

What is Taught and What is Learned:
The Contrasting Elements of To Kill A Mockingbird

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To Kill A Mockingbird is the story of a white, Alabama lawyer, Atticus Finch. Atticus is bringing up two children, Jeremy and Jean Louise. He is trying to mold into their lives the knowledge to know right from wrong and how to act accordingly. Jean Louise, better known as Scout, is six years old; Jem is ten. Scout tells this story with a great sense of humor and insight, enabling the reader to grasp at the fleeting moments of youth. The excitement, the mystery, and the pain of growing up are felt by the reader who is invited to walk around in the childrens' shoes, to get a clear perspective of the childrens' world. "You never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them" (Lee, 1960, p.282).

Scout shares her everyday experiences of both school and homelife throughout the novel. School is the influence of the Dewey Decimal System, much to the reluctant dismay of Scout. At home there is Jem and Atticus, plus Calpurina, the black housemaid. These and the variety of remaining characters introduced into the story make up Scout's world, a small southern community, Maycomb Alabama.

Dill Harris, a summertime visitor and friend of Jem and Scout, enlightens the imaginations and creativity of the children with his preoccupation for Boo Radley and the Radley place. The Radley place belongs to a family that remains kept to itself. The shutters and doors of the home are kept closed. The house is weathered with time and lack of care. In

this house lives Boo Radley, a "malevolent phantom", never actually seen by the children, but known from the gory tales of townsfolk. Boo Radley eventually plays a key role in bringing many of Scouts experiences into a unified lesson about life.

The day to day experiences and influences are enough for anyone, but when Atticus is appointed to defend a black man, falsely accused of raping a white girl, he must practice what he preaches in spite of the typical southern community's attitudes. In the midst of his efforts to raise Jem and Scout properly, Atticus becomes a living example to his children and the entire community.

Attempting to justly defend a black man with conclusive evidence of innocence brought hatred and prejudice upon Atticus, Jem, and Scout as the community was forced to re-evaluate its moral codes concerning equality before the law (Ford, p.122). Atticus took a hard stand, challenging this typical southern community to overcome its fears and ignorance of the rights belonging to all men, "be he any color of the rainbow" (Ford, p.123). The wisdom, knowledge, and understanding maintained by Atticus during this increasingly difficult time proved to be a dominant factor in the learning process of both Jem and Scout.

Jem and Scout were taught a painful lesson from their experience of a scared and ignorant community. A community forced to pay the price for its uneducated, fearful, and

ignorant prejudices (Lipincott, 1960, p.5). The relationships of fear, ignorance, and prejudice play a definite role in this story. The actual key, however, is the educational element. The contrast between what is "taught" and what is "learned" is the central theme of Harper Lee's To Kill A Mockingbird (Schuster, 1963. p.507).

The variety of activities and experiences that take place throughout the story have definite effects on Scout and Jem's perception of life. As the story progresses the children are forced to "learn" about life. What they are "taught," as their child-like world views are forced to conform to reality, is exactly what enables them to cope with the truths of this reality.

One of Scout's earliest learning experiences takes place her first day of school. What Scout learns at school seems to be contradictory of what she is taught before starting school. At least this is true from the idealistic, Dewey Decimal System perspective taken from the young teacher, Miss Caroline. Realizing that Scout has already been taught to read and write Miss Caroline comments,

Now you tell your father not to teach you anymore. It's best to begin reading with a fresh mind. You tell him I'll take over from here and try to undo the damage--.
. Your father doesn't know how to teach you. . . . We don't write in the first

grade, we print. You won't learn to write until your in the third grade. (Lee, pp.22-23)

This arouses in Scout a sudden awareness of her love for reading and a dissatisfaction for school in general. It is the prudence of Atticus that helps Scout understand and learn from her first day's experience. Atticus explains to Scout why things are not the same for everyone, emphasizing that, although the law is bent in special cases, the Finch's are common folk and must obey the law. Therefore a secret compromise, bending Miss Caroline's law, is reached. Scout concedes to remain in school and her nightly reading sessions with Atticus continue. None the less, Scout states

The remainder of my school days were no more auspicious than the first. . . . I couldn't help noticing that my father had served for years in the state legislature, elected each time without opposition, innocent of the adjustments my teachers thought essential to the development of Good Citizenship. (Lee, p.37)

The daily route to and from school takes Jem and Scout past the Radley Place. At the edge of the lot stand two large, old oak trees. In one of the trees is a knot hole which becomes a means of communicating with Boo Radley, the

"malevolent phantom." The first of several treasures found in the tree is chewing gum. Gum that when cautiously eaten does not kill, or even make Scout sick, as is expected of anything coming from the Radley Place. Other treasures from the tree consists of two polished Indian head pennies, two small soap carvings resembling Jem and Scout, a whole package of chewing gum, an old spelling medal, and a broken pocket watch on a chain with an aluminum knife. This relationship with the Radley Place enables Jem and Scout to begin putting themselves in the Radley's shoes. They are begining to like Boo Radley in spite of the long standing fears and rumors from the community. Jem and Scout have never actually seen Boo Radley, but he is becoming their friend. They are begining to grow into the shoes of Boo Radley.

Deciding the time had come to acknowledge their gratitude for the gifts Jem and Scout write Boo a note to be placed in the tree. The following morning on their way to school the children are startled by the sight of the knot hole plugged with cement. Although this upsets Jem and Scout the incidents surrounding the tree are not to be forgotten, and their curiosities about the Radley Place were only heightened.

Summer vacation soon sets in. With Summer vacation comes Dill Harris. With Dill Harris comes the mystery and excitement of curious preoccupation with Boo Radley and the Radley Place. In an attempt to execute the first of Dill's

never ending plans of establishing communication with Boo, Jem and Scout become painfully aware that Atticus knows more than they have given him credit for.

Dill took post to keep watch at the front of the Radley Place. Scout kept watch at the rear. Jem's role was to attach a note to the end of a fishing pole and reach across the yard placing the note at a selected window. While attempting this eerie task Jem and Scout are suddenly disrupted by the sound of Dill's warning bell and the sight of Atticus. Even in Atticus' displeasure he shows a certain amount of understanding and insight into the way the Radleys choose to live as he explains,

What Mr. Radley . . . [does is] . . .
. his own business. If he wanted to come out, he would. If he wanted to stay inside his own house he had the right to stay inside free from the attentions of inquisitive children,. . . (Lee, p.53)

Atticus' expression of displeasure does not, however, leave a lasting impression on the children. Before the summer ends the children make one last attempt to get a look at Boo Radley.

Near the end of the summer, "Because nobody could see them at night,. . . [and] because if Boo Radley killed them they'd miss school instead of summer vacation, (Lee, p.55)

the children sneak under a wire fence at the back of the Radley lot and proceed toward the house. Creeping around to the side of the house the three make their way to a window with a loose shutter. Lifting Dill to the window provides only the sight of a distant light coming through the curtains. This being unsatisfactory they creep to the back of the house and up on the porch. As they crawl up to another window to get a better look the sudden sight of a man's shadow amongst them brings about a panic stricken sprint for the fence. Jem, in a mad dash to escape the exploding sound of a shotgun, leaves his pants, tangled and torn, in the fence.

Later that night, when the commotion has settled and Atticus' reading light has gone out, Jem, in spite of Scout's pleas, sneaks back to the Radley place to retrieve his trousers. This experience has a direct effect on Jem and Scout's childhood relationship as Scout struggles to understand:

It was then I suppose, that Jem and I first began to part company. Sometimes I did not understand him, but my periods of bewilderment were short-lived. This was beyond me. . . . Jem stayed moody and silent for a week. As Atticus had once advised me to do, I tried to climb into Jem's skin and walk around in it: if I had

gone alone to the Radley Place at two in the morning, my funeral would have been held the next afternoon. So I left Jem alone and tried not to bother him. (Lee, p.61-62)

When Jem breaks his silence vigil he confides in Scout, "When I went back they [the pants] were folded across the fence . . . like they were expecting me. . . . They'd been sewed up. Not like a lady sewed 'em, like something I'd try to do. All crooked" (Lee, p.63). Again Jem and Scout are able to see things from another perspective. They are begining to become more aware of the fact that the Radley Place contains a friend, not a phantom despite rumored beliefs.

Winter sets in and the first snow fall in Maycomb Alabama in nearly sixty years brings with it the burning of a neighbor's house and still another gift from Boo. This time it is a woolen blanket unobtrusivly slipped around Scout's shoulders as she stands, nearly freezing, by the Radley Place, watching the fire. When once again settled at home Atticus' sudden recognition of the blanket prompts Jem's full confession of all gifts. Jem is learning more about Boo, and old rumors than he realizes as he explains to Atticus, "...I swear to God he ain't ever harmed us, he ain't ever hurt us, he coulda cut my throat from ear to ear that night but he tried to mend my pants instead . . . he ain't ever hurt us, Atticus" (Lee, p.76).

Scout's first inclination of Atticus' appointment to defend Tom Robinson, a black man, is brought about in the school yard. Criticism from a schoolmate begins a "rather thin time" for Jem and Scout. When questioned as to why he is defending a black man Atticus explains to Scout,

...if I didn't I couldn't hold my head up in town, I couldn't represent this county in the Legislature, I couldn't even tell you or Jem not to do something again. . . . You might hear some ugly talk about it at school, but do one thing for me if you will: you just hold your head high and keep those fists down. No matter what anybody says to you, don't you let them get your goat. Try fighting with your head for a change . . . it's a good one, even if it does resist learning. [Atticus went on to explain,] It's different this time, . . . This time we're not fighting the Yankees, we're fighting our friends. But remember this, no matter how bitter things get, they're still our friends and this is still our home. (Lee, 80-81)

The following day Scout walks away from a fight for the first time in her life. Out of respect for Atticus' wishes

Scout remains calm for several weeks. It is not until the family gathering at Christmas that Scout is provoked enough to break her father's wishes. It is for her father's good name that Scout goes against Atticus' wishes. When cousin Francis refers to Atticus as a "nigger lover . . . ruinin the family" (Lee, p.87) Scout lets fly with a fist to the mouth. Although she receives a whipping for her actions, Scout chose to remain silent about the provocation. Her wish is to honor her father by not letting anything she hears about him make her angry. Scout is begining to learn that physical fighting is not always the best answer. Even in cases of extreme provocation people must pay a price for their actions. This lesson applies to everyone, even Scout's cool headed brother Jem.

Mrs. Dubose, an elderly neighbor, has an ability to infuriate Jem whenever he and Scout pass by her house. Atticus often explains to Jem, "She's an old lady and she's ill. You just hold your head high and be a gentleman. Whatever she says to you, its your job not to let her make you mad" (Lee, p.104). In spite of Atticus' words of wisdom Jem has a breaking point. A point where Mrs. Dubose's constant inability to put herself in Atticus' and in Jem and Scout's shoes causes Jem to take matters into his own hands. While passing Mrs. Dubose house on the way to town one afternoon the children are confronted with her verbal abuse.

Yes indeed, what has this world come to

when a Finch goes against his raising? . .
. Your father's no better than the niggers
and trash he works for!half the
Finches were in the asylum anyway, but if
our [Jem and Scout's] mother were living
we [Jem and Scout] would not have come to
such a state. (Lee, p.106)

It is not until the return trip from town that Jem's anger
gets the best of him.

Jem snatched my [Scouts] baton and ran
flailing wildly up the steps into Mrs.
Dubose's front yard, forgetting everything
Atticus had said, . . . He did not begin
to calm down until he had cut the tops off
every camellia bush Mrs. Dubose owned,
...(Lee, p.107)

For his actions Jem is advised to go and discuss the matter
with Mrs. Dubose. The price for Jem's irrational behavior,
two hours of reading to Mrs. Dubose every day after school
and on Saturdays for a month. This experience proves to be
difficult for Jem and Scout as Mrs. Dubose continues to
harass them. Jem and Scout are unaware that Mrs. Dubose is a
morphine addict determined to leave this world "behold to
nothing and nobody." By reading to her Jem helps her to keep
her mind off her next fix as she is being weaned off the

drug. Shortly after the month of daily reading Mrs. Dubose dies. As Atticus explains the nature of Mrs. Dubose illness to Jem, and just how important his reading had been in helping her to cope, Jem becomes painfully aware of the importance of placing ones self in anothers shoes no matter what.

Atticus explains to Jem that had he not fallen into Mrs. Dubose's hands he would have been made to read to her anyway. Explaining further Atticus states,

I wanted you to see something about her--I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know your licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do. Mrs. Dubose won, all ninety-eight pounds of her. According to her views, she died behold to nothing and nobody. She was the bravest person I ever knew. (Lee, p.116)

Despite Jem and Scout's feelings toward Mrs. Dubose, despite Mrs. Dubose's seemingly bitter disposition, she provides a positive learning experience for Jem and Scout. The children's feelings toward Mrs. Dubose reflect the

community's attitude toward Atticus and his actions. From this the children learn that, like Atticus, Mrs. Dubose is only being true to her essence. Doing what she must. Experiences like this can not be taught as such but they are learned.

The days that follow prove to be no easier as the children are confronted more and more by their classmates and other members of the community. In searching for answers Jem and Scout are able to use their experiences to help broaden their perspectives on life. Atticus' influential wisdom is also an important factor in helping the children adapt according to their experiences. Answering some of Scout's questions concerning the Robinson case, and the attitude of the community, Atticus points out the importance of being true to your own essence. He explains to his little girl that people are entitled to think what they will and be respected for their opinions. Atticus goes on to point out, "...before I can live with other folks I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide to majority rule is a person's conscience" (Lee, p.109).

When asked by Scout if he is a "nigger lover" Atticus replies, "I most certainly am. I do my best to love everybody . . . it's never an insult to be called what somebody thinks is a bad name. It just shows you how poor that person is. It doesn't hurt you" (Lee, p.113). Just as Jem has to pay the price for the pride that forces him to damage Mrs. Dubose's

camellia bushes so Atticus must pay the price for his pride. Jem's respect for his mother and father brought about his actions. Atticus' respect for humanity, in the same way, forces him to justly defend Tom Robinson, an equal fellow human being. Atticus lives as an equal and loves as an equal in a calm understanding and honest way that makes him a living example to Jem and Scout. Atticus not only speaks out of wisdom he lives by the very principles of his wisdom. He is a living example, not for Jem and Scout's sake, or for the sake of Tom Robinson, or the community, but for his own sake. This too is a "life lesson" for Jem and Scout. Although reflective of the ideal behind the Dewey Decimal System this "life lesson" is one that can not be taught from a text. It can only be learned from the experiences of life.

As the trial draws near tension rises among the people of the county. This becomes obvious to Jem and Scout one night as a gathering of men confront Atticus in the front yard. It is also obvious that Atticus intends to calmly yet persuasively stand his ground. With this Jem begins to worry about Atticus, (as only a son can worry about his father). Jem's apprehensions are heightened the night before the trial as Atticus, breaking his usual evening routine, takes the car and goes out for the evening. The night grows late and Jem's worrisome curiosity gets the best of him. He and Scout sneak out, get Dill, and go to find Atticus. Seeing Atticus' dark office they make their way around to the jail house and

observe Atticus, patiently sitting outside, reading the paper. Starting home the children notice four dusty cars pull up in front of the jail. Sneaking back to a safely discrete distance the children anxiously observe Atticus' gentle manner. Scout, unable to control her anticipation, breaks away from Jem and Dill and runs to Atticus' aide. Upon seeing the children Atticus instructs Jem to take Scout and Dill home. With the same gentle persuasiveness he has observed in his father, Jem refuses. As the tension builds Scout takes notice of a man whose son is her class mate and whom Atticus has helped. In an attempt to be polite, as she has learned from Atticus, Scout tries to strike up conversation.

Atticus had said it was the polite thing to talk to people about what they were interested in, not about what you were interested in. Mr. Cunningham displayed no interest in his son, so I tackled his entailment once more in a last ditch effort to make him feel at home. (Lee, p.156)

Suddenly Scout notices the shock amongst the crowd. At this point Mr. Cunningham squatts down, takes Scout by the shoulders, and tells her that he will say "hey" to his son for her. Then he calls the rest of the men back to their cars and they drive off. The next morning at breakfast Atticus

points out to the children that Mr. Cunningham is still their friend.

Mr. Cunningham's basically a good man, . . . he just has his blind spots along with the rest of us. . . . you'll understand folks a little better when your older. A mob's always made up of people, no matter what. Mr. Cunningham was part of a mob last night, but he was still a man. Every mob in every little Southern town is always made up of people you know--doesn't say much for them does it? . . . So it took an eight-year-old child to bring 'em to their senses, didn't it? . . . That proves something--that a gang of wild animals can be stopped, simply because their still human. . . . you children last night made Walter Cunningham stand in my shoes for a minute. That was enough.

(Lee, pp.159-160)

Again the children see the importance of being understanding, not holding a grudge, putting yourself in anothers shoes before casting judgement or acting on impulsive feelings. This as well is an experience that can not be taught but must be learned. Just as Atticus learns of

Scout and Jem's true dedication and love for him, the children learn the importance of loving and understanding all men, be they black or white, in jail or in the midst of a mob.

When all was said and done, the trial over and Tom Robinson found guilty in spite of Atticus proving Tom's innocence, there are many questions and still more lessons to be learned. Struggling with what he has witnessed Jem states,

It's like bein' a caterpillar in a cocoon, that's what it is, . . . Like somethin' asleep wrapped up in a warm place. I always thought Maycomb folks were the best folks in the world, least that's what they seemed like. (Lee, p.218)

Atticus, aware of Jem's struggle with the growing pains of a broadening world view, explains to his son,

So far nothing in your life has interfered with your reasoning process. Those are twelve reasonable men in everyday life, Tom's jury, but you saw something come between them and reason. . . . There's something in our world that makes men lose their heads--they couldn't be fair if they tried. In our courts, when it's a white man's word against a black man's, the white man always wins. They're ugly, but

those are the facts of life. . . . The older you grow the more of it you'll see. The one place where a man ought to get a square deal is in a courtroom, be he any color of the rainbow, but people have a way of carrying their resentments right into a jury box. As you grow older, you'll see white men cheat black men every day of your life, but let me tell you something and don't you forget it--whenever a white man does that to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he comes from, that white man is trash. (Lee, p.223)

Jem soon begins to place himself in other's shoes, which helps him become more aware and understanding of why things are the way they are and why people do the things they do. This is apparent as Jem explains to Scout,

...everybody's got to learn, nobody's born knowin'. That Walter's as smart as he can be, he just gets held back sometimes because he has to stay out and help his daddy. Nothin's wrong with him. . . . Scout, I think I'm begining to understand something. I think I'm begining to

understand why Boo Radley's stayed shut up in the house all this time . . . it's because he **wants** to stay inside. (Lee, p.230)

Jem eventually learns to tolerate the actual facts of life. The importance of being true to yourself by standing up for your beliefs, while being true to others by placing yourself in their shoes, and understanding things from their perspective, comes as a hard lesson for Jem, but it helps him to become his father's son. These lessons which Atticus so often displays in his own character are being formed in Jem's attitudes. Scout, on the other hand, being more of a fighter by nature, sticks strong to her safe, innocent, and ignorant views until one night an experience that she will never forget places her into the shoes of Boo Radley, the "malevolent phantom." This experience proves to be a lesson learned from life, for life.

On halloween night Jem and Scout are walking home from the evening's festivities at school. As they cross the dark school yard, nearing the street, they are attacked by Bob Ewell, the white man who has been made a fool of by Atticus' defense of Tom Robinson. As the scuffling takes place Jem is knocked unconscious and his arm is broke. Scouts halloween costume, constructed of chicken wire, is crushed around her. In the excitement Scout realizes there is another person involved, someone has come to their aide. Upon arrival home,

and after being checked by the doctor, Scout goes into Jem's room to see how he is. The sheriff has investigated the scene of the incident and is already in Jem's room explaining to Atticus that he has found Mr. Ewell outside, dead, stabbed with a kitchen knife.

Relating the evening's events to the sheriff Scout points out their unidentified helper standing silently against the wall. " ...[A]s I pointed at him in wonder the tension slowly drained from his face. His lips parted into a timid smile, and our neighbor's image blurred with my sudden tears. 'Hey, Boo,'..." (Lee, p.273).

As Atticus invites the sheriff to the porch to discuss things further Scout begins to realize the importance of placing yourself in someone else's shoes no matter what the circumstances.

I [Scout] wondered why Atticus was inviting us to the front porch instead of the livingroom, then I understood. The livingroom lights were awfully strong. . . . People have a habit of doing everyday things even under the oddest conditions. I was no exception: 'Come along Mr. Arthur, [Boo]' I heard myself saying, 'you don't know the house real well. I'll just take you to the porch, sir.' . . . Feeling slightly unreal, I led him to the chair

farthest from Atticus and Mr. Tate. It was in a deep shadow. Boo would feel more comfortable in the dark. (Lee, pp.274-275)

In the argument that follows between Atticus and the sheriff Scout again sees the importance of standing in another's shoes to get the proper perspective. Atticus, not wanting anything to be covered up, argues that if Jem has killed Bob Ewell his case must be brought before the county court. A clear cut case of self defense. The sheriff, aware of the fact that Jem could not have gotten up, taken Bob Ewell's knife and stabbed him, argues that Mr. Ewell has fallen on the knife. Although the sheriff is also aware of the fact that Boo Radley has probably caused Ewell's death, he places himself in Boo's shoes as he explains to Atticus,

I never heard tell that it's against the law for a citizen to do his utmost to prevent a crime from being committed, which is exactly what he [Boo] did, but maybe you'll say it's my duty to tell the town all about it and not hush it up. Know what'd happen then? All the ladies in Maycomb includin' my wife'd be knocking on his door bringing angel food cakes. To my way of thinkin', Mr. Finch, taking the one man who's done you and this town a great

service an' draggin' him with his shy ways into the limelight--to me, that's a sin. It's a sin and I'm not about to have it on my head. If it was any other man it'd be different. But not this man, Mr. Finch. . . . I may not be much, Mr Finch, but I'm still sheriff of Maycomb County and Bob Ewell fell on his knife. Good night, sir. (Lee, pp. 278-279)

As the sheriff leaves and Atticus sits silently contemplating, Scout places herself in her father's shoes. When Atticus finally speaks he asks Scout if she can possibly understand that Bob Ewell has fallen on his knife. "Yes sir, I understand, I [Scout] reassured him. Mr. Tate [the sheriff] was right" (Lee, p.279). When asked what she meant Scout explains to her father, "Well it'd sort of be like shooting a mockingbird wouldn't it?" (Lee. p.279)

Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird. (Lee, p.94)

Atticus, getting up, thanks Boo Radley for his childrens'

lives and goes into the house leaving Scout with but one more pair of shoes to try on. Gradually becoming comfortable with Boo Radley Scout begins to understand him.

Once more he [Boo Radley] got to his feet. he turned to me and nodded toward the front door. 'You'd like to say good night to Jem, wouldn't you, Mr. Arthur? Come right in.' . . . Boo had drifted to a corner of the room, where he stood with his chin up, peering from a distance at Jem. I took him by the hand, a hand suprisingly warm for it's whitness. I tugged him a little, and he allowed me to lead him to Jem's bed. . . . An expression of timid curiosity was on his face, as though he had never seen a boy before. His mouth was slightly open, and he looked at Jem from head to foot. Boo's hand came up, but he let it drop to his side. . . . 'Go on sir, he's asleep.' His [Boo's] hand came down lightly on Jem's hair. I [Scout] was begining to learn his body English. His hand tightened on mine and he indicated that he wanted to leave. I lead him to the front porch, where his uneasy steps halted. He was still holding my

hand and he gave no sign of letting me go. 'Will you take me home?' He almost whispered it, in the voice of a child afraid of the dark. . . . I entered the Radley front gate for the second time in my life. Boo and I walked up the steps to the porch. His fingers found the front doorknob. He gently released my hand, opened the front door, went inside, and shut the door behind him. I never saw him again. (Lee, p.280-281)

Although Scout's journey with Boo Radley is seemingly short, it is one of the most meaningful journeys of her life. This night Scout Finch, through her glimpse of Boo Radley, catches a glimpse of reality that broadens her world view.

I [Scout] turned to go home. Street lights winked down the street all the way to town. I had never seen our neighborhood from this angle. . . . 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. . . . As I made my way home, I felt very old. . . . As I made my way home I thought Jem and I would

get grown but there wasn't much else left for us to learn, except possibly algebra. (Lee, p.282)

One more thing, gentlemen, before I quit. Thomas Jefferson once said that all men are created equal, a phrase that the Yankees and the side of the Executive branch in Washington are fond of hurling at us. . . . We know all men are not created equal in the sense some people would have us believe--some people are smarter than others, some people have more opportunity because they are born with it, some men make more money than others, some ladies make better cakes than others--some people are born gifted beyond the normal scope of most men. (Lee, p.207-208)

This is precisely why Atticus Finch's way of life serves as a strong example for what he teaches. Teaching that does not encompass "reading, writing and arithmetic," but rather, "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" (Lee, p.34). As the story progresses Jem and Scout learn the importance of stepping into another's "skin" or "shoes". In doing so they learn that seeing things

from a wiser, more open perspective prevents ignorant, premature judgement. The children's own experience of misunderstanding others as they themselves are being misunderstood and therefore prejudiced against makes this lesson a living learning experience of life. These learning experiences are not the kind that can be taught from a text or by a highly devised system of teaching such as the Dewey Decimal System. They are lessons that are learned from life itself. The only real teacher, Father time. Thus we see that the unifying element of Harper Lee's novel To Kill A Mockingbird, is the element of education, the contrast between what is taught and what is learned.

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