

## *To Kill a Mockingbird* Essay Topics

1. **Racism**- "I'm simply defending a Negro—his name's Tom Robinson" (75). With these words Atticus informs Scout of his life-altering task of standing up to the prejudice and racism that pervades the sleepy southern town that was Maycomb, Alabama in the 1930's. Discuss the effects of racism on three Maycomb citizens such as Tom and Helen Robinson, Calpurnia, Scout, Jem, Dill, Mayella Ewell, or Dolphus Raymond. What comment is Harper Lee making about racism and prejudice?
2. **Empathy**- According to Atticus, "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" (30). How is empathy toward others demonstrated or learned by three characters such as Atticus, Scout, Jem, Dill, or Miss Maudie? What comment is Harper Lee making about this importance of empathy?
3. **Courage**- Atticus says to Jem that he wants his son "to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand" (112). How is courage defined in this novel? What character(s) best exemplify courage? Why? What point does Harper Lee want to make about courage through her use of these characters?
4. **Symbolism** is the use of an object, color, or idea to represent something bigger or more abstract than itself. Analyze how Harper Lee utilizes three symbols from the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, to underscore a particular theme. What does it represent? How is the symbol presented and maintained throughout the novel? Do you think it was an effective symbol? Why or why not?
5. **Motifs** - motifs are reoccurring patterns (symbols, ideas, and phrases) which begin to convey theme as a story progresses. Focusing on one motif, write an essay analyzing how that motif functions in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and what it reveals about characters or themes of the novel as a whole. Do NOT merely summarize the plot. *Some motifs to consider: boundaries, mockingbirds, secrets, "when to worry", walking in someone's skin, losing battles, and blind spots.*

### Requirements (rough draft and final draft):

- 5 paragraphs
- **Heading** (name, course title, teacher name, date, period in the top left margin)
- **Original title** (centered and not underlined)
- **Introduction** (hook, background, thesis statement, statement of order)
- **3 Body Paragraphs:**
  - Each body paragraph begins with a topic sentence
  - 1-3 quotes from the novel per body paragraph
  - 2-5 sentences of commentary on each quote
  - **Concluding/transitioning sentence at the end of each body paragraph**
- **Conclusion paragraph:**
  - 5 -10 sentences
  - **Reinforces and restates thesis**
  - **Connects thesis to universal themes, or relates it to your own reality of the world today**
- **Final draft must be written in blue or black ink**