Sample Theme Essay for *To Kill a Mockingbird*

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Sears
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To Kill a Mockingbird: Prejudice—Man’s Inhumanity to Man

Harper Lee’s novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* examines the theme of prejudice in all its forms through the ignorance of the people in a small town in Alabama. The reader quickly realizes that all people are biased in some aspect of their lives; although, Lee also points out that some are more able to recognize their own faults and work to overcome them while striving to educate the ignorant on the basic equality of all men.

Many authors investigate humanity’s bent toward inhumanity, but Harper Lee’s novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, exposes this inhumanity through various scenarios throughout the telling of Scout’s story. Scout Finch encounters prejudice in all of its forms, beginning with that of gender and social class when she assaults Walter Cunningham and then invites him home where she inadvertently embarrasses him by calling attention to his lack of table manners. Fortunately, she has a parent who is morally bound to impart his beliefs on equality to his children. Atticus Finch not only practices what he preaches; he also shares his wisdom with the people of Maycomb County when he takes on the case of Tom Robinson, knowing that he will lose before he even begins. Harper Lee illustrates this scenario as racial prejudice head on; throughout the book, black men are referred to as the lowest level class in society. Even Maycomb’s lowest rung of white society is considered to be above the most intelligent black man. This is clearly evidenced when Tom Robinson is put on the witness stand right after Bob Ewell swaggers down; the townspeople in the courtroom show their indulgence as they snigger at Ewell’s thinly veiled innuendos and references to “that negra” (190), while Robinson articulates clearly and compassionately, he is still dismissed and not worth feeling sorry for by the majority of white people in the courtroom. The obvious discrimination in this form is not missed by the reader, but the reluctance to act against racial, gender, and social injustices is still evident in today’s society in as many forms as it was in the past and may yet continue on into the future. Harper Lee does not suggest that humanity is unconcerned with the evil in society; rather, she proposes that the majority of human beings still desire to do right and continue to harbor an optimistic approach to the future.

Unfortunately, I have witnessed the ugliness of prejudice in the treatment of one student to another here at East High School. As students who can afford to obtain the latest in fashion or athletic gear, model their acquisitions, those who cannot are subject to ridicule and offensive comments. This, my friends, is a form of prejudice by judging one’s peers based on their monetary status. Students also discriminate against each other based on one’s looks, intelligence and physical appearance. How far are these actions from those of Maycomb County citizens who criticized Atticus for not following the crowd, and convicted a man based on the color of his skin? A disregard of humanity based on such trivial prejudices becomes an excuse for uncensored, inhumane actions. Of course we say that we would never treat someone this way, but how often do we turn a blind eye to the injustices going on around us. In order to progress in the future as a humane culture, we as a society must become more accepting and less judgmental in our treatment of others. But we cannot stop there, we must speak out against the injustices brought against others or else find ourselves guilty of promoting the very prejudices we are called on to prevent. “The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in times of great moral crisis, maintain their neutrality.” (Dante)
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