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Hypocrisy and Racism

"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." This is a quote from Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird.* The story takes place in the Great Depression era in Maycomb County Alabama. A lawyer, Atticus Finch, and his children, Jem and Scout Finch, discover and learn from the current events of their community. Atticus is representing an African American man, Tom Robinson, who is accused of raping a 19 year old, white girl. As the court date approaches, Atticus’ children are teased and Atticus is mocked for taking the case. He is the kind of person though who stands up for the “mockingbird” characters who can’t defend themselves. **By creating an honest character like Atticus, the author of this novel does take a stand against racism and the idea of the hypocrisy of society.**

Hypocrisy is defined as “the practice of professing beliefs, feelings, or virtues that one does not hold or possess” and is mentioned many times in the novel*, To Kill a Mockingbird* (Dictionary.com*)*. For example, Scout and her Aunt Alexandra are having a get-together with ladies in the community. During the meeting, Mrs. Merriweather, a lady attending the meeting, brings up the topic of an African tribe of Mruna. This applies to the hypocrisy theme because the women are so concerned about the tribe and J. Grimes Everett, the missionary sent to convert them to Christianity. “Living in that jungle with nobody but J. Grimes Everett,” Mrs. Merriweather said. “Not a white person’ll go near ‘em but that saintly J. Grimes Everett.” The ladies want to help the Mruna and feel sorry for them as they feel they are an ignorant African black tribe. However, they ignore the fact that their own community needs help before the Mruna tribe does. They think that the problems of a faraway tribe are more important than the racial issues in their own community. The author shows the lack of awareness in people when it comes to dealing with their own racist attitudes. The author also shows how quick people are to judge others.

Hypocrisy about racism and prejudice is shown often in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. At school, Scout’s class discusses what Adolf Hitler was doing overseas to the Jews. The teacher, Miss Gates, and the class agree that persecuting the Jews and killing them is wrong. “Over here we don’t believe in persecuting anybody. Persecuting comes from people who are prejudice.” However, this statement is not true because of the intense racism in the community. Miss Gates can’t see that what is going on overseas is what is going on right in their own town. The author again shows the hypocritical nature of people and how they don’t see problems close to them. Lee makes the point that it takes someone who is confident and willing to look at their own behavior to be able to change a viewpoint. Unfortunately, very few people in society have this kind of confidence, especially to go against a deep belief like racism.

Lastly, Atticus stands for what is right and just and he does not stand for hypocrisy or racism. He defends Tom Robinson even though he knows people of the town will not agree with him. In fact, the jury finds Tom guilty even though the evidence of bruises on Mayella don’t fit with Tom’s useless left arm.. Atticus strives to be the best role model he can in the eyes of his children. Scout explains to Miss Maudie that her father is the same in his house as he is on the street meaning he doesn’t say one thing and do another. Atticus knows well that if he is not the same person in town as he is in home, he will not be taken seriously by his kids. “Before Jem looks at anyone else he looks at me, and I’ve tried to live so I can look squarely back at him.” The author makes the point that all parents are role models to their children and that kids will learn how to act from the way their parents act. Atticus is aware of this and makes sure that he stays true to the beliefs he wants the children to learn such as being a defender of the innocent.

Hypocrisy is noted and linked to the idea of racism in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Jem and Scout both grow up and mature and realize that many people believe it’s easier to find fault in other people before you find fault in yourself and that it’s easier to judge others. Jem especially notices the way others are not devoted to the idea of justice and equality like Atticus. Even though Tom dies at the end, they realize that their father tried his best to get justice for him. The author created a role model in Atticus that contrasted with the hypocrisy of society and that’s how the children gained a better knowledge of their world and community.