. Lee, a man so honourable, he was admired by both friend and foe. The contrast between the two characters is completely incongruous and hence ironic.

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Irony, in a sense, is a subtle means of engaging the reader's attention and their sympathy, It's as if the author appeals to you directly, saying, look, *we* understand exactly what's going on here, but such and such a character is unaware of the true situation. It is almost a compliment to the reader's intelligent and as such can be most effective, particularly in this book where the hypocrisy of so many characters is quite breath-taking. Just as with irony, they are saying one thing when what they actually mean (and think) is something altogether different. A good example of this is the Current Events lesson when the teacher criticises Hitler because persecution comes from people who are prejudiced, blithely ignoring the fact that exactly the same accusation can be made of the townspeople and forgetting her own racist comments about the black community.

Tragicomedy is deftly handled by the author, for example, Dolphus Raymond, who prefers the company of the black community and actually pretends to be a drunkard to ensure that he will be left in peace; his bride had killed herself with a shotgun.

Humour is employed as spoonfuls of sugar to accompany the medicine. The main purpose of the book is to point out the evils of prejudice and that toleration is vital but it is immensely readable because the writing is so entertaining. When Scout lists the strange goings on attributed to Boo Radley, tension increases as these grow steadily spookier but the end is so down-to-earth it's an anti-climax: the culprit was Crazy Addie, who eventually drowned himself in Barker's Eddy.

Society at large is held up to gentle but inexorable ridicule and much fun is poked at the history of Maycomb County and the attitudes and behaviour of its inhabitants - courtesy is so engrained it becomes almost exaggerated, like Little Chuck Little's gallantry towards his teacher. Some characters are remarkably eccentric, but made memorable despite their brief appearances, such as Mr Avery and the Misses Tutti and Frutti.

Much of the dialogue is humorous, particularly Atticus' and Miss Maudie's wry and witty observations: sometimes the Bible in the hand of one man is worse than a whisky bottle. As for the other characters, the humour arises from the colour and pithiness of the language they use: puttin' on airs to beat Moses. The Southern idiom is a way of speaking which does a great deal to bring the people, and the novel, to life.

EXERCISE:
Choose your favourite scene and explain what you feel it contributes to the novel as a whole.

THEMES 1 - TOLERANCE; CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY LIFE

Toleration

The main message of the book is the traditional one of good versus evil: the necessity of respecting all living things and fighting prejudice, in particular, racism. That Tom Robinson can be found guilty of something which he could not have done, in effect, treated with cruelty for having dared to be kind to Mayella Ewell, is so blatantly unjust, it suggests that there is no hope for improvement in the world. Evil must triumph over good because it's the simple hell people give other people.

The trial itself is treated by Maycomb as a gala occasion. Yet the fact that the jury takes such a long time to make up their minds shows how much thought they must have given to Atticus' words. His influence on them means that they have at least considered the morality of the situation, something which may be the shadow of a beginning. This is only the very slightest of changes in attitude, just a hint of optimism, but the author takes pains to show that there are people prepared to put an end to prejudice and that their beliefs do have a chance of succeeding.

It is important to study the historical background to gain a clearer perspective. The author is critical of Southern men, their courage and honour, their belief that there is nothing worse for fine fancy gentlemen than to be accused of being yellow stinkin' cowards. Jem and Scout find the constant insults about their father intolerable and it is very hard for them to learn self-control when their instincts tell them to fight to protect his honour. They also learn not to take things at face value, having been secretly ashamed of Atticus, whose modesty they saw as a weakness. These ingrained beliefs show the immense difficulty faced by those who know they ought to stand up for what they know is right, yet which will set them apart from others. Walter Cunningham is not good enough by Aunt Alexandra's standards yet he has the courage to call off the lynching party.

Intolerance is an evil assumption; although some people tell lies or are immoral and so on - this is a truth which applies to the human race and to no particular race of men. Miss Maudie, sensible and down-to-earth, stresses the importance of tolerance to the children and thus the reader, as does Atticus. An authoritative figure, he demonstrates that tolerance is a virtue, not a weakness: it's not okay to hate anybody. Even after the encounter with the lynch mob, he says Walter Cunningham is basically a good man and insists Bob Ewell must be mad, rather than wicked, for trying to murder the children. Although the result of the trial makes him despair, convincing him that men couldn't be fair if they tried, Atticus believes everybody must have some redeeming feature, like Mrs Dubose's extraordinary courage in fighting drug-addition when she is dying, which seems pointless when she has so little time to live, especially as drugs would ease her pain.

From the point of view of the present day, although the main theme is vehemently against prejudice, the author has little to say on the subject of inequality where women are concerned. Scout is shown as indignant that somebody as wise as Miss Maudie is not allowed to vote, simply because of her sex but then concedes: perhaps our forefathers were wise. When Atticus tries to explain about their family's social standing, he seems almost like a stranger to his children and Scout remarks ambiguously: It takes a woman to do that kind of work. These two comments may of course be meant ironically.

THEMES 1 - TOLERANCE; CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY LIFE

It is made clear, however, that the church's attitude towards women is intolerant: the Impurity of Women doctrine that seemed to preoccupy all clergymen. Even Atticus looks down on Mayella because of the enormity of her offence though mostly because it condemns Tom Robinson to death.

Ladies in bunches always filled me with vague apprehension says Scout. They do not figure greatly in the book and only a few, such as Calpurnia and Miss Maudie, appear in a positive light: Dill's Aunt Rachel has a drinks problem and is unkind to him, Miss Stephanie Crawford is spiteful, Mrs Merriweather hypocritical. The ladies are all prejudiced and obsessed with social status, thriving on gossip; they represent the town at its most narrow-minded. Even Scout's teacher disapproves of her ability to read and write, because she wasn't taught according to the rules.

Another theme which predominates is respect for all living creatures. The environment features widely today but was still unusual for the 60s and largely unheard of in the 30s. Yet the author makes the point that people should even value insects, as well as birds and animals and plants. When Jem gets an air-rifle, he heeds his father's words and shoots at tin cans, which seems stupid with all the bluejays around; Scout is not old enough to understand. However, he is punished for wantonly spoiling Mrs Dubose's camellias while Miss Maudie place great importance on her garden because she loved everything that grew in God's earth, even the weeds. Even Mrs Radley is seen taking care of her lilies.

Toleration is something which comes only with the ability to see things from other people's point of view. Scout finally realises that her father is right, you can never understand somebody else until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. For example, the Depression of the 1930s caused widespread poverty, something which embittered men like Walter Cunningham and increasing fear and hatred of blacks, yet the black community welcome the children. But Tom Robinson dies because the jury, i.e. Society, cannot imagine that Mayella Ewell could be so lonely and desperate for affection that she would behave the way she does.

Childhood and family life

The other main purpose of the book is reminiscence, celebrating childhood. Emotion and experience are so evocatively described it has an autobiographical feel, showing Scout and Jem growing up, and growing apart. The term 'rites of passage' should more properly be used of Jem since by the end, he is thirteen, on the brink of manhood, acknowledged by Miss Maudie offering him a slice of the grown-ups' cake. Scout and Dill have miniature versions, baked for children. Nonetheless, the author believes adults have a lot to learn from children, with their innocence and lack of prejudice. She has a high opinion of children, seeing in them hope for the future: We need a police force of children.

This is obvious in her choice of narrator, since events as seen through the innocent eyes of a child have more impact. Scout has a very direct way of speaking and often puts clearly into words what others are thinking. One of the poignant aspects is her changing relationship with her older brother whilst one of the most entertaining is the description of her growing up, the tomboy who has to learn that it takes more than good manners to join those fragrant ladies. It also affords the opportunity for the writer to consider the drawbacks of Southern Society's ideas of femininity,

THEMES 1 - TOLERANCE; CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY LIFE

The book is almost didactic in that the author seems determined to teach the reader that children have to be set a good example. She feels very strongly about this and Scout and Jem are shown as being heavily influenced by their father, constantly trying to live up to his high standards. He expects a great deal of them but the various trials they endure in the first half of the book ensure they can survive the even harder lessons they have to learn in the second half. They can face adult life equipped with tolerance, courage, self-control and self-esteem. In other words, for society to change for the better, attempts at improvement have to be grounded in the security of happy family life.

One oddity, however, is the complete omission of ordinary families since mothers rarely figure, apart from Dill's, who is divorced, Aunt Alexandra and Helen Robinson. The Ewells' mother is dead, the Cunninghams' never mentioned, Mrs Radley rarely seen. Most of the people Scout knows seem to live on their own and part of the reason she and Jem seem grown-up for their age is probably due to the time they spend with adults. Their upbringing is regarded by the townspeople as unconventional, yet theirs is the only happy family, apart from those in the black community. Dill runs away because his mother and her new husband are so indifferent towards him, he feels more secure staying with the Finches. Ironically, their forebear Simon Finch was not known for providing a wonderful family life. Finally, Boo Radley is treated with such coldness and cruelty by his father, Calpurnia's reaction to the latter's death is the only time she is ever critical of white people.

EXERCISE:
How do you imagine Dill's mother would try to explain to Aunt Alexandra why she treats her son as she does?

Social Status

This theme provides background information, accounting for the events which arise. The author clearly feels that it is morals which make the man (or woman); there are but two real gentlemen in the book, in Scout's words: in their own way, Tom Robinson's manners were as good as Atticus's. Maycomb is obsessed by class, making its inhabitants self-satisfied and prejudiced. Scout insists: there's just one kind of folks. Folks, but she understands Jem's summing up: first, families like theirs, then people like the Cunninghams, after that, the Ewells and finally the black families.

Jem thinks education has a part to play: background...(is) how long your family's been readin' and writing. while Scout claims: fine folks were people who did the best they could with the sense they had although she is aware that people like Aunt Alexandra reflect the complacent views of Southern Society: social status has to do with the amount of land a family owns, and the length of time it has been owned. It matters more than having money; because of the Depression, payment in kind, even to doctors and lawyers is taken for granted. Atticus does not have a high opinion of 'old family', even though he comes from one while Miss Maudie places at the highest rank those few people who say a fair trial is for everybody. Oddly enough, rather than the townspeople wishing to serve the community by being on the jury, it is made up of farmers and the like.

Religion

It may appear at first that the author does not regard religion very highly since it is constantly satirised, as can be seen in the grandiose polysyllabic six word title of the Missionary Circle's church. However, the point she is making is that those who most profess themselves to be Christian are often the least likely to behave the way true Christians should. After all, religion was not only of great importance in the South, it was one of the few things white and black community had in common. It also serves to stress the differences between them. Religion unites the black people in celebration and each person loves their neighbour and takes care of them. They put into practice exactly what they preach. In the white community, religion is a means of trying to keep up with the Jones (or better still, overtake them) and divides people: Baptist, Methodist, the Missionary Circle. For them, it is more important to be seen, indeed, to be praised as religious, than to act out of Christian charity. They are astonishingly hypocritical, prompt to judge others in the secret courts of men's hearts. Scout claims that Maycomb's principal recreation is church-going, which makes the unchristian treatment of Tom Robinson even more heartless and hypocritical. Atticus, however, is a true Christian, who heeds his conscience and acts accordingly; it is one of the main reasons he takes on the defence.

Superstition and the Supernatural

Like racism, this results from ignorance but it is almost another Southern tradition and similarly permeates the book; Walter Cunningham (and no doubt the rest of his family and many others) takes it for granted that there are such things as ghosts, for all the idea is laughed off: 'tell the haints to be careful of Scout'. Even Aunt Alexandra has a premonition about Bob Ewells' attack and feels guilty for ignoring it.

Religion condemns superstition but although the black community are clearly more religious than

the white, it is assumed they must be far more superstitious. Held to be ignorant and ill-educated, in effect, far more primitive, they are therefore more susceptible.

The spookiness of the Radley family and their home is emphasised by the superstitious beliefs that have sprung up about them. Boo is referred to as 'an entity' i.e. a supernatural being; much as Scout regrets playing the Radley drama, she is really scared he will come after them, like a vengeful spirit. She is scared at first by his gift of carved soap dolls Before I remembered that there was no such thing as hoo-dooing.

Children are fascinated by the supernatural. They love daring each other, swapping and reading scary stories. The Finch children tell Dill about the Hot Steam, a haunted place where only the ritual chanting of a rhyme ensures safety.

Symbols such as the mocking-bird and the rabid dog can be seen as omens or portents.

Loneliness/Outsiders
The usual outcast and shut-ins haunt these pages, some from choice, like Dolphus Raymond, a rich white man who spends his time with the black community. By contrast, Atticus, casts himself off from Society, to a certain extent, preferring to live by his own rules. He keeps himself to himself but is still regarded with respect; it is his defence of Tom Robinson which makes both him and his children outcasts. While Scout and Jem have each other, they rarely seem to be lonely, although she is regarded by some as an outsider because of being a tomboy, constantly rebelling against the restrictions of acting like a young lady. Her father treats her very similarly to Jem though he resorts to calling upon Aunt Alexandra to instil into her a modicum of conventional behaviour.

Mrs Dubose is one of the most unpleasant characters but this is more understandable considering she is completely alone, apart from her maid, Jessie. However, the worst case of loneliness is Boo Radley, literally cut off from Society, though Mayella Ewell is just as pathetic. When Atticus questions her about friends, the idea is so alien to her, she thinks he is mocking her, especially as she is so unused to kindness. And she fatally misjudges Tom Robinson's compassion. Boo Radley does at least have the friendship of Scout and Jem, as does Dill, whose family has, more or less, cast him off. When he runs away, a parallel is drawn between the two of them when Scout asks Dill why Boo Radley never ran off: Maybe he doesn't have anywhere to run off to...

The whole Ewell family are regarded as outcasts, while the entire black community is treated thus by most of the white people, who seem convinced that even the worst of whites are better than the best of blacks.

EXERCISE:
Describe a situation where humour is used to make a serious point and illustrate one of the main themes.