**THEME- Prejudice**

Prejudice permeates Maycomb society. Almost every character is either prejudiced against others, or the victim of prejudice. There is racial prejudice, class prejudice and prejudice against individuals who don't fit in.

**Racism**

The majority of the white population of Maycomb are racist. They see Blacks as second-class citizens (they do menial jobs for little money) and second-class humans.

The table below shows some examples of the racist views shared by most of the characters in the novel.

Character Example of racist attitudes

The Sheriff When he arrested Boo Radley (suspected of stabbing his father in the leg with a pair of scissors) he "hadn't the heart to put him in the jail alongside Negroes".

Mrs Dubose She tells the children: "Your father's no better than the niggers and trash he works for!"

Aunt Alexandra She doesn't like to talk about important matters "in front of Calpurnia and them".

Scout's cousin Francis He claims that Atticus is "ruining the family" by taking on the Robinson case.

Mr Cunningham He's part of a mob of men who would have lynched Tom Robinson, had Atticus not been on guard outside the jail.

Only a few people in the book are open-minded enough to recognise racism for the evil it is.

Character Example of anti-racist attitudes

Atticus He hates the town's racist attitude and refers to it as "Maycomb's usual disease".

Miss Maudie She is proud of "those people in this town who say that fair play is not marked White Only."

Jem He can't believe that the jury can convict an innocent man just because he is black. "It ain't right!" he says.

Scout She sees the hypocrisy of her teacher who opposes Hitler but supports Tom's conviction. "It's not right to persecute anybody, is it?"

**Class prejudice**

As well as prejudice about people's colour, there is prejudice about people's social standing. There are strict divisions along class lines in Maycomb society. For example...

Character Examples of Class Prejudice

Aunt Alexandra Aunt Alexandra is obsessed with the superiority of the Finch family, part of the local white aristocracy. She doesn't allow Scout to play with Walter Cunningham because...

The Cunninghams The Cunninghams are lower class whites - poor farmers, badly hit by the Depression. However they are a better class of people than...

The Ewells They are 'White Trash' - the lowest class of whites - uneducated and poor. But even they look down upon...

The Blacks The black community is automatically seen as at the bottom of the class system, yet since the abolition of slavery, the boundaries between them and the Ewells is less clear. This is one reason why Mr Ewell is so racist.

**Prejudice against individuals**

Finally, there is prejudice against anyone who doesn't fit in to Maycomb's fixed expectations of how people should behave. The most important victim of this type of prejudice is Boo Radley.

Most of the town are prejudiced against Boo. Local gossip portrays him as a malevolent phantom. Children run past the Radley house out of fear and won't eat anything that came from Radley trees, believing them poisoned.

Yet a very few people accept him for what he is. Miss Maudie remembers him when he was a boy who always spoke nicely; and Atticus tries to make the children understand him and not torment him. By the end of the novel, the children respect him too.