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Moral Education in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

In the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, Scout Finch matures significantly. She is forced to learn much about the world and the nature of people throughout the turbulent events of the book. At her sensitive and impressionable age, she undergoes an internal transformation, greatly influenced by the world and people around her. Scout is undoubtedly affected the most by her father, Atticus Finch - a strongly moral lawyer who wants above all else to raise Jem and Scout to share his ideology, especially in light of the Tom Robinson case and issues with racism. Jem and Scout both come away from the events of the book with a different outlook on life. Ultimately, Atticus passes on many of his morals to his children, among them being empathy, respect, and fair-mindedness.

One of the most significant values Atticus teaches Scout is empathy. In the third chapter, Atticus tells Scout “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.” (Lee 39), which is arguably one of the most important lessons from the book. This is in response to Scout talking to him about what happened on her first day of school. Atticus wants her to realize that everyone’s lives are different and to not be too quick to judge other people because they might be facing their own internal problems. Similarly, in the eleventh chapter Atticus tells Jem not to get too upset at what Mrs. Dubose said to him: “‘Easy does it, son,’ Atticus would say. ‘She’s an old lady and she’s ill. You just hold your head high and be a gentleman. Whatever she says to you, it’s your job not to let her make you mad.’” (Lee 133). Even though he hasn’t yet told him of the addiction Mrs. Dubose is battling, he teaches Jem to be understanding of her and to be a gentleman despite whatever awful things she might say to him. Later, Atticus teaches Scout to be empathetic for her brother: ““Scout,” he said softly, “don’t let Jem get you down. He’s having a rough time these days. I heard you back there.” (Lee 331). He knows Jem is having a difficult time as a teenager, so he tries to tell Scout to be understanding of him. Finally, at the end of the novel, he tells Scout that “‘Most people are, Scout, when you finally see them.’”, in response to Scout saying “… ‘Atticus, he was real nice …’” about a book character. He is trying to impress on Scout that most people really are good people when one takes the time to see them for who they truly are. Additionally, this being the last thing said in the novel reflects its importance - it is the embodiment of the lesson of empathy in the novel.