

Doing the right thing and the easy thing are not always the same option. This is shown in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. When a controversial decision must be made by Atticus Finch, he chooses to follow his conscience instead of the public's. Atticus Finch faces a difficult moral dilemma; when he follows his conscience and his actions result in negative repercussions. Atticus's difficult moral decision greatly contributes to the theme of standing up for those who cannot defend themselves.

When a young girl is badly beaten an innocent African-American man, Tom Robinson, is wrongly accused. In the predominately white society everybody's racist attitudes make them believe he is guilty of the crime. Atticus Finch is appointed to defend Tom and faces a difficult decision whether or not to do what is socially acceptable or what he knows is right. In the end Atticus chooses to defend Tom because he knows Tom truly is innocent. The town is upset and disgusted with Atticus's decision but he holds true to his conscience. He says "I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience" (105), this quote shows how even though everyone will find Tom guilty he has to do his best to defend him because Atticus knows in his conscience that it's the right thing to do. Even with the town against him Atticus sticks to his morals and does what he knows is right, although events occur which make him unsure.

When Atticus takes a stand to keep faithful to his morals, Jem and Scout stick by his side. However, instead of Atticus, the kids are verbally attacked for Atticus's choice, a repercussion he did not expect. One of the greatest insults of the time is to be called a "nigger-lover" and the townspeople call Atticus just that. Even their own cousin, Francis, says: "He's ruin' the family, that's what he's doin. He's nothing but a nigger-lover" (183). Scout is furious about this and defends Atticus's reputation with her fists, she punches Francis in the face. Atticus doesn't want to enstall violence in his children and seeing Scout react the way she did saddens him, and knowing that she is fighting for him makes him question what he is doing. Atticus doesn't want the children to be verbally attacked and react with violence on his account. However, he knows defending Tom is the right thing and sticks to it.

Atticus is upset with how African-Americans are treated in Southern society, and he believes they deserve the same treatment from the law. Atticus also believes that it is downright dirty to cheat an African-American because they can't defend themselves: "You'll see white me cheat black me every day. When a white man does that...he is white trash" (220). Atticus is expressing how awful it is to cheat a black man because they can't always stand up for themselves, which greatly contributes to the theme of the novel which is how it is our responsibility to defend those who are unable to defend themselves. Atticus is a perfect example of this. His moral dilemma, and difficult choice, show how we need to stick up for people who have done nothing wrong and can't stick up for themselves. This theme is also shown by another quote from Atticus. "It's a sin to kill a mockingbird" (90). This quote states how wrong it is to kill a mockingbird who does nothing but sing for people's enjoyment. Tom Robinson is like a human mockingbird, he has done nothing wrong and it's an awful thing to accuse him of the crime. This is why Atticus makes the decision to defend him, because Tom can't defend himself.

Atticus Finch must make a difficult moral decision where he chooses to follow his conscience and do the right thing, even though there are negative repercussions. Atticus's controversial choice shows Harper Lee's theme of defending those who can't defend themselves. Through Atticus's controversial choice shows Harper Lee the importance of sticking true to your conscience even when society is against you.