

Atticus, An Advocate: Developing Rhetorical Analysis Skills through *To Kill a Mockingbird*

UNIT RESOURCES AND HANDOUTS:

Below are three ways to access this session's shared Google Drive folder with several handouts. Thank you!



<http://tinyurl.com/jempkym>

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B_jF4to7uXayTFFmZnI5YmJMYkE?usp=sharing

OVERVIEW:

Compassionate advocacy promotes change, even if speakers first seem unsuccessful. Explore strategies that probe To Kill a Mockingbird in a nuanced, rhetorical way: a summative written piece in which students explain how Atticus' argument utilizes persuasive appeals in order to challenge Maycomb's "status quo."

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Consider prompting students to unpack how compassionate advocacy can promote change! In this treatment of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, students ponder this essential question: to what extent can an individual use his/her craft in order to promote change within a broader community? By the end of the unit (suitable for grades 9 - 12), students craft a rhetorical analysis essay in which they explain how Atticus Finch's closing argument appeals to Maycomb values in order to persuade the jury and challenge Maycomb's "status quo."

There are several engaging ways to encourage student empathy. For example, check the Google Drive folder for American contemporary artist Kara Walker, who as a "speaker" presents provocative silhouettes in order to mix historical prejudice into her artwork. This choice helps her audience build a deeper understanding about ignorance, racism, and sexism. By priming students with these techniques, it prepares them to write their essay in which they likewise analyze speaker, audience, and purpose. For example, Atticus Finch USES a device (e.g. a rhetorical question) IN ORDER to build pathos (e.g. the jury feels compassionate for Tom Robinson), which therefore helps him achieve his purpose (e.g. to persuade the jury).

Although his argument is ultimately "unsuccessful," it remains successful in other ways. Harper Lee frequently reiterates that Maycomb is stuck: a polite yet ignorant group, sheltered in a tiny, claustrophobic town of segregation and anger. Atticus' primary audience is the jury, who are twelve men that have been immersed in racist ideologies their entire lives. However, the jury takes several hours to deliberate after Atticus' closing argument, which suggests that their consciences weigh in DESPITE their background. In addition, despite the guilty verdict and Lee's assertion that Maycomb returns to "normal" at the end of the novel, there is evidence that Atticus' advocacy did have some ripple effect on individuals.

At a moment in which pre-AP and Advanced Placement enrollments grow, this unit reinforces rhetorical analysis strategies. In an era when Common Core asks ELA departments to explicitly teach informational text reading standards, this unit creatively pairs rhetorical analysis strategies with classic literature. At a time in which prejudice and racism still trouble our communities, this unit plan empowers students as agents of advocacy in their own lives.

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