

The Champion of English Section

Senior Division

Name of Winner : Agatha Tsang

Name of School : St. Paul's Convent School

Book Title : *To Kill A Mockingbird*

Author : Harper Lee

Publisher : J.B Lippincott & Co

“Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin **to kill a mockingbird.**”

Published in 1961, *To Kill A Mockingbird* was instantly heralded as a literary classic, garnering widespread attention across the globe. The book sang of a revolutionary tale taking place in an insouciantly lackadaisical Alabaman town by the name of Maycomb as narrated from the perspective of a quick-witted child, in a time where the supposedly pristine lines between

right and wrong were tainted with appalling assumptions of racial supremacy and bigotry. Author Harper Lee ingeniously intermingles the naïveté of a halcyon summer brimming with puerile shenanigans, against the blatant injustice of Thomas ‘Tom’ Robinson’s passing—a law-abiding man, charged guilty for the crime of ebony skin.

The novel mainly revolves around the interactions of father-daughter duo Atticus Finch and Jean Louise ‘Scout’ Finch, as they attempt to navigate themselves through a ponderous year, witnessing the trial of Tom Robinson and documenting all the townsfolk gossip along this onerous journey. Throughout the entirety of this masterpiece, readers are accompanied with Scout’s commentary as they observe the events through the lens of an admirably righteous yet jejunely persistent child.

Initially, readers are introduced to the persona of

Arthur 'Boo' Radley, the Finch's reclusive neighbour. As a victim of parental abuse, Boo prefers the solace of night, eventually becoming the receptacle for the town's superstitions and terrors. Our main character Scout understands that the uncontaminated truth is far less sensational than the outlandish rumours, yet elects to participate in expeditions to Boo's manor under the coaxing of her brother, Jem Finch. This untamed desire for adventure and excitement steers the pair onto a roguish, spectacle-filled year, with antics ranging from challenging each other to touch Boo Radley's house, to deliberately producing a deformed caricature of a snowman with an uncanny resemblance of the obnoxious Mr Avery down the road, to lastly interjecting the Halloween fair during the school band's rendition of *Dixie*.

However, the languid borough of Maycomb is not without its share of adversities. Tom Robinson's lawsuit

is the very epitome of such, evidenced by the unyielding barrage of backlash he received from the denizens of Maycomb County; with the heinous smoking gun of this alleged atrocity, being his race. A humble worker who kept a low profile, he was condemned for allegedly raping Mayella Ewell, daughter of the destitute yet baleful Ewells. Against the spiteful wishes of the district's 'conservatives', Atticus decides to defend Tom and allow justice, not intolerance, to guide the hearing. Accompanied by Scout, Atticus resists a lynch mob intent on exacting 'retribution' on Tom before the commencement of the proceedings. Atticus himself unwittingly transforms into a beacon of light in this obfuscating predicament, honourably upholding a sense of morality and inspiring others to do so with his virtuous deeds.

The day of the long-anticipated trial arrives, with most of the town's inhabitants venturing out into the

courthouse. Under the scrutiny of a thousand eyes, Atticus opens his case with a compelling reconstruction of the fateful day's events. Readers watch with bated breath, imitating the tumultuous emotions experienced by that of Scout and Jem. After a gruelling afternoon spent on tenterhooks, the case reaches its climax as Atticus begins cross examining the prosecutor—Mayella Ewell. The ‘victim’ appears recalcitrant to Atticus’ interrogation, resorting to unwarranted temper tantrums in order to avoid the glaring fallacies in her fabricated chronicle of affairs. Ultimately, this principled lawyer reaches the expected conclusion: that nothing egregious occurred, save for the fact that Ms. Ewell ‘tempted an African American’ out of desolation and neglect.

Regrettably, the power of truth was insufficient to sway decades’ worth of xenophobia.

Tom was sentenced to prison, a thinly veiled guise for

impending demise. In the end, however, he opted for an alternative, exercising what limited freedom he possessed to put an end to his misery—death by shootout following a failed escape endeavour. A poignant tragedy nonetheless, the breadth of the verdict's fallout reaches far and wide. In a shocking twist of events, Bob Ewell, the disgruntled racist who instructed his daughter Mayella to deceitfully blame Tom Robinson, ambushes the Finch siblings on their way home, nearly placing them in mortal peril. All seemed to be lost, until an enigmatic figure intervenes, snatching the two from the cusp of imminent doom. After the dust settles, the anonymous hero is then revealed to be—none other than *Boo Radley!*

Upon completion of Harper Lee's magnum opus, I promptly understood its status as a paragon of contemporary literature—especially with the current state of discord and strife in America. In view of the

recent spate of racial violence and soaring tensions between persons of varying ethnicities, *To Kill A Mockingbird* is a stark reminder of the US's sanguinary history, in addition to the paramount significance of equality. The abolishment of segregatory Jim Crow laws in 1965 paved the way for seedlings of egalitarianism to take root in American constitution; a long overdue apology to the myriad of Tom Robinsons throughout the nation's centuries of enslavement.

However, the scourge of prejudice remains an indelible blemish on the country's legacy to this day, from flagrant displays of "white pride" from extremist groups like the KKK, to the inconspicuous perpetuation of poverty in ghettos, the cards are odiously stacked against individuals of African American descent. This candid delineation of apartheid in Southern America reminded me of the harrowing ramifications of unbridled hate—the maiming, or even massacre of innocents.

These potential repercussions motivated me to pay more attention to social issues, instead of maintaining a façade of compliance against the multitude of injustices in today's society. Atticus Finch made an example of this, assisting the oppressed in whichever manner he could, going so far as to volunteer staying at the county jail overnight with Tom to shield him from frenzied, weapon wielding crowds. A venerable resident of Maycomb County, he did everything within his influence to ameliorate Tom's plight, regardless of the end result. Although he is but a work of fiction, his persona is extremely laudable; no matter how minuscule we believe our actions to be, they exert an unimaginable impact on the recipients. By signing petitions, attending protests, or simply spreading awareness, we too can mirror his spirit and strive for a better future.

Though it saddens me to say so, in the past few months there has been an exponential rise in attacks

against Asian Americans. As a Chinese person, it agonises me to see my fellow brethren become targets to irrational bouts of loathing. Though vengeance appears to be an alluring possibility, *To Kill A Mockingbird* leaves its audience with a profound message: Do not combat hate with hate. This sage idea was first exemplified in Scout's reconciliation with Mrs Dubose; together the two warring rivals mended past transgressions and gradually achieved a form of truce.

In essence, although this Pulitzer prize winning novel is marketed towards children, its wisdom is to be imparted to people of all ages and of all walks of life. I sincerely recommend that everyone should read this novel at least once in their lifetime!