

A Character Sketch of Atticus Finch

Atticus Finch is one of the major characters in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* written in 1960. Atticus is a lawyer in Maycomb, the representative of Alabama in the State Legislature and the father of Scout and Jem Finch. The major themes and ideas tackled in Lee's novel such as social inequality and intolerance, education, legal justice and bravery are represented in one way or another through this character.

Atticus Finch is a man of principles who is consistent in his views and deeds throughout the novel. Although he is criticized and mocked by many characters in the novel for his tolerant attitude towards the 'Negros', people of Maycomb still respect him and keep re-electing him to be their representative in the State Legislature. According to Miss Maudie Atkinson words to Scout, Atticus is a man who does for other people the unpleasant things they have to do. He is a defender of justice and he fights for it even if he is sure that he will be beaten at end. He also tries throughout the novel to pass these values onto his children.

Atticus' wise and understanding attitude is because he is quite aware of the fact that each human being has positive and negative sides. He always focuses on the good part of the people around him and in each situation he finds excuses for their aggressive or bad deeds. For instance, he forgives Mrs. Dubose's for the bad words she said to his children about him and he almost forces Jem to read for her during her last days. After she dies, he speaks to Jem and Scout about his admiration for her courage in resisting morphine addiction. Atticus once tells Scout that "you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view", and at the very end of the novel states that she is grateful to her father for letting her know that "you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them". This attitude also makes Atticus tolerate Mr. Walter Cunningham and Bob Ewell

aggressiveness towards him. Atticus is able to see beyond other people's deeds and thoughts and thus he is highly respected for the wisdom with which he deals with difficult situations.

Atticus is a courageous man. However, he believes that real courage is not manifested in "a man with a gun in his hand". Although he once has been the best shooter in the town, his children never see him using a gun before the dog incident. Moreover, Atticus is too courageous and righteous to abide by the norms of the pride white people in his town. He defends a black man, Tom Robinson accused of raping a white young girl, against his white opponent. Atticus believes from the very beginning that he is to lose his case. However, he withstands people's insults to himself and his children for the sake of the color-blind law he aims to achieve. Also, Atticus' courage makes him ready to present his own son to be punished when he thought he killed Bob Ewell whereas Sheriff Tate tries to defend Jem. Atticus' frequent courageous defense of his principles has had an impact on his children's conception of courage. Scout says "... I thought my father, who hated guns and had never been to any wars, was the bravest man who ever lived".

As mentioned earlier, Atticus does not abide by the norms of the pride white community. Not only does he defend Tom Robinson, but he also chooses to go himself to his wife to tell her about his death. The agony and pity of the late prisoner's wife and not her color is what mattered to him. Atticus has chosen to defend his morals and his belief of justice regardless to the ethnic associations of Tom Robinson's case.

Unlike other characters in the novel, Atticus perceives the Negroes as equal human beings who have the right to enjoy justice and social respect. He always defends his cook Calpurnia against his sister Alexandra's reservations and he asserts to her that Calpurnia is a significant member in the Finch family. He does not mind that a black woman takes part in raising up his children. Also, he does not mind that she accompanies them to the church of

the Negroes even though the objections from his sister and from some members of the black community.

Atticus Finch consistency makes him an ideal father. Unlike his brother, Atticus is an expert in dealing with little children. His wise and firm opinions and deeds have had great influence on the characters of Jem and Scout as the novel proceeds. Miss Maudie says that "Atticus Finch is the same in his house as he is on the public streets". He deals with Scout and Jem as if they are adults. For instance, he does not hesitate to answer Scout's question about the meaning of "rape", and he makes deals with his children and is committed to them. At the same time, Atticus understands that Jem and Scout are still children and they are bound to make childish mistakes. He finds excuses for their bad deeds and that makes him more patient with them than his sister Alexandra. For example, he says to her when she criticizes the language Scout uses that "bad language is a stage all children go through, and it dies with time when they learn they're not attracting attention with it."

Atticus is eager to teach his children good values and practices through people's mistakes and poor behavior and their own mistakes in real life situations rather than by giving them instructions. He does not rebuke or punish Jem and Scout for attending the trial of Robison or for secretly following him to the jail where Robinson was kept. He is always aware of what his children secretly do. For example, he has known that it was Jem at whom Mr. Radely once shot his gun. Yet, he frequently draws their attention not to violate other people's privacy.

He also tries to make them realize facts about life and to correct their misconceptions by themselves. He often uses the question "do you really think so?" as an indirect hint that drives the children to revisit what they have thought or said. Also, Atticus' conversations with Jem and Scout regularly included morally heavy contents such as "Shoot all the bluejays you

want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird". The way Atticus deals with his children has made them respect him and grow more proud of him as time passes, although they once have felt sorry that their father is older and less energetic than other children's fathers.

The character of Atticus Finch represents a good model of a professional lawyer. Atticus' defense of the color-blind justice and his belief that law should be free from any prejudices have set him as an ideal lawyer. As a result, the character of Atticus Finch, the lawyer has appeared in many other books that targets lawyers and concern them. Mike Papantonio's *In Search for Atticus Finch: A Motivational Book for Lawyers* and Pierre Schlag's *Laying Down the Law: Mysticism, Fetishism and the American Legal Mind* are cases in point. Also, the character was so influential that it appeared in books concerned with law and lawyers in cinema productions such as *Law and Film* by Steve Greenfield, Guy Osborn, Peter Robson.

In conclusion, Atticus Finch is an ideal paradigm of a good citizen, a skillful and honest lawyer and an understanding father. The character is enlightening and influential on other fictional characters in the novel and on people in the real world as well. His insightful attitudes and deeds distinguished him as a highly respectable and appreciated individual in the community he lived in. His personality urged people to choose him as their representative even though they sometimes criticize him for doing the unpleasant things that must be done.

Works Cited

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