
An Analysis of Childhood Memories in *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

Parents hide their childhood memories from their children for many reasons. Some are embarrassed, some are scared, and some are ashamed. In *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, Atticus Finch's nickname describes his childhood. Rather than learning about his second persona from their father, his children, Jem and Scout, find out from Heck Tate, the county sheriff, because Atticus is ashamed of a moment during his teens. In effect, this shapes the way he lives the rest of his life.

Atticus is one of the best shots in Maycomb County. His kids, however, do not learn about this characteristic until a dog with rabies appears in front of them. While they are playing, Calpurnia, their housekeeper, calls Atticus and Heck Tate. When they arrive at the scene, Heck Tate hands Atticus a gun to shoot and kill the dog, which he successfully does. Jem and Scout are in disbelief of what their father does when Miss Maudie says, "I saw that, One-Shot Finch" (Lee 128). Miss Maudie infers that Atticus is an amazing gunman that holds the ability to hit anything he desires using a single bullet. In addition, she infers One-Shot Finch has been Atticus's nickname since childhood. Nonetheless, Atticus does not inform Jem and Scout about this skill, which is rather peculiar considering most people in Maycomb find this attribute to be prestigious. Additionally, this knowledge can easily change his children's perception of him. Atticus is portrayed as a boring character that does not have an exciting life, which is exactly what Jem and Scout think of him. Knowing this, Jem and Scout's thoughts of Atticus drastically change. Conversely, Jem and Scout, along with the reader, need to understand Atticus's ambiguous reason for keeping a secret.

Atticus does not tell his kids about his second personality for an unclear reason. When he was a kid, he had a life-changing experience with his gun, which is why he is hesitant to let Jem and Scout own guns. Ultimately, Uncle Jack buys them rifles, which Atticus lets them keep. However, he institutes a policy for the use of them: "Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but it's a sin to kill a mockingbird" (Lee 119). Atticus uses the mockingbird to show innocence. He also tells his children that you cannot harm anything that is innocent. However, Atticus chooses not to use guns anymore because as a child, he killed a helpless human when he was young. He puts guilt upon himself because his unique shooting skills ended the life of a person who did not deserve it. Furthermore, he regrets his actions because he did not think it out thoroughly. As an adolescent, Atticus was not as knowledgeable or wise, so he did not think of the long-term outcome. However, this life-changing experience determined the way he lives the rest of his life.

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Atticus's shocking experience shape the way he lives the rest of his life. His children think he is a boring old man who never does anything worth wild and will never do anything exciting for the rest of his life, which shows when Scout says, "Our father didn't do anything. He worked in an office, not in a drugstore. Atticus did not drive a dump-truck for the county, he was not the sheriff, he did not farm, work in a garage, or do anything that could possibly arouse the admiration of anyone" (Lee 188). As a result of killing an innocent human, Atticus does not live his life to the extreme, which makes him seem boring. He chooses to help people in court than to work a typical country job. In addition, he has a Zen personality that makes him seem innocent and calm. Similarly, Atticus does not look at life the same way. Instead of looking at the glass half empty, he looks at it half full. For example, when Mrs. Dubose insults Atticus, he complements her instead of stooping down to her level because he sees the good in everyone. Atticus is the man he is today because of his past experiences.

Atticus has been through a life altering experience during his childhood. He killed a harmless human, which remains a secret. However, this event changed the way he would live his life. Society is built the same. Whether it's a near death experience, a wake-up call in high school, or committing a felony crime, common people undergo similar processes that change their lives forever.

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