

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

SS1

WEEKS 4&5

DATE:

NON-AFRICAN PROSE: *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

1. Plot Summary

To Kill a Mockingbird takes place in the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, during the [Great Depression](#). The [protagonist](#) is Jean Louise (“Scout”) Finch, an intelligent though unconventional girl who ages from six to nine years old during the course of the novel. She is raised with her brother, Jeremy Atticus (“Jem”), by their widowed father, [Atticus Finch](#). He is a prominent lawyer who encourages his children to be empathetic and just. He notably tells them that it is “a sin to kill a [mockingbird](#),” [alluding](#) to the fact that the birds are innocent and harmless.

When Tom Robinson, one of the town’s Black residents, is falsely accused of [raping](#) Mayella Ewell, a white woman, Atticus agrees to defend him despite threats from the [community](#). At one point he faces a mob intent on [lynching](#) his client but refuses to abandon him. Scout unwittingly diffuses the situation. Although Atticus presents a defense that gives a more plausible interpretation of the evidence—that Mayella was attacked by her father, Bob Ewell—Tom is convicted, and he is later killed while trying to escape custody. A character compares his death to “the senseless slaughter of songbirds,” paralleling Atticus’ saying about the mockingbird.

The children, meanwhile, play out their own miniaturized drama of [prejudice](#) and [superstition](#) as they become interested in [Arthur \(“Boo”\) Radley](#), a reclusive neighbour who is a local [legend](#). They have their own ideas about him and cannot resist the allure of trespassing on the Radley property. Their speculations thrive on the dehumanization perpetuated by their elders. Atticus, however, reprimands them and tries to encourage a more sensitive attitude. Boo makes his presence felt indirectly through a series of [benevolent](#) acts, finally intervening when Bob Ewell attacks Jem and Scout. Boo kills Ewell, but Heck Tate, the sheriff, believes it is better to say that Ewell’s death occurred when he fell on his own knife, sparing the shy Boo from unwanted attention. Scout agrees, noting that to do otherwise would be sort of like shooting a mockingbird.

2. CHARACTERS

The main character and narrator in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is **Jean Louise Finch**, though she goes by the name **Scout**. She’s an overall-wearing, tree-climbing tomboy who is six years old at the start.

Then there's **Jem Finch**, Scout's older brother by four years. There's also **Atticus Finch**, their father. He's a widower. He's also a lawyer, which means the Finches are fairly well off for their community. He's kind of a paragon of virtue.

His opposite is **Bob Ewell**. He's a poor, drunken, hate-filled man. His daughter is **Mayella Ewell**. And their story intersects with **Tom Robinson**, a black field hand. Then there's **Arthur 'Boo' Radley**. He's a recluse living in a creepy house near the Finches and though his presence is felt, he's rarely seen.

3. THEMES

There are many themes in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, including: prejudice, integrity, justice, innocence, and good versus evil.

The novel explores prejudice on racial conflict, gender expectations, and economic and social class distinctions. Through Tom's case, the novel asks what justice, innocence, and good versus evil mean. The novel suggests that through Atticus that justice is in part reflected through integrity. Integrity, a personal decision to live according to what is right. It also suggests that the law does not determine good versus evil. The law does evil to Tom, but Atticus upholding his duties to the law is seen as good.

4. SETTINGS

To Kill a Mockingbird is set in the small, rural town of Maycomb, Alabama, during the early 1930s. The character of Atticus Finch, Scout's father, was based on Lee's own father, a liberal Alabama lawyer and statesman who frequently defended African American within the racially prejudiced Southern legal system.

5. LITERARY DEVICES/FIGURES OF SPEECH

- a. **Action:** the main action in the novel is that the children are fascinated with Boo Radley, the trial of Tom Robinson, and his demise. The rising action is the children's fascination of Boo. The falling action is the threats of Bob Ewell to Atticus and Boo saving the children from Bob Ewell.
- b. **Allegory:** Tim Johnson is the bird dog of citizens of Maycomb. Boo is an outsider who the society shuns and yet he sacrifices himself so that the level of prejudice would change in Maycomb.
- c. **Antagonist:** Bob Ewell is the main antagonist in the novel. He falsely accuses Tom Robinson of raping his daughter despite his drunken state when the events occurred.
- d. **Allusion:** Dill is the pocket Merlin (the legendary magician as well as advisor to King Arthur) and has eccentric plans, strange desires, and old-fashioned fantasies. The allusion to the pestilence surfaces with the Miss Maudie's face.
- e. **Conflict:** The main conflict is African American and the whites of Maycomb. Second conflict refers to those in the society who want their children to move away from the prejudice in the society and see each other as equal versus those who believe that Atticus has deviated from the expectations of the society and has joined the black society.
- f. **Climax:** This is where the conflicts in the novel reach a final moment. The attack on Scout and Jem, the breaking of Jem's arm and Boo saving then children. At this point, Scout finally speaks to Boo Radley. The moment of the anti-climax comes when there is the rumor that Tom has been shot while he tries to flee prison. Additionally, Bob attempts to intimidate Atticus but Atticus does not accept the threats that Bob issues.

- g. **Hero:** Atticus Finch is the true hero when he fights for Tom to the end of the trial. In addition, Boo and Scout are the protagonists in the scenes that they appear.
- h. **Hyperbole:** Lee uses hyperbole to write of Maycomb in the first chapter. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. (Chapter-1) In this exaggeration, the author stresses the fact that it could have been otherwise in Maycomb.
- i. **Irony:** The irony in the novel is clear with Scout and Jem's attempt to pull Boo Radley out of hiding. In addition, it is ironical that Tom tries to free himself with his escape, but he is killed in his own action.
- j. **Metaphor:** The use of metaphor is clear in the author's use of the mockingbird to represent someone who creates happiness to others. Other metaphors include: Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... "Sir?" ... Until you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. The first metaphor compares Maycomb to an old town while the metaphor in the second compares persons to other persons.
- k. **Mood:** The mood in the novel at the start is serious. Later it becomes humorous and light but still one can find it somber and profound at times when there is the issue of racial prejudice, discrimination, and hatred.
- l. **Narrator:** the story is told from a first-person child narrator. She is also one of the heroes in the novel. Jean Louise Finch tells the story based on her thoughts and tries to remove the racial hatred in Maycomb.
- m. **Protagonist:** Scout Finch is the main protagonist in the novel, and she tells the story. But Boo Radley is another protagonist, and he saves the children.
- n. **Paradox:** The novel shows that justice is a paradox in the southern states where blacks and whites try to remove the prejudice that existed.
- o. **Resolution:** The conflict in "To Kill a Mockingbird" is resolved with Boo Radley's heroic act of saving Scout and Jem. At the onset, he was a mystery to the children.
- p. **Rhetorical Questions:** There is good use of rhetorical questions across the novel. These include: What was the evidence of her offense? What did she do? What did her father do? In these examples Atticus questions the jury and shows that there is no cases or evidence against Tom Robinson.
- q. **Simile:** He was as good as his worst performance. (Chapter 4). In this simile, Dill's performance is the comparison. The tire bumped on gravel, skeetered..... And popped me like a cork onto pavement. (Chapter-4)
- r. **Symbol:** The mockingbird symbolizes innocence and vulnerability. Boo symbolizes loyalty and love. Atticus, on the other hand, symbolizes justice and fair play.

HOME WORK

- 1- Write a brief plot summary of the novel above.
- 2- Write short notes on:
 - a. Themes
 - b. Settings

c. Characters

3. List and explain **FIVE** literary devices/ figures of speech