

Why the Mockingbird Died: Examining Gender, Race, and Justice in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*

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Overview

The main premise of this unit is to connect the themes of gender, race, and justice with similar themes and motifs in Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Lee's novel examines the ideas of gender, race, and justice as it pairs the real and the fictional in a plot loosely based on the historical Scottsboro Boys trial. The Tom Robinson case is a fictional version of this trial and within it's story are the inescapable ramifications of gender and racial discrimination and the failure of the American justice system to overcome these prejudices.

This unit centers on strategies and curriculum designed for eighth grade language arts students in a high performing middle school in Charlotte, NC. The school is an honors school of excellence, meeting both high growth and 27 out of 27 AYP standards. The school population consists of 1,054 students in sixth through eighth grade with a racial and socioeconomic diversification resulting in 72.2 percent Caucasian, 13.8 percent African-American, 7.6 percent Asian, 4.1 percent Hispanic, 2.1 percent multiracial, .3 percent Native American and 12.6 percent of students participating in the free and reduced lunch program. 7.3 percent of students have disabilities and 5.4 percent have limited English proficiency (LEP). The majority of the school population enjoys wealth, involved and well educated parents, and average to high intellectual abilities.

Driven by “rigor and relevance,” the goal of the administration and teachers remains to create an academic environment designed to challenge the most gifted students while simultaneously stretching and growing all students to reach new academic heights. A strategy employed to accomplish this goal is the heterogeneous grouping of all Language Arts classes. This grouping creates a classroom of multiple ability levels and challenges the instructor to differentiate education in order to facilitate the needs of lower-level students without introducing frustration, while simultaneously driving high level students to greater academic and intellectual engagement. The instruction exists within the premise of teaching all whole group lessons to the highest level of student and then addressing the needs of lower level students through small groups and on an individual basis as need arises. Intellectually stimulating, challenging, and rigorous instruction aligned to the NC standard course of study, and designed to teach students curriculum as well as application, guides the instructional focus of this school.

This curriculum unit's design applies these principles to create a unit of study both challenging and accessible as students engage with an interdisciplinary exploration of gender,

race, and justice as revealed through literary analysis focused primarily on in depth character and historical case history study. The issue of gender is explored by two primary characters, Scout Finch and MayElla Ewell, and furthered on a smaller scale by the secondary characters of Aunt Alexandra and Calpurnia. Readers are told the Tom Robinson story from the unexpected perspective of Scout Finch, a character struggling with conformity to societal norms beyond her comprehension. Through Scout's point of view, a tomboy raised without a mother in a southern society valuing "ladylike" behavior and uncomfortable with girls or women who fail to meet gender expectations, readers examine the characters of MayElla Ewell, another female failing to uphold societal expectations as she falls in love with and "tempts a negro", and Tom Robinson, an African-American man destroyed by the racial prejudice that makes it a sin for him to feel pity for a white woman. By juxtaposing Scout to Aunt Alexandra, the epitome of southern feminine stereotypes, modern readers are free to examine the influence gender had on women like Scout and MayElla Ewell in early twentieth century society. When the character of Mayella Ewell, who not only represents a woman transgressing her stereotypical gender role, but a woman imprisoned by poverty and the abuse of her father, is compared to Calpurnia, the Finch family's African-American maid, readers see the further complications of gender discrimination and societal expectations.

In order to identify and analyze the gender issues each of the above characters embodies, students will read and discuss primary source documents written by women in this time period struggling with issues of gender. Students will also examine court cases involving the issue of gender during this period. These nonfiction texts will be compared and contrasted to the experiences of the characters within the novel. The culmination of the gender study will be to have students analyze the evolution of gender issues, including gender discrimination, by examining modern essays and court cases centered around gender struggles.

Following the study of gender, students will examine race and the characters marred by racial prejudice in this novel. Students will analyze Atticus Finch and the racial expectations placed on wealthy, educated, white southern males during this time period and compare his character to that of Bob Ewell, a poor, uneducated, southern share cropper. They will then examine both these men in terms of their reaction to Tom Robinson and his role as an African-American male in a society governed by prejudice and Jim Crow laws. Finally, students will study the justice system itself while examining the Jim Crow laws and court system that left Tom Robinson a victim of what will be argued to be not only a prejudice of race, but a discrimination of race, gender, and socio-economic prejudice inextricably and horrifically entangled within the minds and laws of the early twentieth century American South.

In this unit, the strategy of in depth character analysis paired with a comparative analysis of contemporary and modern case studies will guide student learning. While reading the novel students will analyze the characters mentioned above within the context of the novel and its historical setting, then read case studies of different characters in modern society facing similar gender, race, and justice struggles, and compare and contrast the evolution of gender, race, and justice and their influences on character's (whether fictional or real) motivation and behavior. This unit will cover the course of a month during which time students will read and study *To Kill A Mockingbird* in conjunction with reading and studying nonfiction texts documenting the evolution of the American justice system in regard to the influence of gender and race on justice.

Socially Constructed Gender Stereotypes

The female characters in *To Kill A Mockingbird* provide excellent examples of the types of socially constructed gender roles women are expected to comply with and the means by which this compliance is achieved. As is conveyed by the women in this novel, gender is a socially constructed concept; women are not female simply because they possess a feminine anatomy. Biology alone does not dictate their femininity, as evidenced in chapter 12 with Jem's insistence "it's time you started bein' a girl and acting right,"¹ implying Scout's gender- "bein' a girl"- hinges on her behavior rather than her biology, and in chapter 13 as Aunt Alexandra begins her efforts at feminizing this tomboy; instead one becomes female when one adopts the societal norms associated with the female biology. "To be born a man or a woman in any society is more than a simple biological fact. It is a biological fact with social implications. Women constitute a distinct social group, and the character of that group, long neglected by historians, has nothing to do with feminine "nature." "Gender" is the term now widely used to refer to those ways in which a culture reformulates what begins as a fact of nature. The biological sexes are redefined, represented, valued, and channeled into different roles in various culturally dependent ways. . . a 'Sex/gender system [is] a set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity. . .'"² To fail to assimilate to "cultural reformation" is to fail to be female despite what one's biology might suggest. Scout and MayElla Ewell demonstrate the struggle to conform to culturally dictated norms as they both, initially, reject the feminine paradigms with which they are presented: Scout by wearing overalls and behaving in a hoydenish fashion and MayElla by pursuing a married, African-American man. Unfortunately, both women find it impossible to sustain a continued defiance of social expectations. Scout's "transformation" occurs as a result of Aunt Alexandra's interjection, MayElla's from her father's discovery of her transgression and her fear of not only his, but society's rejection.

While MayElla defies tradition as an adult, driven to rebellion by a loneliness imposed as a result of not only her gender role- caretaker to the innumerable Ewell children, but her class- her low socio-economic status excluding her from associations with missionary circles and amanuensis clubs Aunt Alexandra enjoys- Scout rebels as a child and Scout's reformation depends (according to the beliefs of Aunt Alexandra and other women like her) on her exposure to "proper models" of feminine behavior while still young enough to alter her inappropriate habits. These "models" are the means by which the social construction of gender occurs. Aunt Alexandra's actions reinforce Mead's theory of socialization, "founded on the notion that the self cannot be established independent of social interactions with other selves. By interacting with other and engaging in social acts, humans can have meaningful interactions that possess more meaning than could ever be achieved by the rudimentary responses that are achievable by simple organisms. Instead, humans, by establishing social acts, can convey ideas to other humans that can only be interpreted in one way."³ Aunt Alexandra has come to the Finch household to convey the idea of only one type of femininity to Scout- that of the genteel, upper class, white, Southern lady. Her model of behavior "can only be interpreted in one way:"⁴ if Scout is to be a woman, Scout must adopt the mannerisms Aunt Alexandra introduces- "...your father and I decided it was time I came to stay with you for a while... We decided it would be best for you to have some feminine influence."⁵ Aunt Alexandra models this "through the creation of gestures that convey a universal response... In this way, [Scout is] socialized to develop [her]

comprehension and, ultimately, [her] outward [appropriately feminine] expression from societal norms.”⁶ According to Haslanger, and evidenced by the interactions between Aunt Alexandra and Scout, “females become women through a process whereby they acquire feminine traits and learn feminine behaviour. Masculinity and femininity are thought to be products of nurture or how individuals are brought up. They are *causally constructed*”⁷ Aunt Alexandra symbolizes this casual construction of the culturally and societally influenced ideal of genteel, Southern, American femininity in the 1930s.

The women of *To Kill A Mockingbird* also demonstrate the influence that class, here identified by socio-economic stratification, and race exert on the appropriation of gender based social interactions and behavior. Within the historical context of this novel, class, race, and gender are all highly significant influencers. “In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, 26 states had laws prohibiting the employment of married women. The sentiment behind the laws was that a married woman – who presumably had a husband to take care of her – should not “steal” a job from a man. It was acceptable for single women to find jobs, but usually these were lower-paying jobs that were typically considered “women’s work” – thus white women worked as salesgirls, beauticians, schoolteachers, secretaries, and nurses. The job market for African American women was even more restricted, with most black women who worked serving as maids, cooks, or laundresses.”⁸ In the novel, the difference between Aunt Alexandra, white, married, and unemployed, Calpurnia, African- American, married, and a maid, and Miss Caroline, white, unmarried, and a school teacher, marks the discrepancies between socio-economic and racially influenced gender stereotypes in the workplace.

Character Study

Students will examine the concept of socially constructed gender roles through an in depth character analysis of the following females in the novel, paying particular attention to the characteristics listed below:

Aunt Alexandra and Scout

In the novel, the interactions between Aunt Alexandra and Scout provide an arena for students to analyze the impact and implications of socially determined gender roles. Aunt Alexandra’s femininity arose in conjunction with modeled behavior representing the socially constructed idea of proper femininity in the American south of the 1930s. Her feminine identity evolved as a reaction to the “norms” exposed in her cultural conditioning. As a white southern woman, she modeled her white southern elders and almost unconsciously became a product of their beliefs. She follows social norms and believes it is necessary for women of a certain class to exhibit certain behaviors and therefore cannot accept Scout’s resistance to the societal expectations of women at this time period. Scout, unlike Aunt Alexandra, has grown up without a mother or traditional feminine influence by which to construct her own gender role. While Calpurnia and other female figures, Mrs. Maudie, Scout’s teachers, etc., are a part of her world, they are not involved enough in her day to day activities to exert the influences necessary to transform her confusion over the gender expectations of her society. Scout represents a defiance of the socially

constructed gender roles, dresses as a tomboy and prefers a masculine lifestyle- all habits Aunt Alexandra hopes to rectify by moving in with the Finch family and providing a consistent model of feminine behavior for Scout to pattern her femininity after: “Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady (again, a reference to gender as something that is constructed rather than biologically determined) if I wore breeches; I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I wasn’t supposed to be doing things that required pants. Aunt Alexandra’s vision of my deportment involved playing with small stoves, tea sets, and wearing the Add-A-Pearl necklace she gave me when I was born...”⁹ Again, Aunt Alexandra hopes to not only show Scout femininity by modeling it for her, but engage Scout in gender specific activities that train her conformance.

In order to examine the contrast between Scout and Aunt Alexandra while further exploring the idea of socially constructed gender roles, students will analyze passages in the novel illustrating how Aunt Alexandra has been marred by gender stereotypes and how Scout has tried to resist them. Students will create a log citing all of the passages in the novel relating to Aunt Alexandra and Scout’s gender roles and perceptions. (Students will use the “Gender, Race, and Class chart” provided at the end of the unit). Following an in depth character analysis of Scout and Aunt Alexandra students will then read the article *1930s, America - Feminist Void? The status of the Equal Rights Movement during the Great Depression* by Mickey Moran and extrapolate historical evidence for Aunt Alexandra’s gender biases while creating a graphic organizer highlighting the historical influences that shaped Aunt Alexandra’s anti-feminist propensities. Finally, students will complete a writing assignment predicting Aunt Alexandra’s long range impact on Scout’s gender construction.

1930s America: How a Feminist Void Constructed “Calpurnian” Femininity

Historical Reference/ Event	Impact on Americans	Influence on the “construction” of Calpurnia’s femininity (inferred by students)	Textual Evidence from the novel supporting or refuting inference	Impact on Scout (With text citations)
But after the initial surge of support for women's rights with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, feminist fervor diminished throughout the latter '20s and all but disappeared during the Depression. And with that reduced support for women's rights came a renewed promotion of the traditional belief that women belonged in the home -- not in the workplace. ¹⁰				
In a depressed economy, unemployment figures escalated and federal				

<p>forces concentrated on bringing Americans back to work. Or, more accurately, bringing American men back to work. For society viewed working women as un-American money grubbers, stealing jobs from men who needed them to support their families.¹¹</p>				
<p>Support for male and female differentiation strengthened during the '30s after a decade of decline.¹²</p>				
<p>President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, praised for seeking the advice of women in his administration, named Frances Perkins as the first woman cabinet member. But she herself asserted that married women ought not shirk their responsibilities to their families by seeking outside employment.¹³</p>				
<p>In the Atlantic, Albert Jay Nock pandered to feminine pride in agreeing that women could perform as well as their male counterparts and had demonstrated that fact for centuries. He then fell into the same tired truisms of emphasizing woman's sphere, implying that the female must stand firm in her role as moral model. He stated, "Women can civilize a society and men cannot."¹⁴</p>				
<p>Nock, and the majority of the U.S. population, believed that women could civilize" not through roles as legislators, educators, administrators or preachers, but through the comforting domain of their immediate households. Only in molding their young ones and prodding their husbands toward responsible action could women serve their natural</p>				

purpose. ¹⁵				
<p>Once again, prominent women only enforced these sexist tendencies. Mrs. Samuel Gompers proclaimed, "A home, no matter how small, is large enough to occupy [a wife's] mind and time." She called women working outside the home "unnatural" and chided them (or taking jobs from men who needed them. The Women's Bureau asserted that wives who held outside jobs were destroying the integrity of their families. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins supported the concept of family wages. Mary Dewson, who organized the Women's Division of the Democratic Party in 1932, believed women possessed specific qualities best suited for the "sanctity and security" of the home.¹⁶</p>				
<p>During the 1930s, the percentage of master's degrees and doctorates earned by women dropped significantly. While female university education increased substantially, those who attended college found the formerly high quality comprehensive education replaced by classes that emphasized training for women's roles in the household. Women's magazines promoted the virtues of motherhood and homemaking, condemning those who became involved in areas outside women's sphere. Without training or public support, the '30s working woman faced numerous obstacles in fighting for a suitable job.¹⁷</p>				
<p>...women found enormous obstacles blocking their entry into certain fields. Most women found work in factory and clerical jobs, as traditional barriers against women in</p>				

<p>professional fields loomed higher. Instead of "glamorous" professions, 36 percent of working wives entered domestic and personal services, while another 20 percent were in apparel and canning factories. Those who were in lower-level professions, such as elementary and high school teaching, found men displacing them for higher pay. In 1939, the median salary of a male teacher was \$1,953 a year, while female teachers received only \$1,394.¹⁸</p>				
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Calpurnia

Calpurnia represents an intersection of gender, class, and race roles. Unlike Aunt Alexandra and Scout, Calpurnia must adapt to both racial and gender constructions of identity. This complicates her identity and is evidenced by her variant behavior at work in the Finch household and amidst the Black community. The conflict between these existences is illustrated when Calpurnia takes Scout and Jem to church with her. Scout, again a model of an innocent not yet formed by societal influences, notes “That Calpurnia led a modest double life never dawned on me. The idea that she had a separate existence outside our household was a novel one, to say nothing of her having command of two languages.”¹⁹ Lee uses this episode to remind readers of the multitude of influences on the Tom Robinson plot in this novel. Race and gender roles are both significant factors within the context of this case and the Black community’s response to both the Finch children’s visit to First Purchase (the Black church Calpurnia attends) and Scout’s analysis of Calpurnia’s dichotomous identification portray the degree of complications gender and race play in Tom Robinson’s pursuit of justice. This chapter also creates a lens by which students will carefully examine the intersection of gender and race via the character of Calpurnia. In this section of study, students will read chapter 12 of *To Kill A Mockingbird* and take notes on the way race and gender impact and shape Calpurnia’s character and actions in the novel. Following discussion of these notes, students will read the article *Gender Roles in Black Communities, 1880s-1930s* by Sharon Harley and compare and contrast the descriptions in this article with the role played by Calpurnia in the novel. Finally, students will analyze the information from both sources and predict the ways race and gender will play a role in the Tom Robinson trial.

MayElla Ewell: The Paradigm of Social Structure and the Paradox of Race and Poverty

Mayella is the most complicated of all the female characters in the novel as she represents the intersection of class, race, and gender roles. Her role as a female contrasts with that of Aunt Alexandra’s because she is of a lower social class and, ironically, with Calpurnia’s as she is not

only of an inferior class but white. In addition to her class struggle, Mayella attempts to defy the socially constructed expectations for her race and gender by falling in love with Tom Robinson, a married African American man, however, she is not strong enough to stand up against societal pressure when her pursuit of Tom is discovered by her racist father and therefore returns to her prescribed persona, accusing Tom of raping her in order to reinsert herself into an acceptable feminine role in society. Her behavior represents the theory of social strain, manifested when “The gap between approved goals and the means people have to achieve them creates what Merton terms *social strain*.”²⁰ Mayella’s “social strain” or conflict exists between a white society from which she is excluded due to poverty and a black society from which she is racially excluded. Mayella literally has no place in the society of Maycombe and, in the words of Scout Finch, “must have been the loneliest person in the world.”²¹ This loneliness motivated Mayella to defy her societal trappings, behaving in rebellion against another powerful institution of this period, racial segregation.

“Merton’s theory of social strain holds that people respond to the gap between society’s values and their own circumstances in several different ways: rebellion, retreatism, and innovation. Some of these involve criminal activity. Rebellion involves a rejection of both society’s goals and the established means of achieving them, [Mayella abandons the goal of becoming a respectable middle to upper class white female of the Aunt Alexandra variety and instead of bettering her education, attempting to improve her hygiene or marry a respectable white male, pursues not only a black man, but a married man.] along with an attempt to create a new society based on different values and goals... Retreatism entails a rejection of both the goals and the accepted means of achieving them[Mayella retreats into the lie that Tom raped her and abandons all hope of love or escape from her class, testifying in court that Tom raped her.]... Innovation involves an acceptance of society’s goals but a rejection of the accepted means of attaining them [Mayella initially hopes that by agreeing to charge Tom with rape she will be accepted by the white society of Maycombe, even if the cost of this acceptance is Tom’s life]- that is, some forms of innovation can be negative rather than positive. Crime is one mode of innovation. [Mayella commits the crime of “tempting a negro” and rejecting the Jim Crow laws and attempts to avoid the consequences of this crime through her rape accusation. Crime accompanies each stage of social strain Mayella experiences.]”²²

According to Cornell West, as quoted in *The Color of Justice*, structures and behavior are inseparable, ... institutions and values go hand in hand.”²³ The institution of classism, casting Mayella in the role of “white trash” poverty and the institution of racism, enforced by the Jim Crow segregation of the south, along with the rebellion and innovation of social strain, became the structural basis of Mayella’s criminal behavior. These structures created a woman who, as a result of poverty, was ostracized by her white counterparts, and as a result of racism, unable to socialize or enter a relationship with a black man. Mayella’s structural assignment was one of isolation and loneliness so extreme that the concomitant emotional strain she suffered in the midst of her societal restraints led her to an initial rebellion against them, kissing Tom Robinson. This also led to crime. In the segregated south, interracial relationships were prohibited by law and had she been discovered Mayella could have faced criminal charges for her rebellion against the institution of Jim Crow. Unfortunately, when this rebellion backfired, Mayella committed an even greater crime as a result of an ultimately tragic innovation, accusing Tom of rape in order to

realign herself with the very social structures by which she was oppressed.

In spite of the fact that Atticus, and most of Maycombe, following the trial and Atticus' revelation that Mayella was beaten by a left handed man and Tom's left hand was handicapped in Dolphus Raymond's cotton gin, are aware that Tom is innocent, Mayella, still angered by the trappings of her socio-economic status, refuses to admit her crime, depending instead on the corrupt justice system and racial prejudice of Maycombe to protect her. When Atticus implores Mayella to confess, asking " 'Who beat you up? Tom Robinson or your father?' No answer. 'What did your father see in the window, the crime of rape or the best defense to it? Why don't you tell the truth, child, didn't Bob Ewell beat you up?'" Mayella is so paralyzed by the structure of racism and fear motivating her accusation against Tom, she fails to see an opportunity to, once and for all, rise above the very systems of oppression she has faced her entire life, and instead, her "face... a mixture of terror and fury..."²⁴ retreats into a permanent state of prevarication, viewing Atticus as another upper class enemy against which she must fight declaring " 'I got somethin' to say an then I ain't gonna say no more. That nigger yonder took advantage of me an' if you fine fancy gentlemen don't wanta do nothin' about it then you're all yellow stinkin' cowards, stinkin' cowards, the lot of you. Your fancy airs don't come to nothin' - your ma'amin' and Miss Mayellerin' don't come to nothin', Mr. Finch-' Then she burst into real tears."²⁵ Mayella's "real tears" are the tears of a woman so entangled with the discriminatory structures of race and class that crime, whether ultimately beneficial to her plight or not, has become her only option of behavior. "The analysis of social structure reveals patterned relationships between groups of people that form the basic contours of society. The patterned relationships are related to employment, income, residence, education, religion, gender, and race and ethnicity. In combination, these factors explain a person's circumstances in life, relationships with other groups, attitudes and behavior on most issues, and prospects for the future."²⁶ The exchange between Mayella and Atticus as she is questioned on the witness stand epitomizes the patterned relationships of Maycombe society, the very relationships that created Mayella's social strain and led to Tom's demise.

In order to analyze the role that gender, race, and class has on the Tom Robinson trial, students will examine the social theories listed above and analyze the ways in which Mayella Ewell's gender, race, and class impacted her behavior towards Tom Robinson before and after her rape accusations. Students will compare and contrast her response to her socio-economic situation in particular before and after she is caught with Tom Robinson. Using the textual references in the paragraphs above, students will analyze her use of rebellion, retreatism, and innovation and predict the impact it may or may not have within the criminal justice system today.

Legislated Racism

Following the analysis of gender, students will explore the idea of "legislated racism," or racial injustices arbitrated by enforceable law. The most obvious example of legislated racism in *To Kill A Mockingbird* exists in the form of Jim Crow Laws. Enacted in the throes of a failed

southern reconstruction, Jim Crow laws oppressed American citizens of color for almost a century, inflicting legal punishment on any individuals defying racial segregation as a systematic form of societal stratification. “Jim Crow was more than a series of rigid anti-Black laws. It was a way of life. Under Jim Crow, African Americans were relegated to the status of second class citizens. Jim Crow represented the legitimization of anti-Black racism.”²⁷ In order to better understand the dynamics of a racism enforceable by law, students will begin their novel study analyzing the history of Jim Crow laws and identifying their anticipated impact on the characters in the novel. Students will be given a short survey of activities and asked to identify whether or not people of color have the ability to participate in these activities today. They will then be given a nonfiction article on the history of Jim Crow and a list of Jim Crow laws that correspond to modern activities and asked to identify whether or not people of color in the American South of the 1930s had the right to participate in these activities. For example, the activity listed might be “play on a multi-racial baseball team.” Today, this is a reality. In the 1930s not only could an individual not play on a baseball team, but there were laws in some states forbidding people of color from playing within a two block radius of their white counterparts. After finishing this assignment, students will be introduced to the concept of legislated racism and began examining its repercussions amidst the events of the novel.

The characters of this novel, and the Tom Robinson plot exist entangled within this “way of life,” their perceptions and fictional realities formed by this system. “The Jim Crow system [and every character and event in *To Kill A Mockingbird*] was undergirded by the following beliefs or rationalizations: Whites were superior to Blacks in all important ways, including, but not limited to intelligence, morality, and civilized behavior; sexual relations between Blacks and Whites would produce a mongrel race which would destroy America; treating Blacks as equals would encourage interracial sexual unions; any activity which suggested social equality encouraged interracial sexual relations; if necessary, violence must be used to keep Blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.”²⁸ These myths guided behavior in the south and influenced the actions of every character in the novel. In order to understand the pervasiveness of the Jim Crow system of beliefs, students will engage in an identification of the ways in which these myths manifested in the plot of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Particular attention will be paid to Atticus’ closing argument in the Tom Robinson trial. During this speech Atticus discusses the direct influence these myths had on the Tom Robinson case:

“ ‘She [Mayella] tempted a Negro. She was white and she tempted a Negro. She did something that in our society [1930s American South] is unspeakable: she kissed a Black man... And so a quiet, respectable, humble Negro who had the unmitigated temerity to ‘feel sorry’ for a white woman has had to put his word up against two white people’s... The witnesses of the state... have presented themselves to you gentlemen, to this court, in the cynical confidence that their testimony would not be doubted, confident that you gentlemen would go along with them on the assumption- the evil assumption- that *all* Negroes lie, that *all* Negroes are basically immoral beings, that *all* Negro men are not to be trusted around our women...’ ”²⁹

Upon reading and discussing the trial section in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, students will analyze

each myth as it is illustrated in the novel (fictional case study), in historical records of that time period (historical case study), and in our modern world (modern case study). By not only comparing and contrasting the fictional representation of the Jim Crow reality with the historical narratives of that time period, but analyzing the enduring negative influence Jim Crow has had on American society, students will be able to identify the dangers of racism in their world today and grapple with how to rectify this negative and enduring blemish on American society. The sections that follow show how class discussions and readings will be divided based on the four myths extrapolated from the above quote.

Myth One: “Whites were superior to Blacks in all important ways, including, but not limited to intelligence, morality, and civilized behavior”³⁰

Students will identify and examine examples of this myth within the text. Students will be asked if there are still individuals in today’s society who operate under this erroneous belief.

Fictional Case Study: Students will participate in discussions of the following topics from the novel: the Ewell’s social status versus that of African American characters (Calpurnia and Tom Robinson in particular); chapter 9- Scout’s fight with Cecil Jacobs and the Finch family’s reaction at Christmas; chapter 11- the insults Mrs. Dubose hurls at Scout and Jem; chapter 12- after attending the service at First Purchase Church, Scout learns that Tom Robinson has been accused by Bob Ewell and cannot understand why anyone would believe the Ewells’ word over Tom Robinsons’.

Historical Case Study: Students will be divided into expert groups and each group will be assigned a reading related to our study of myth one. Students in group one will read and discuss the interview: Growing up Black in McCulley’s Quarters Alabama and compare and contrast the events and characters in this text with those analyzed in the novel. Students in group two will read and discuss Interview: Growing up White in the South and compare and contrast the events and characters in this text with those analyzed in the novel. Students in group three will analyze the 1971 court case Griggs versus Duke Power Co. In this case, the Court decided that certain education requirements and intelligence tests used as conditions of employment acted to exclude African-American job applicants, did not relate to job performance, and were prohibited.³¹ (See the bibliography for information on how to access these articles.)

Modern Case Study: Student expert groups will read James Ragland’s editorial, *Modern Racism has Changed, but it's Still There* and Chuck Hystmere’s article, *Modern American 'Racism'* and compare and contrast the racism illustrated by these articles versus that seen in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. (See the bibliography for information on how to access these articles.)

Myth Two: “sexual relations between Blacks and Whites would produce a mongrel race which would destroy America”³²

Students will identify and examine examples of these myths within the text. Students will be asked if there are still individuals in today’s society who operate under this erroneous belief.

Examples:

Fictional Case Study: Students will participate in a character study of Dolphus Raymond. In

particular, discussions of the following examples from the novel: Chapter 16- the character of Dolphus Raymond; chapter 20: Dolphus' charade as an alcoholic in order to avoid facing societal persecution.

Historic Case Study: Students will analyze the U.S. Supreme Court Case, Loving versus Virginia, which legislated that "Virginia's statutory scheme to prevent marriages between persons solely on the basis of racial classifications held to violate the Equal Protection and Due Process Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment,"³³ referencing the web following web addresses as research tools, HYPERLINK

"<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/loving.html>"

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/loving.html>,

HYPERLINK "<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=us&vol=388&invol=1>"

<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=us&vol=388&invol=1>,

analyzing the impact this legislation would have had on the character of Dolphus Raymond.

Modern Case Study: Students will examine three recent articles on interracial couples facing discrimination. The following web links provide examples recent to the publication of this unit and can be used as a template to guide teacher selection of articles relevant to your classes' study: *Interracial couples face discrimination from others*- HYPERLINK

"http://lubbockonline.com/stories/022310/loc_566396711.shtml"

http://lubbockonline.com/stories/022310/loc_566396711.shtml, Interracial Dating: A Case of Discrimination- HYPERLINK "<http://www.diversityinc.com/article/7104/Interracial-Dating-A-Case-of-Discrimination/>"

<http://www.diversityinc.com/article/7104/Interracial-Dating-A-Case-of-Discrimination/>, *Interracial Couple Denied Marriage License By Louisiana Justice Of The Peace*- HYPERLINK "http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/15/interracial-couple-denied_n_322784.html"

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/15/interracial-couple-denied_n_322784.html" http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/15/interracial-couple-denied_n_322784.html.

Myth Three: "treating Blacks as equals would encourage interracial sexual unions; any activity which suggested social equality encouraged interracial sexual relations"³⁴

Students will identify and examine examples of this myth within the text. Students will be asked if there are still individuals in today's society who operate under this erroneous belief.

Fictional Case Study: Students will read and discuss chapters 18-19 of *To Kill A Mockingbird* analyzing the interactions between and relationship of MayElla Ewell and Tom Robinson.

Historic Case Study: Students will return to the Loving versus Virginia Supreme Court case and analyze if, how, and why it may have impacted the Tom Robinson case.

Myth Four: "if necessary, violence must be used to keep Blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy."³⁵

Students will identify and examine examples of this myth within the text. Students will be asked if there are still individuals in today's society who operate under this erroneous belief.

Fictional Case Study: Students will review and discuss chapter 15 of *To Kill A Mockingbird*

where Heck Tate warns Atticus about the lynch mob planning to attack Tom at the jail and then examine the mob scene.

Historic Case Study: Emmett Till

Modern Case Study: Rodney King Beating

Racial Injustice and the “Justice” System

Another component of racism inherent within the context of this novel appears in the form of a corrupt system of justice operating under a racially biased system favoring Caucasians. During “...the segregation era of the South (1890s-1960s), when white supremacists instituted de jure segregation in public schools and other public accommodations, the criminal justice system was used to maintain the subordinate status of African Americans. Because African Americans were disenfranchised as voters, they had no control or influence over the justice system. As a result, crimes by whites against blacks were treated very harshly, including alleged or even completely fabricated offenses [Mayella Ewell’s false accusation of Tom Robinson].”³⁶ Mayella Ewell’s accusation against Tom Robinson is completely false, however, the Ewells are white and Tom Robinson is black and the court system is biased: “All the little man on the witness stand (Bob Ewell) had that made him any better than his nearest neighbors was, that if he scrubbed with lye soap in very hot water, his skin was white,”³⁷ unfortunately, within this system, that was all the Ewells needed. This example of racial injustice is expanded by the theoretical perspective of conflict theory which “holds that the administration of criminal justice reflects the unequal distribution of power in society. The more powerful groups use the criminal justice system to maintain their dominant position and to repress groups or social movements that repress it.”³⁸ This is no more obvious than in the court scenes of the Tom Robinson trial in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Lee makes it evidently obvious that Tom Robinson is not truly on trial for rape but that the issue of segregation, and white dominance, is being tried by the citizens of Maycombe county Alabama.

Discussion and analysis of this corruption will focus around an in depth analysis of the Tom Robinson trial and its connection to the historical Scottsboro trials. Students will also look at the trial and subsequent acquittal of the policemen involved in the murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in the incident immortalized as the film, *Mississippi Burning*. Finally, students will examine the supreme court case, *Batson versus Kentucky*, a decision holding that “a state denies an African-American defendant equal protection when it puts him on trial before a jury from which members of his race have been purposefully excluded,”³⁹ and, finally, students will analyze the events of the Rodney King trial and acquittal of the policemen accused of abuse. Students will use these events as a measure of the “evolution” of racism in American society and compare and contrast the racism within the novel with the historical examples examined.

Gender, Race, and Class Analysis Chart

During each section of study, students will log information and notes from Jigsaw activities on the following chart. As a culminating activity, students will select one of the three areas of

discrimination examined in this unit and write an essay comparing and contrasting the issue of discrimination in the novel and its historical setting and contemporary society. This will be the final formal assessment for students.

Gender Discrimination				
Definition and Overview:	Textual References:	Historical Examples:	Modern Examples:	Evolution of Gender Stereotypes
Racial Discrimination				
Definition and Overview:	Textual References:	Historical Examples:	Modern Examples:	Evolution of Racial Discrimination and Stereotypes
Socio-Economic Discrimination				
Definition and Overview:	Textual References:	Historical Examples:	Modern Examples:	Evolution of Discriminatory Practices:

Strategies

Flexible Grouping

Differentiation, in the form of flexible grouping, is employed in almost all of my lessons for this unit. "Differentiated instruction, also called differentiation, is a process through which teachers enhance learning by matching student characteristics to instruction and assessment.

Differentiated instruction allows all students to access the same classroom curriculum by providing different entry points, learning tasks, and outcomes that are tailored to students' needs."⁴⁰ As a teacher in a heterogeneously grouped classroom, it is almost impossible to meet the needs of the multiple ability levels within a single classroom setting without differentiating content, process, or product. Students need individualized activities and content specific to their learning styles and level. As a teacher of heterogeneous classes in an eighty to ninety minute

block period, I have found that breaking my class into "chunks" of teaching time, and transitioning between direct, whole class instruction and flexible grouping, has produced the most positive results. I introduce concepts in a whole class setting. Following direct instruction, flexibility grouping allows me to individualize assignments and content, remediating, reinforcing, and challenging as appropriate. As "teachers can differentiate content, process, and/or product for students,"⁴¹ it is important to note that the groups used to cover curriculum in this unit are based around differentiated content and product. However, the process remains uniform for all students. The wonderful part about this grouping is that it allows students a much broader exposure to content as student groups share the content knowledge learned in these small settings with the rest of their peers.

Literature Circles, Expert Group Presentations, and Guided Notes

Information will be shared among students through the use of literature circles, or "expert groups." Once divided into groups, students within each group are given different texts to respond to and interpret. Each student in the group is assigned a role and will perform a specific task. The roles I traditionally assign are Discussion Leader, Textmaster, Creative Director and Connector. I do not place students in groups larger than four students and I have found that groups of three, whenever possible, create environments of better interaction and discussion between peers. After completing interpretive activities, the students in each literary circle become "experts" on their text or texts and create a five to ten minute mini lesson on their completed analysis, presenting this information to the whole class. Students whose groups are not presenting information will be taking guided notes on the information each group shares. These notes are the same for each student and are designed to explore the idea of universality in the study of archetypes. They contain a section of information and questions for students to answer as each group presents.

Jigsaw

The jigsaw strategy is designed to present students with a multitude of texts, or one very large text, without making it necessary for students to read an entire work, or every resource material provided by a teacher, while still being exposed to relevant information and material in an engaging and instructional manner. During a jigsaw, students are presented with different texts, or different passages of texts, and read these works individually or in a small group in order to form an "expert" opinion on the text and report findings. As students take on the role of an "expert" they analyze their section of text in detail and then share their new knowledge within a small group or whole class setting. Students are responsible for an assigned text in such a degree that they can summarize and present this information to classmates in a manner that facilitates the understanding of the basic themes and concepts inherent within the text.⁴²

End Notes

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