

To Kill a Mockingbird, by Lee

The Anti-Capitalist Story

Many of the good characters in TKAM are trying to survive the Great Depression, an economic disaster created by capitalism, an economic system in which everyone competes for money against everyone else, and the rich and powerful do not share but instead they use scams and force to profit from the majority. How do Atticus Finch, the Cunninghams, Mrs Dubose, Mrs Maudie, Mr Radley and Boo Radley, and many more survive capitalism and its Great Depression? Think about how these people pay for things, avoid going in debt, avoid using technologies like phones, radios and televisions, get food without going to grocery stores, and avoid going to hospitals?

The Anti-Government Story

TKAM constantly exposes how government and the law does not work. Consider Atticus' dislike of his job in Chapter 1, the failure of the government to take care of older women like Mrs. Dubose, the trial of Tom Robinson, the awful school and teachers Scout endures, the fire fighters, and so on.

The Unlawful Heroes

The heroes in TKAM are Atticus Finch, the Finch children, Calpurnia, Mrs Dubose, Mr Radley and Boo Radley, and many more. But these heroes are not conventional, swashbuckling or long-suffering heroes. These heroes always challenge social conventions and society's laws.

While reading TKAM, collect evidence with citations that the following traditions, laws, and social conventions are being violated, broken, mocked or otherwise challenged.

Traditional Assumptions:

1. Good American families attend churches
2. Being a defense lawyer is a great job
3. Good American children attend public school and learn best in school
4. American teachers are good
5. American men are married
6. White and black Americans do not intermarry
7. American women wear dresses
8. Americans buy their food; they do not grow it
9. White Americans feel superior to other Americans
10. American heroes kill their enemies
11. Americans follow doctor's orders and take their prescriptions
12. Good parents should attend their children's performances at school

13. Adults should be patriotic

Laws:

1. Boo Radley and friends drive a car backwards
2. Mr Radley persuades a judge to exempt his son from a sentence
3. Boo Radley does not attend school
4. Children trespass
5. The children attend the trial
6. Atticus barter to avoid taxation and help the poor
7. Atticus commits arson so that Miss Maudie can collect her fire insurance
8. Atticus does not seem to report Dill's absence to his step-parents
9. Mrs Dubose administers her own medicine
10. Atticus shoots a dog that is not his, without permission
11. Judge Taylor mocks the defendant
12. Atticus tells an officer of the law to bend the rules

Many of these topics can be used to support the thesis that TKAM contains a great deal of advice about how to survive another Great Depression and a thesis about how to live independently, without help from governments, banks and stores.

Operation Mockingbird

Atticus never uses the media. Why? Research CIA influence over the media through Operation Mockingbird. You can research by watching videos. Here are some:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=project+mockingbird

Surviving Capitalism

Explore how characters try avoid survive not only the Great Depression but also work outside the capitalist economy. Here are some topics to explore:

- Living without money, using trade or barter instead – the Cunninghams,
- Not accepting bank loans and risking debt – mortgages and the Cunninghams; education related expenses and the Finch brothers
- Growing your own food and caring for your own land – Ms Maudie, the Radleys, etc.
- Avoiding dental bills by eating responsibly – Ms Maudie
- Avoiding medical bills and bankruptcy caused by medical bills – the leading cause of personal bankruptcy in the U.S. – Mrs Dubose

- Refusing to spend on false wealth: movies, televisions, fairs, summer camps, etc. – Atticus
- Giving no money to your churches and being ‘spiritual’ at home instead – Radleys and Finches
- Helping one another for free – various examples, including Boo Radley, Tom Robinson, Ms Maudie, those who help the Ewells, Jem reading for Mrs Dubose, etc.

Surviving the Justice System

Tom Robinson is charged with rape even though no evidence was presented, and the testimony of the accusers was not even logical. We can easily assume that this awful world described by Harper Lee no longer exists, but the world seems to be less interested in evidence than ever before, and more than ever before people go to prison and more wars are fought on the basis of lies without evidence. To explore this subject, read a few articles through these links:

The Media:

<https://fair.org/?s=%22no+evidence%22>

The Justice System:

<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-1209-goldberg-uva-rape-false-allegations-scottsboro-20141209-column.html>

<http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2014/04/28/how-many-people-are-wrongly-convicted-researchers-do-the-math/>

<http://www.justiceontrial.org/index.php/the-presumption-of-guilt/>

Other thoughts

The novel presents an extremely critical and unflattering picture of education. In one or more paragraphs, prove that this is true. Hint: discuss how useless public education was to children growing up in a rural, farming area during the Great Depression. Most of the evidence will come from Part One, but the trial and the school play or pageant can also be discussed.

The Mockingbird is usually treated as a symbol of a good person who is unjustly persecuted and sometimes, as in Tom Robinson’s case, killed. But *mocking* and irony also play a strong role in the story. Discuss a few examples. Consider the snowman-mudman, one or more of Miss Maudie’s fierce quips, and—if possible—one of your own examples from the book.

Comment on how Nazi Germany is discussed. Compare it to the prejudiced and negative opinions the Christian missionary ladies have of native peoples.

