



# Literary Analysis

## To Kill a Mockingbird Theme Essay



*1<sup>st</sup> Draft Due: Monday, March 13. Final Due Friday, March 18*

Throughout each piece of literature, there are messages and ideas that the author is trying to convey to his/her readers. These messages and ideas are called **themes**. Themes are represented in the text by certain characters, events in the story, and/or symbols and motifs.

**Focusing on Harper Lee’s novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, develop an arguable theme that can be found in the story, and write a well-developed essay that identifies and explains your chosen theme and prove it through the use of quotes.**

### Paper Requirements:

- ❖ 2-3 typed pages in MLA format
- ❖ Arguable claim (theme statement – see chart below) that is presented in introduction
- ❖ Each paragraph begins with a well-written topic sentence and ends with a well-written concluding sentence
- ❖ Transitions are used between ideas
- ❖ 3-4 quotes integrated into the body paragraphs that are properly cited according to MLA and support your claim statement

### Step 1: Create an arguable theme

*Begin with a simple topic from the story, then develop that topic into an arguable theme by following the steps below:*

| Level & Description   | EXAMPLE from <i>Of Mice and Men</i>             |  | Level & Description   | <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> |
|---|---|--|---|------------------------------|
| <b>Topic:</b><br>1-2 word topic   | Love  |  | <b>Level 1 Theme:</b><br>1-2 word topic                                       |                              |
| <b>Theme:</b><br>Sentence that answers the question, “What about your topic?” | True love is a force that cannot be controlled. |  | <b>Theme:</b><br>Sentence that answers the question, “What about your topic?” |                              |

**Sample Claim:** Although many may blame Romeo and Juliet for their tragic end, it is clear from the first lines of the play that true love is a force that cannot be controlled.

**Step 2: Find your evidence**

Find Three quotes from To Kill a Mockingbird that support your theme. Make sure your quotes are valuable and that they help to prove your theme to be true.

| Scene  | Quote (with page number)  | 1-2 sentences connecting the quote to your claim   |
|--|---|--|
| <p><b>EXAMPLE</b><br/>Even though he has been moping about Rosaline since the beginning of the play, Romeo allows Mercutio and Benvolio to talk him into crashing the Capulet's party. There, he sees Juliet and instantly falls in love with her.</p> | <p><b>EXAMPLE</b><br/>"Did my heart love till now?<br/>Forswear it sight, for I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" (I.v.59-60).</p> | <p><b>EXAMPLE</b><br/>Romeo just did a complete turn-around the moment he saw Juliet. This shows that when true love hits, there is no turning back.</p> |
|  |   |  |
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|  |   |  |

### Step 3: Format and integrate your quotes properly into your body paragraphs

- If you use a **quote that contains dialogue**, remember that the entire quote gets the “double quotes” around it, while anything spoken gets the ‘single quotes’ around it. For example:
  - Atticus says, “‘If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view---“ (Lee 39).
  
- If you find a quote that is **rather long**, use the ellipsis (...) to eliminate parts of the quote that are unnecessary. For example:
  - Atticus says, “ ‘I wanted you to see what real courage is... It’s when you know you’re licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what’ “ (Lee 149).
    - In this example, the ellipsis eliminated the line, “‘instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand,’” because it would be unnecessary to include if you are simply trying to prove what real courage is (not what it isn’t).
  
- Before the quote, write a sentence that includes background information about the quote *so the reader knows what is happening in the story when the quote is given*. For example:
  - When Jem, Scout, and Dill went into the Radley yard to peek into the window, Jem got his pants caught on the fence. Jem has to go back to retrieve his pants from the Radley fence, and afterward Scout notices that he “stayed moody and silent for a week” (Lee 77).
  
- **Anchor** the quote to your body paragraph by using either a verb and a comma (he says,/she states,/the narrator claims,) or a colon (remember: colons are used after a COMPLETE sentence). For example:
  - The novel begins with a flashback where Scout mentions Jem’s broken arm. Scout says, “I maintain that the Ewells started it all, but Jem, who was four years my senior, said it started long before that” (Lee 3).
  - When she was old enough, Scout was excited to go to school: “I would be starting school in a week. I never looked forward more to anything in my life” (Lee 20).
  
- After integrating the quote into your paragraph, **EXPLAIN** what the quote means in 1-2 sentences. Explaining the quote is like showing your work in math class; doing so helps your reader understand your thoughts. For example:
  - Scout notices something important about the Radley house after Jem touches it: “The old house was the same, droopy and sick, but as we stared down the street we thought we saw an inside shutter move. Flick. A tiny, almost invisible movement, and the house was still” (Lee 19). This suggests that someone had been standing there watching them.
  
- Once you have explained your quote, you should make the **connection** between your **quote** and your **theme**. In doing so, you are effectively proving your claim statement to be true. For example:
  - Atticus was not a typical father, but he did want his children to have a somewhat typical childhood, so he buys them air rifles for Christmas one year. He tells them not to shoot at mockingbirds, and Miss Maudie explains why when she says, “‘Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat up people’s gardens, don’t nest in corncribs, they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us’” (Lee 119). It is wrong to kill mockingbirds because they are innocent; they

do no harm or damage peoples' belongings, so people should not harm them. This is one of the most important lessons the people of Maycomb can learn because it can be applied to people like Tom Robinson and Boo Radley, two people who are innocent, but are mistreated by most of the people in the town.