Maycomb: A Balanced Society Of The Good And Evil Essay, Research Paper

The novel To Kill a Mocking Bird written by Harper Lee is told from the perspective of a six-year-old girl named Scout. The story focuses on the maturation of Scout and her elder brother Jem in the “tired old town” of Maycomb, Alabama, in the 1930’s. The story takes place in Maycomb, a classic southern town of that era, a town full of gossip, tradition and burdened with a legacy of racism and prejudice. Jem and Scout live together with their father Atticus and their black cook Calpurnia in the small town of Maycomb. Atticus is a prominent lawyer and the Finch family is reasonably well off in comparison to the rest of society. A major plot in the story is the Boo Radley plot. One summer, Jem (10) and Scout (6) befriend a boy named Dill, who had come to live in Maycomb for the summer, and the trio acts out stories and plays together. Eventually, Dill becomes fascinated with the spooky house on their street called the Radley Place. The house is owned by Mr. Nathan Radley, whose brother, Arthur, nicknamed Boo, has lived there for years without venturing outside. Jem and Scout had always been afraid to go near the house for there were many scary rumors about Boo Radley, such as that he had stabbed his father in the knee and that he eats meat raw. As the story progresses they learn more about Boo and realize he was not at all like the way the rumors made him appear to be and at the end of the story Boo even saved them from the attack by Bob Ewell. Another major plot in the story was the Tom Robinson trial plot. Atticus was appointed to defend a black man named Tom Robinson who had been accused of raping a white girl named Mayella Ewell. Many white people of Maycomb were outraged at his decision to defend Tom and did their best to make life difficult for the Finches. As the trial drew nearer, racial tensions between the blacks and whites mounted, and their schoolmates subjected Jem and Scout to many insults and abuse. Despite Atticus’ efforts, Tom was convicted and sent to prison. Atticus was going to appeal to a higher court but Tom tried to escape from prison and was shot to death. Harper Lee presented a more balanced society in Maycomb because she delineated many positive characters as well as the negative characters that contrasted the positive characters.

Miss Stephanie Crawford was a negative character in the story. Miss Stephanie Crawford was known as a ??neighborhood scold’. She was a terrible gossip who loved to poke into and around in the lives everyone and anyone in Maycomb. At the beginning of the story the reader learns that most of what Jem and Scout have heard about Boo Radley was from Miss Stephanie Crawford who claimed to know all about the mysterious events surrounding Boo Radley and the events that happened over twenty years ago. Although what she said sounded pretty veritable at the beginning of the story, as the story progressed it became increasingly obvious that most of what she said about Boo Radley were completely rumors with not base or fact whatsoever. Miss Stephanie Crawford’s favorite past time was to gather tidbits of rumors or gossip, preferably on the ignominy on one or another of the families living in Maycomb. She was an extremely nosy person who loved to pry into other people’s private lives. She felt no qualms about spreading the rumors she heard and more often than not adds extra details to rumors making the rumors even more outrageous and ambiguous than they had been before. Jem and Scout disliked Miss Stephanie even more after the trial because she badgered after them to answer her questions about the trial. ??Miss Stephanie’s nose quivered with curiosity. She wanted to know who all gave us permission to go to court ?V she didn’t see us but it was all over town this morning that we were in the Colored balcony etc.?? She was thoughtless and maladroit in the way she pestered two children so persistently over a case, which their father had lost just yesterday. She is a racist person who saw herself as being special and ranking a lot higher above the black people.

Miss Maudie Atkinson was in many ways the exact opposite to Miss Stephanie Crawford. Miss Maudie Atkinson was the Finches’ neighbor, a sharp-tongued widow in her late forties and an old friend of the family. Miss Maudie shared Atticus’ passion for justice and was the children’s best friend among the adults of Maycomb. She was not partisan or racist and treated everyone equally regardless of race. She was a very optimistic person for even when her house burnt down she was not terribly upset and simply said that she had always wanted a bigger garden. She never gossiped and she never tried to shame someone deliberately simply for her own pleasure and satisfaction as the way Miss Stephanie did with Scout. Miss Maudie made delectable cakes and would often make small cakes especially for each of the children. When Dill and Jem would not let Scout play with them, Scout often went to seek the company of Miss Maudie. She was one of the few people who supported Atticus in the Tom Robinson trial and helped to soothe Jem and Scout’s feelings when they were feeling extremely desolated after the trial. Ms. Maudie said (pg. 215); ??Did it ever strike you that Judge Taylor naming Atticus to defend that boy was no coincidence? That Judge Taylor might have had his reasons for naming him??? and also said, ??Atticus won’t win, he can’t win, but he’s the only man in these parts who can keep a jury out so long in a case like that.?? Although it was obvious what the result would be, Miss Maudie still supported Atticus because she knew what was the real truth and the truth is what she believes in.

Another negative character in the story was Bob Ewell. Bob Ewell was a drunken and permanently unemployed member of Maycomb’s poorest family. He had many children but he never made any attempt to make life better for them, leaving the children to fend for themselves. He takes the money the county supplies him with (welfare) and spends most the money on alcohol without leaving anything to buy food for his children. He hunts out of season though and the people of Maycomb basically let him get away with it. ??Hunting and trapping of season is against the law all right,?? said Atticus, ??and it is certainly bad, but when a man spends his relief checks on green whiskey his children have a way of crying from hunger pains. I don’t know of any land owner around here who would begrudge those children any game their father can hit.?? Bob Ewell even beats his children yet despite all those despicable facts about him, he saw himself as being better and superior over the black people. While testifying Mr. Ewell said, “I’ve asked this county for fifteen years to clean out that nest down yonder, they’re dangerous to live around ’sides devaluing my property”. The statement showed his belief of being superior to the blacks even though the way he lived was even worse than he was.

Tom Robinson’s case was in fact the completely the opposite of Bob Ewell’s. Tom was a black man with a crippled left arm. He had worked hard for Link Deas, who proved to be an employer who had complete faith in his employee. Tom passed by the Ewell’s dwelling everyday on his way to work and Bob Ewell’s daughter Mayella often asked Tom to help her with one chore or another. Tom helped her out of the goodness of his heart but when he resisted her advancements on him, and got caught by Bob Ewell, Tom was faced with a barricade that, in those days mean certain death for a black. Tom was wrongly accused of raping Mayella. Through the entire court case Atticus made his best effort to show the obvious evidence that pointed to Tom as being a wrongly accused man but in vain. For most of Maycomb county, Tom’s guilt never comes into question during the trail, it was set even before the trial started. Atticus said that the trial had, “An inevitable verdict” Another example was the mob that wanted to kill Tom when he was still in jail also assumed his guilt. They would not wait until he can have his day in court; they wanted to execute the punishment they deem acceptable a persecution. The leader of the mob challenged Atticus: “You know what we want … Now get aside from the door Mr. Finch.” In that era, blacks were assumed to have committed any incidents the white members of society accused them of, without ever to have looked at evidence or heard the blacks’ story. In Tom’s case, the mob believed Bob Ewell’s story of Tom molesting Mayella Ewell, without having any hesitation about the truth, and they were unwilling to look for any proof indicating Tom did not commit such a heinous crime.

In the era in which they lived, Maycomb was a town filled with racism and prejudice. Whether is was the Miss Maudie versus Miss Stephanie or the Tom versus Bob comparisons, prejudice and racism played a very large role in the way the events and/or characters were the way they were. Miss Stephanie and Bob both viewed the blacks as being inferior and lowly. They believed that the whites were always right and the blacks were always wrong. Miss Maudie and Tom represented the opposite perspective where people are all the same and equal simply because every single one of the people are simply humans, regardless of race and skin color. Strip off the outer appearances of the people and the end results are that every single person is just the same as the other, no one is superior or inferior to anyone else. This was the balanced society that Harper Lee presented in her book.