

TO KILL A
MOCKINGBIRD - STYLE



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SOME ASPECTS OF STYLE YOU MAY WISH TO CONSIDER

- ❖ Point of view (who tells the story)
- ❖ Creation of character
- ❖ Dialogue
- ❖ Tension
- ❖ Symbolism and imagery

POINT OF VIEW - FIRST PERSON NARRATIVE

- ❖ Scout - first person narrator
- ❖ Although she is looking back from an adult perspective, she gives us the viewpoint she had as a child
- ❖ First person narrative **draws us in** and **allows us to engage** with the main character



- ❖ First person narrators are not omniscient (all seeing); we only know what Scout knows. This makes us feel as if we are experiencing all the events along with her.
- ❖ Because the first person narrator is a child, the style is quite factual. Children don't usually reflect too deeply on what is happening in their lives. Scout doesn't tell us what to think or feel, so we make up our own minds and that makes the story personal and interesting to us.

- ❖ Example (Chapter 24) The ladies from the missionary circle are in the Finch house at Aunt Alexandra's invitation. They are expressing openly racist views and one, Mrs Merriweather, is hinting strongly that Atticus is stirring up trouble among the 'darkies' by defending Tom Robinson. Miss Maudie comes to Aunt Alexandra's defence and afterwards Aunt Alexandra flashes her a look of 'pure gratitude'. Scout is puzzled and says, 'I wondered at the world of women. Miss Maudie and Aunt Alexandra had never been especially close, and here was Aunty silently thanking her for something. For what, I knew not.'

CHARACTERISATION

- ❖ We judge characters by what they do more than what they say.
- ❖ Example: Women in the missionary circle claim to be Christian but are openly racist.
- ❖ The teacher, Miss Gates, frets over the fate of the Jews in Europe and says that it's not right to persecute anyone, but Scout overhears her commenting on the outcome of the trial and saying that it was time the black people were taught a lesson as they were 'gettin' way above themselves' and starting to think they were equal to white people. (Chapter 26)

- ❖ Scout's view of the characters in Macomb becomes more sophisticated and complex as she grows older.
- ❖ At first she describes Boo Radley as 'a malevolent phantom' and Mrs Dubose as 'plain hell' but in time comes to see that Boo is a kind, vulnerable person and Mrs Dubose is a sad, sickly old woman battling her personal demons.

DIALOGUE

- ❖ The way people speak marks them out in terms of social class, education and attitude. There is a world of difference between Atticus' manner of speaking and that of Bob Ewell.
- ❖ Atticus is particularly offended by the use of the word 'nigger' and tells Scout that she should not use it: 'nigger-lover is just one of those terms that don't mean anything – like snot-nose. It's hard to explain – ignorant, trashy people use it when they think somebody's favouring Negroes over and above themselves. It's slipped into usage with some people like ourselves, when they want a common, ugly term to label somebody.'

TENSION

- ❖ There are plenty of examples of this in the book.
- ❖ When the Old Sarum gang try to lynch Tom Robinson, the tension is evident from the start.
- ❖ Talk of the Ku Klux Klan at the start of the chapter makes us keenly aware that there are those who may be so enraged by the trial that they could pose a serious danger to Tom and those who protect him.

- ❖ Jem admits to Scout that he is ‘Scared about Atticus’ and fears someone may hurt him.
- ❖ Atticus leaves the house and drives to town. This is unusual: sparks our curiosity and fear. Is he afraid to walk? Is he in a terrible hurry?
- ❖ Children sneak out to follow him.
- ❖ Tense atmosphere, no moon, deserted square.

- ❖ Men appear, but seem almost monstrous:
'Shadows became substance as light revealed solid shapes moving towards the jail door.'
- ❖ Sheriff has been lured out of town - Atticus is vulnerable and alone.
- ❖ Tension broken when Scout recognises and addresses Mr Cunningham, causing the gang to break up and leave.

SYMBOLISM AND IMAGERY

- ❖ Atticus says that ‘it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird’.
- ❖ Miss Maudie agrees: ‘Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy.’



- ❖ Mockingbirds are harmless and innocent, like Tom Robinson. Mr Underwood writes an editorial after Tom's death in which he likens it 'to the senseless slaughter of songbirds by hunters and children'. Tom was an innocent, kind man who, despite his disability, tried to do what he could for others.

- ❖ Boo Radley is a vulnerable, kind man who does not deserve to suffer just because he killed Bob Ewell. Even though he would almost certainly be cleared of murder, any sort of attention would cause him great distress.
- ❖ Scout says that drawing any attention to him would be 'sort of like shootin' a mockingbird'.

- ❖ Killing a mockingbird is a pointless, cruel act that serves no purpose. Atticus wants Jem to stop and think before he pulls the trigger, and maybe everyone in Maycomb should do the same before they react to situations. Those who act sinfully or thoughtlessly or cruelly cause great pain to others.