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Innocent Eyes: Life Lessons Learned from Scout Finch

It is said in the Bible, “out of the mouths of babes” the truth comes because children are innocent since they have not been tainted by grown up problems and vices yet. This is true of the main character Scout in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Scout is an observant six year old girl who has been taught by her father to treat all people the same, and yet she struggles when she realizes that not everyone in her 1930s small southern town follows that practice. Through a series of class and race struggles that occur around her, Scout grows from a naïve young girl to a mature and tolerant young lady.

At the beginning of the novel, Scout has an innocent outlook on her life and the town in which she lives. She does not understand the underlying tension that exists in her small southern Alabama town of Maycomb in the 1930s. After a rough first day of school Atticus explains to Scout, “you never understand a person until you consider things from his point of view” (Lee 30). Scout has grown up sheltered from the harsh realities of the town she lives in. In her innocence, she does not see a difference between rich and poor or black and white. Therefore Atticus must caution her to observe things from another person’s perspective before passing judgment, which is the mistake she had made earlier that day at school. Scout’s inability to sense the racist and classist tension in her classroom demonstrates her naivety in understanding the world around her.

The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a coming of age story and therefore there are several events that cause Scout to change drastically. The first life-changing event that Scout endures comes when Atticus decides to defend Tom Robinson, an African American man who has been wrongly accused of rape. In his explanation to Scout when she questions why he took the case, Atticus tells her, “This case, Tom Robinson’s case, is something that goes to the essence of a man’s conscience—Scout, I couldn’t go to church and worship God if I didn’t try to help that man” (Lee 104). In this moment Scout learns that Atticus believes in doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do, regardless of whether or not it is popular. He teaches Scout to stand up for what she believes in and not to allow the judgments of others to influence her to treat others differently even if that means she is ridiculed for it. Scout’s eye-opening conversation with her father helps her to grow from a child to an adult.

By the end of the novel, Scout has matured greatly. When she finally meets Boo Radley, the author sets the stage for Scout to demonstrate her new grown-up outlook. Boo is a reclusive man who has been persecuted by the town for being different until he has become something of a legend. However, once Scout has the opportunity to meet Boo after he rescues her brother from Mr. Ewell’s knife, she tells her father, “Well, it’d be sort of like shootin’ a mockingbird, wouldn’t it” (Lee 276). Scout had learned from her father that it is a sin to kill a mockingbird because they bring only joy. Now that she has met Boo she realizes that he too doesn’t harm anyone and doesn’t deserve to be treated the way he has by their town. This is a pivotal moment for Scout in understanding that just because a person is different, they aren’t evil or wrong.

Through enduring and overcoming the town’s hatred of her family because of Atticus’s choice to defend Tom Robinson and finally being able to meet and understand Boo Radley, Scout is changed permanently. Her evolution from questioning child to compassionate young lady shows us we cannot allow others opinions or our own challenges to taint our view of the world. Rather it is better to live life with innocent eyes, and consequently approach each new day, person, and situation with an open-mind and an open-heart.