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Creative and Witty Title Goes Here

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a coming-of-age story set in small-town Maycomb, Alabama in the 1950s. Like any small southern town in this era, Maycomb is full of scandal, gossip and prejudice; many characters are considered outcasts simply for being different from those who make up society's rules. Throughout the novel, Harper Lee explores the harsh social hierarchy that ranges from the well-to-do white folks all the way to the black community which surrounds Scout, Lee's innocent and naïve protagonist. However, Scout also has positive influences in her life—her father, Atticus, and their neighbor, Miss Maudie—who teach her what it means to be a truly moral person. In her novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee uses the contrasting characterization of Atticus and Miss Maudie to examine the idea that empathy is far more important than giving in to society's often misguided standards.

**Comment [DU1]:** WORDY!

Atticus Finch is characterized early on as the moral voice of the men in Maycomb, as well as an exemplary father figure. Atticus teaches his children about empathy and compassion His advice to Scout in the beginning of the novel recurs throughout the entire story. He tells her, "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" (32). It is this advice that Scout repeats to herself throughout many key moments in the novel and ultimately helps her along the road to maturity. This advice helps Scout deal with her ever-changing relationship with Jem, as well as some of her classmates; ultimately, it helps her to see that Boo Radley is more than just a phantom that lives in a creepy house—she sees him for the kind person he really is.

**Comment [DU2]:** Do these go together?  
Separate paragraphs for father and man?

**Comment [L3]:** Quote?

Atticus not only tells Scout to put herself in others' shoes, but he also takes his own advice; he is constantly considering what others may be feeling and explaining reasons for their actions. For example, after Mrs. Dubose's death, despite the fact that she constantly rained down insults on Atticus, Jem and Scout, he says, "You know, she was a great lady...According to her views, she died beholden to nothing and nobody. She was the bravest person I ever knew" (105). His ability to feel compassion for even the most racist and insulting old woman is just another example of his strong moral character. Unlike many of the people of Maycomb, including his own sister, Atticus values equality and compassion. When he takes on the Tom Robinson case, he knows there will be repercussions, possibly even for his own children, yet he takes the case anyway because he feels it is necessary for him to try to help Tom. He tells Scout, "I couldn't go to church and worship God if I didn't try to help that man...before I can live with other folks I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience" (99). Even though it would be easier for Atticus and his children if he were to decline the case, his integrity as a lawyer, father and man will not let him go down without a fight.

**Comment [L4]:** More explanation...another quote?

Miss Maudie, the Finches' neighbor, is another moral compass for the children throughout the novel, as well as Miss Maudie interacts with the children, particularly Scout, in much the same way that Atticus does. She does not look down on the children and lets them be themselves, despite what anyone else's opinion is. During the Missionary Society meeting, Scout is laughed at by many of the women for wearing her pants under her dress. She says, "My cheeks grew hot as I realized my mistake, but Miss Maudie looked gravely down at me. She never laughed at me unless I meant to be funny" (210). She encourages Scout to consider others and to treat people as just people, rather than relying on stereotypes and rumors; like Atticus, she also practices what she preaches. She tells Scout everything she knows about Arthur Radley, refusing to use the nickname he has been given, and seems

to feel sympathy for him. She feels he is more of a victim of circumstance than a bad person and is able to see through all the rumors and suspicion that has run rampant through the town.

**Comment [L5]:** Quote? Also, more explanation?

Much like Atticus keeps the men in Maycomb in check, Miss Maudie seems to be the moral voice for the women in town. Although she is part of the Missionary Society, she understands and has obvious contempt for the hypocrisy that occurs within the meetings. During the social hour of one of these meetings, one of the women is complaining about her servant sulking around the house since the verdict of the Tom Robinson trial. Miss Maudie responds by simply asking, "His food doesn't stick going down, does it?" (213). Miss Maudie has no problem calling Mrs. Merriweather for being hypocritical and condescending.

Throughout the novel, Scout learns what it means to be a good person; though she is exposed to prejudice, hatred and gossip on a daily basis. However, through the positive influences on her life through the extremely moral characters of Miss Maudie and Atticus, she is able to become her own person and disregard what society deems "proper." Ultimately, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* uses these strong characters to teach the lesson that an essential part of becoming a moral person is the ability to have empathy for people and sometimes to disregard the ideals that society tries to enforce.