

DISCUSSION OF RACISM IN CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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Abstract: This paper gives a brief overview of racism and injustice through literature, mainly in *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1960) and *Jasper Jones* by Craig Silvey (2009). In both novels, communities think and feel the same way, unfairly, towards black people. Young protagonists, namely Scout and Charlie, expose racism in a small town and learn that when there are secrets and discrimination, injustice continues to happen. Overall, the consequences of racism and injustice in small towns are discussed in the article. The research paper also shows why discrimination against Black and mixed-race people happened in the novels and suggests some solutions to stop racism and injustice from happening in the future.

Keywords: racism, injustice, half-aboriginal, black people, bigots, villains, innocent, discriminating.

Introduction

Racism is treating people poorly and unfairly because of their skin color, race and even their ethnic background. Racism has been world's one of the common problems. It is important to understand that racism can actually affect people's life, jobs, education and especially their mental health. Even today, some people face this kind of judgment and discrimination. In *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and *Jasper Jones* by Craig Silvey, racism is shown through the perspectives of young children who witness how the town treats some people unequally because of their skin color and race. We can see that Harper Lee's novel shows the lifestyle of the people who lived in the 1930s, and Craig Silvey's novel focuses on the 1960s. Both novels show how, from early times, people were treated unfairly and faced consequences of their actions in the form of racism.

The Disaster Called Racism

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, racism is exposed through the tragedy of Tom Robinson. The story is told from the perspective of a young Scout Finch, and it happens in a small town called Maycomb, Alabama. Tom Robinson, a victim, a black man who was accused of raping a white woman called Mayella Ewell. Despite Atticus Finch, an attorney, showing clear evidence that Tom is innocent

because he could not commit this crime due to his disabled arm, the jury, who were deeply racist, found Tom guilty. In Maycomb, most of the white people saw black people as guilty or lower-ranking, no matter what the shown evidences were. After this happened, Tom tried to escape from prison, while doing so he was shot and killed. The result deeply affected Scout and her elder brother Jeremy who then began to understand the unfairness of the world. Atticus, who was criticized because he tried to help Tom in court, tried to teach his children that showing empathy is important by telling Scout that "...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 1960, p. 30). This lesson helps Scout to slowly realize that racism appears when you do not see or feel the person fully. From the book young generation can learn many things such as being brave in difficult situations is important and that people are not always as they look like or act.

Consequences of Keeping Secrets and Silence

The novel Jasper Jones explores racism through the eyes of the boy named Charlie Bucktin who became friends with Jasper. "Even though time is flowing, heroes of masterpieces are alive forever and reappear in other novels." (Akhrorova, 2025) Tom Robinson's character is transformed into Jasper Jones in the novel Jasper Jones. One night, they found the dead body of Laura Wishart and the real story begins from here. Jasper is blamed for the missing of the girl because he was half-Aboriginal. He asks Charlie to help him by saying, "Charlie, we can't tell anyone. No way. Specially the police. Because they are gonna say it was me. Straight up. Understand?" (Silvey, 2011, p. 19). Charlie realizes that town always treated Jasper unfairly and sees him as the villain all the time. He has heard parents telling their children "Stay away from Jasper Jones" (Silvey 2011, p. 11). He decides to help Jasper by finding a letter written by Laura. By the time they discovered the truth, it was already late. Unfortunately, no one even listened children when they wanted to prove the innocence of Jasper Jones. He was arrested for nothing; was beaten, and treated severely in the police office just because of his race. Consequently, he was released, and decided to leave the town to start a new life. Charlie knew it was the right decision, and he understood that keeping silent and judging someone harshly and unfairly, without proof, and because the majority of the people did so, was allowing racism to spread and continue. By this story, Craig Silvey tried to show that to stop racism, people should start calling black object black if it is black, but not white because the majority of white people call them white. Each person should consider things from his/her perspective but not make the decision because of the stereotypes or believes of the society.

Victims of Society

As one of the great Australian writers, Ellen van Neerven (2017) said "racism is bad, and bigots (individuals who strongly and unfairly dislike others based on their beliefs and identities) are villains". In both *To Kill a*

Mockingbird and Jasper Jones, we as readers can explore some similarities and how racism and injustice can destroy someone's whole life-it is bad- and some people -villains- make them isolate themselves from others for peace and protection. One of the shared features is how the community in both books and situations has felt about black community. According to Zeng (2025), in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, racism is explained through a theory called "othering", where people who are black are treated unfairly and seen as the lowest. Examples of "othering" can be seen in the situations of both Tom Robinson and Jasper Jones. They were the victims of racism and society's judgments because they were black people and were not seen as trustworthy. In both situations, readers can see how easily society can find someone guilty without knowing the whole story through Scout and Charlie's eyes. At the end of the stories, we can see that having courage to stand up for truth might be the only way we can stop injustice.

Conclusion

It is known that racism was not only a dilemma in the past, but it touches many societies today as well. The majority of white people still hesitate when acknowledged or challenged about racism. This shows that while the periods of the novels are different, the denial and silence about acknowledging racism and injustice continue in the modern world. To prevent facing racism, our mission is to teach young generation about the consequences of racism and never to judge one person because of their race or nationality. The stories teach people that everyone deserves to be treated equally and seen as a human being. It is considered by authors that every and each person has feelings, and as human beings, we should respect and support each other. If people witness and keep silent about racism, wrongdoing, disrespect, and discrimination against others, it will continue happening.

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