

Sample Answer – Scout and Atticus

From a novel you have studied, choose a character who made a significant impact on another person's life.

Outline this character's influence, supporting your answer by reference to the novel.

Would you like to encounter this person in your own life? Give reasons for your answer.

Answer

The novel I have studied for my Junior Certificate is Harper Lee's classic 'To Kill a Mockingbird'. Set in the sleepy town of Maycomb, Alabama during the Great Depression of the 1930s the novel is narrated by Scout Finch who lives with her widowed father Atticus and her brother Jem. The character who makes a significant impact on Scout's life is undoubtedly her father, Atticus.

Atticus is a lawyer, and a single father since his wife's death. He is devoted to his children and has a most unusual parenting style. He has encouraged Scout to grow as an individual rather than forcing her to fit in with the prevailing notions of what a typical Southern girl should be like. He allows her to dress and behave as a tomboy as that is what she wants to do. This sort of behaviour - including allowing his children to call him by his first name - may seem shocking to outsiders, but Atticus believes in focusing on the important things in life. Scout is a happy, independent-minded girl as a result of her father's relaxed attitude towards such things.

However, although Atticus is a laid-back father in many ways, and is happy to treat his children in quite an adult way, he is also strict when he needs to be. This is important in Scout's life, as she is a very strong-willed girl and needs to

be firmly checked at times. Atticus has high expectations of her and insists that she and Jem leave Boo Radley alone when he catches them trying to send him a note.

Atticus is happy to help his children learn about the world and when Scout asks him difficult questions, he does his best to explain the answers to her in a way she will understand. He tells Scout the truth, and does not try to fob her off with lies. For example, when Scout gets into trouble in school for explaining to Miss Caroline about Burris Ewell, Atticus is frank about the Ewells' social standing, telling Scout that they have been 'the disgrace of Maycomb for three generations'. Later in the novel, when Scout is again in difficulties in school - this time for fighting with Cecil Jacobs who says that Atticus 'defended niggers', Atticus logically and calmly explains the situation and tells her that he believes what he is doing is the right course of action. This has a significant effect on the impulsive Scout, who finally learns to ignore the taunts of others and is able to walk away from a fight. The next day in school, she takes no notice of Cecil's jeers. Because of her father's blend of strictness and kindness, and because of his high moral principles, Scout is growing into a mature and wise young girl.

I would definitely like to have encountered Atticus in my life. He is a fascinating man with admirable values, and he is a kind and loving parent.

One of the main reasons I would like to have met Atticus is that he always takes the time to explain the reasoning behind his decisions. This is not something adults always bother to do with children, but I would very much enjoy hearing Atticus discuss the reasons for his taking on the Tom Robinson case, for example. It would be inspiring to talk to a man who believes that he must do something so brave because he feels that he must follow his conscience at all times.

Another reason I would like to meet Atticus is that I am a little like Scout at times and can be too impulsive and judgemental for my own good. When I read the novel, I tended to side with Scout each time she did something rash or got involved in a fight when someone treated her unfairly, but Atticus' calm, rational way of showing her that there are two sides to every story is something I very much took to heart and think is a valuable life lesson. For example, he made me see - like Scout - that Miss Caroline was in a difficult position too when she confronted Burris Ewell, and she must have felt very much at sea dealing with people she neither knew nor fully understood.

An aspect of Atticus' character that I admire the most is his courage. He shows his children the true nature of bravery by standing up for what he believes in a quiet, dignified and decent manner. Atticus does what he knows to be right rather than what he knows will be popular. He always sticks to his principles. I think this is something all of us could learn from and I would very much like to spend time with a man who believes that real courage is 'when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and see it through no matter what'.