

IGCSE English literature: To Kill a Mockingbird Themes

Racism

- The majority of the white population of Maycomb are racist
- Black people were not seen as fully-rounded people
- Harper Lee was aware of these attitudes and decided to focus on the good traits of black characters in this novel

Racist ideas

<p>Mrs. Dubose</p>	<p><i>"Your father's no better than the niggers and trash he works for!"</i></p> <p>→ Mrs. Dubose thinks coloured people are "trash"</p> <p>→ nobody respects them and puts them down instead</p>
<p>Mr. Gilmer</p>	<p><i>"You felt sorry for her, you felt sorry for her? "</i></p> <p>→ parallel structure and repetition of "sorry" and "her" conveys a mocking tone</p> <p>→ Tom overstepped society's boundaries by feeling sorry for a white person – he embarrassed the Ewells and this was unacceptable</p>
<p>Scout</p>	<p><i>"To Maycomb, Tom's death was typical. Typical of a nigger to cut and run."</i></p> <p>→ Repetition of "typical" shows the prejudice in the society and how Maycomb views coloured people as unrespectable, unworthy people</p> <p>→ There were "typical" things that coloured people did – stereotyping</p>

Anti-racist ideas

- Some people are more open-minded and recognise racism in the society

Dolphus Raymond	<p><i>"Cry about the hell white people give coloured folks, without even stopping to think they're people too"</i></p> <p>→ biblical reference to "hell"</p> <p>→ constant persecution and prejudice towards them</p>
Atticus	<p>"This case is as simple as black and white"</p> <p>→ Different viewpoints:</p> <p>1. This case is very simple</p> <p>OR</p> <p>2. This case was only brought up because of the racial inequality in society (black and white skin colours)</p> <p><i>"The evil assumption- that all negroes lie, that all negroes are basically immoral beings..."</i></p> <p>→ Parallel structure: emphasis on "all"</p> <p>→ Atticus is morally aware of the the severe racism in society</p> <p>→ trying to teach the people a lesson that they should not stereotype all negroes as a group of people</p>
Jem	<p>"It ain't right, Atticus"</p> <p>→ Minor sentence places emphasis on "ain't right"</p>

	<p>→ A bildungsroman – Jem is growing up and can comprehend the racism and how evil it is</p>
Scout	<p>"I think there's just one type of folks. Folks."</p> <p>→ Minor sentence</p> <p>→ Scout is simple-minded and innocent, does not understand the prejudice in society yet</p> <p>"It's not right to persecute anybody, is it?"</p> <p>→ Beginning to form her own ideas about prejudice</p> <p>→ However, she still asks Atticus for advice</p>

Compassion/empathy

- One of the most important moral lessons Atticus tries to teach Scout and Jem is to have empathy for people – to try to see things from their perspectives

Atticus	<p><i>"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."</i></p> <p>→ Metaphor – Atticus teaches his children indirectly so they still have the capacity to come to their own judgements</p> <p>→ This is the crucial piece of moral advice Atticus gives Scout</p> <p><i>"So it took an eight-year-old child to bring 'em to their senses...that proves something – that a gang of wild animals can be stopped, simply because they're still human."</i></p> <p>· Metaphor in "to their senses" and "gang of wild</p>
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	<p>animals" → relates more to the reader and allows us to understand how they were uncontrolled (like animals)</p> <p>→ Atticus has empathy for people and understands that Maycomb's prejudiced views affected everyone in the society</p>
Scout	<p><i>"Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough."</i></p> <p>→ Short sentence – emphasis on "right"</p> <p>→ Repeat of the metaphor Atticus used → Scout is learning from his teachings</p> <p><i>"When they finally saw him, why he hadn't done any of those things . . . Atticus, he was real nice. . . ."[...] "Most people are, Scout, when you finally see them." – Scout/Atticus</i></p> <p>→ This sentence concludes the novel</p> <p>→ If one lives with sympathy and understanding, it is possible to remain faithful in humanity despite its capacity for evil</p> <p>→ suggests that it is only a matter of time before the barriers of prejudice are broken down</p>

Education

Moral Education

- Harper Lee explores many of the flaws in the education system in Maycomb – and how it restricts the learning of children
- For example, Miss Caroline's teaching is ineffective and constricting.
- Moral education is taught at home by Atticus, Calpurnia and Miss Maudie
- Atticus wants to build a social conscience in Scout and Jem
- Most important moral lessons are: sympathy and understanding

Scout learns a variety of things from the different characters in the novel:

- Calpurnia: to be polite and tolerant towards everyone
- Atticus: To be able to appreciate courage and empathise with people
- Aunt Alexandra: the value of being a "lady"

- One of the most important moral teachings Atticus teaches Scout and Jem is on empathy.

"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." - **Atticus**

→ Metaphor – Atticus teaches his children indirectly so they still have the capacity to come to their own judgements

→ His language is easy for Scout to understand and relate to, shows his understanding of children

Education system in Maycomb

"Jem that damn lady says Atticus's been teaching me to read, and for him to stop" - **Scout**

→ There is a problem with the education in Maycomb, they follow very strict rules and do not allow the children space to learn and come to their own viewpoints

→ Use of profanity "damn" at such a young age shows that school can also have a negative impact on children

"She said you taught me all wrong..." - **Scout**

→ Miss Caroline doesn't understand that children can learn at home as well

→ She firmly believes in the school education system, and thinks it is the only "right" way to learn