

Context is a crucial factor of a piece of writing. It contributes to the inspiration behind many characters and events within the text. Context also impacts how the reader feels about the text and relates to certain aspects of what they read. The well-known novel 'To Kill a Mockingbird' by Nelle Harper Lee is a prime example of how context influences a piece of writing. Lee's childhood in 1930's Alabama is evident in the portrayal of the protagonist, the events she experiences and the ways in which she interacts with her fellow characters. This use of personal context, in particular, is demonstrated through the character representations of Atticus and Jem. In Atticus, the reader can see Lee's memory of her father, and in Jem elements of Lee herself. Certain circumstances in the novel, such as the social and economic hierarchy surrounding the inhabitants of Maycomb, also relate to how the historical context impacted Harper Lee's storyline, in particular slavery and the Great Depression. Context greatly assisted Harper Lee's capacity to create a complex and realistic world in 'To Kill a Mockingbird'.

Lee's personal context, namely her childhood, inspired and prompted her to address the racial discrimination and segregation she witnessed growing up through the character representation of Atticus. The quote "catching Maycomb's usual disease that of reasonable people going stark raving mad when anything involving a negro comes up." demonstrates how much of an impact segregation had on small town life which directly affected Lee's own upbringing and world view. Lee's use of emotive language positions the reader to feel as though they can relate to how the characters are perceiving certain topics and events. The emotive language used in this quote sparks feelings of anger and injustice which prompts the reader to feel more connected to the people being targeted through the discrimination. It gives the reader insight into events that happened during the time of Lee's childhood and demonstrates how unjust and prejudiced the practice of slavery and the subsequent segregation between different races was. This quote gives insight into Harper Lee's life as it is a well-known fact that she herself lived in a small town where racism and discrimination were common and - through word of mouth and well embedded prejudices - rumours were adopted as fact. This quote, in particular, clearly demonstrates how events in Harper Lee's life had a great impact on the style of her writing and how she developed her characters.

Harper Lee's childhood and personal context significantly influenced the way the character Jem is represented in 'To Kill a Mockingbird'. In Chapter 23, Jem inquires, "If there's just one kind of folks, why can't they all get along with each other?" Jem's tone in this rhetorical question makes it appear as though he is not only asking a question for the purpose of receiving an answer but also wishing for his statement to be true. While Harper Lee primarily based Scout on her own personal experiences, Jem also exhibits similar attributes and provides various poignant quotes demonstrating how Lee may have felt. This quote shows how Lee's innocence as a child would have impacted the views she had on certain matters and how she would have reacted to particular events such as slavery, the Great Depression and its consequences. This excerpt also reflects Jem's mature opinions on discrimination and his empathetic understanding of human nature. Harper Lee's representation of Jem's innocent yet intelligent personality is a demonstration of how she too would have felt and behaved when experiencing similar events to that of this character.

Many historical events experienced by Harper Lee during her childhood are directly represented through events in the novel and some are even explicitly referred to. As this book is set in the years following the Great Depression, Scout describes Maycomb as a town with “nowhere to go, nothing to buy, and no money to buy it with.” This quote is a form of imagery in the sense that it helps the reader to picture the bleakness of the town and the people in it along with describing the economic circumstances within Maycomb. It is also a form of anaphora, demonstrated through the repetition of the word “no” which instills the reader with hopelessness and dread. The Great Depression had an incredible impact on the social class and economic status of many families. Many characters in the book are referenced as being part of families that experienced hardship due to this event. Harper Lee would also have felt the strain caused by the Great Depression and this would have impacted her portrayal of almost every character in ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’. Historical context such as The Depression would have influenced Lee’s detailed storyline and representation of characters and events.

Harper Lee’s novel ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ took a great amount of inspiration from the personal and historical context surrounding 1930’s Alabama and the environment in which Lee was raised. These contextual elements reference the important people in Harper Lee’s life as well as how she herself would have reacted to significant events and are the core features in the composition of this realistic novel. ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ is a perfect mix of both personal and historical context and Harper Lee has skillfully used both of these to create an incredible novel that discusses the timeless and harsh reality associated with racial discrimination and segregation of which she would have witnessed daily.