

FILM STUDY GUIDE FOR TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD SEEING THE FILM THROUGH THE LENS OF MEDIA LITERACY

SYMBOLISM

"When we read with our students, we often point out all of the relevant and important symbols in a story or a novel....We assume that students cannot pick up on a symbol on the first read-through, and that may be true, since for a symbol to be truly a symbol, it must be repeated throughout a work, though students may have difficulty picking out symbols because they do not understand the purpose or the function of symbols...so we need to help students see how artists use various techniques to get the audience to recognize that something is, in fact, a symbol." 1

Symbolism/Meaning

"After we have isolated a symbol, we must interpret it, that is, match the symbol with a meaning that has been previously learned. For example, we memorize the definitions of words and the conventions of grammar and expression to be able to read. From our experience listening to radio, we know that certain sounds signal the lead-in to news, certain voices convey humor or seriousness, certain sounds convey danger or silliness. With television or film, we learn the meaning of **flashback**, an extreme close-up on a character's face, character stereotypes, and what to expect in the unfolding sequence of a detective show. We have learned to connect certain symbols with certain meanings."2

Symbolism In The Opening Credits of *To Kill A Mockingbird*

watch this sequence [here](#) (Quicktime software required)



The objects that appear behind the opening credits include a pocket watch, harmonica, pearl necklace, whistle, marbles, and a child's drawing of a bird- items

that gain meaning as the story unfolds. The sequence is a good introduction for the story's symbolism and themes. It also shows (to quote Harper Lee again) how a film can have " a life of its own as a work of art."

Notice how the camera moves in, like a child's vision, to close-ups of these valued objects, tracking from left to right along the row of treasures carefully arranged.

Notice how the nostalgic music and humming of a child create a mood. And notice what happens to the drawing at the end of the sequence. 3

ACTIVITY

Students should pay careful attention to the opening sequence in the film. Some of the objects are pictured above. Using the chart (below) students should complete the form. For each symbol, students should determine: what is happening in the scene with the object and what it might mean or represent.

Some items seen in opening credits of the film	Describe the scene in which the item is seen/heard	Symbolism meaning or representing
pocket watch		
harmonica		
pearl necklace		
whistle		
marbles		
drawing of a bird		

The man responsible for the look of the [opening credits](#).

METAPHOR

"A metaphor is a means of communication whereby something that was unknown is made known by drawing upon something already familiar." 1

Students may also wish to analyze these other scenes in the film for the uses of metaphors. In the first scene, ask students what the mockingbird represents. In the second scene, what is the significance of the rabid dog.

DVD Chapter 13 The Dinner Guest

After an altercation at school between Scout and Walter Cunningham Jr., Jem invites the boy over to their house for dinner. In this scene, Atticus explains to the children why it is a sin to kill a mockingbird.

Atticus: I remember when my daddy gave me that gun. He told me that I should never point it at anything in the house. And that he'd rather I'd shoot at tin cans in the backyard, but he said that sooner or later he supposed the temptation to go after

birds would be too much, and that I could shoot all the blue jays I wanted, if I could hit 'em, but to remember it was a sin to kill a mockingbird

Jem: Why?

Atticus: Well, I reckon because mockingbirds don't do anything but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat people's gardens, don't nest in the corncribs, they don't do one thing but just sing their hearts out for us.



DVD Chapter 15 The Best Shot In This County

In this scene, Calpurnia has called Atticus home to take care of a wild dog that is approaching their home.

Description: In the next memorable sequence, Atticus proves his Lincoln-esque stature to his children. Although Scout is disbelieving and yells out "He can't shoot" when Sheriff Heck Tate (Frank Overton) hands his rifle to her father, Atticus takes aim with a rifle at a rabid dog moving erratically down the street outside their home. He raises up his glasses a few times on his forehead to see better, and then removes them altogether by dropping them on the street. Jem and Scout are both dumbfounded and stunned when the rifle cracks and the dog flops over dead. The Sheriff tells Jem about the hidden abilities of his modest father who hasn't shot a

gun in twenty years: "Didn't you know your daddy's the best shot in this county?" 2



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