
To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee and Fences by Augusta Wilson: a Comparative Study

Comparative Literature Essay

Authors consistently use character foils in their novels to further develop their characters' traits and to deepen the reader's knowledge and understanding of the major characters and themes. In both *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *Fences* the authors use character foils. In *To Kill A Mockingbird* Atticus's character becomes better understood once his foil, Bob Ewell, is introduced into the story. In *Fences* Troy's character traits are made stronger as opposed to his foil, Gabe's personality. These works offer great examples of character foils.

Of all the works in our curriculum this year, the book *To Kill A Mockingbird* demonstrates the best examples of character foils, Atticus and Bob Ewell are the most obvious ones. Atticus is one of the major characters in the book. Throughout the work he shows signs of great care and love for his children and others. For example, he tells Jem and Scout not to kill mockingbirds for the sole purpose that they only do good and don't harm anyone. This scene demonstrates his caring personality and affection towards others. One of Atticus's more significant quotes in the book is "you never really understand a person until you consider things from their point of view, you climb into their skin and walk around in it". This quote expresses Atticus's deep, compassionate personality and his pure belief in justice. Bob Ewell, on the other hand, could be considered one of the villains in the novel. He has a completely different perspective from Atticus. He is quick to judge and does not care about others, making him the perfect foil for Atticus. For example Bob Ewell accused Tom Robinson, an average black male in Maycomb, of sexually assaulting his daughter even though there is no evidence supporting his accusation. He had what is referred to as "the disease of Maycomb", namely, racism. As you would expect, Bob is against Atticus's beliefs in civil rights.

Just as in *To Kill A Mockingbird* the main foils are siblings, ironically so are the foils Troy and Gabe in *Fences*. Troy is a very selfish and irresponsible character. He betrays his family by cheating on Rose with Alberta, a younger woman from the neighborhood and impregnating her. Not only did he impregnate her, he also delivered the news to Rose himself. This could be acceptable if he was sympathetic about the news although he used a very careless tone and showed how little he cares about Rose and the family. Gabe, on the other hand is very caring and loving. Although he has a slight mental disability, he has good moral values and is a kind person. Gabe is always worried that Troy is mad at him because he looks up to Troy. He also fears Troy and always wants to be on his good side. Unlike Troy, Gabe is very sympathetic and loving to Rose. Throughout the book he would frequently say to Rose "A rose for Rose" and hand her a rose. Gabe doesn't deserve a brother like Troy, he deserves better. Troy and Gabe were significant foils in *Fences*

Many times authors use two closely related characters who possess completely different and opposing character traits to further develop the reader's understanding of the characters and to strengthen the theme. In the book *To Kill A Mockingbird* the polar opposite characteristics of Atticus and Bob make the characters perfect foils. The author uses their opposite character to develop the moral issues of racism, compassion and justice. In *Fences* the opposite

characteristics of the brothers Troy and Gabe enable the author to more deeply explore each others characters and to drive home the moral issues of fidelity, kindness and caring.

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