

**MAYCOMB'S USUAL DISEASE: A PRACTICAL APPLICATION TO DISABILITY
STUDIES IN *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD***

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Abstract

This paper aims to connect literary studies and disability studies through the acknowledgement of disability in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. By analyzing Boo Radley as a character with autism, we can begin to discuss disability in high school classrooms. By using a novel typically found on high school reading lists in the United States, curriculum can be implemented to discuss disability as a facet of diversity. This analysis will focus on Boo Radley's characterization, as well as the prevalence of disability in the fictional Maycomb. Putting a disability perspective on the novel will help to approach the idea of adding conversations of diversity to children's literature.

Key Words: Boo Radley, disability studies, diversity in children's literature, autism, neurodiversity

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Introduction

During my high school and college education, I have noticed an absence of characters and authors with disabilities. Many of the novels required on the average high school syllabus explore various literary cultures including modernism (Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*), transcendentalism (Thoreau's *Walden*), religion and purity culture (Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*), civil rights and social justice (Thomas's *The Hate U Give*), and even themes of poverty and migration (Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*). Very rarely are books concerning disability included on these high school reading lists. When reading many of these novels through a lens of disability studies, many of the characters have differences that create the perception of the Other. My teachers didn't give me or my classmates the tools to parse the idea of disability. In some cases, the scholarship did not include discourse to understand disability. Without attending to disability, many of these characters with physical deformities or mental atypicalities were Othered and set outside of society. This lack of inclusion prompts students to perceive characters with disabilities negatively or even dangerously. *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s Boo Radley was a specific character that planted this idea of research. Described as the "marvelous phantom"¹ that "went out at night when the moon was down,"² Boo is the misunderstood scary creature. Misunderstanding in Lee's novel leads to mistrust and fear. While Lee's story was written in the 1960s about the 1930s and correct terminology and diagnosis of disability did not exist, we can ask questions today. Is Boo Radley a monster? Is Boo Radley a recluse? Is Boo Radley a terror? Or, is Boo Radley autistic? To recognize the impact of disability in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I will first analyze how Lee utilizes disability as a descriptor and commonality among the characters in Maycomb. To view Boo as autistic, I will diagnose him using jargon and language rooted in disability studies. Then, I will explain the harm in including *To Kill a Mockingbird* in public high school curriculum without addressing autism. Finally, my research will conclude with an Op-Ed call to action to highlight inclusive literature in American classrooms.

My purpose in this paper is to explore the idea of literature as a whole with a greater focus on including individuals who have a disability, either through recognizing characters with neurodivergence or by placing a greater emphasis on authors or stories based around accurate portrayals of disability. This is why I've decided to focus my research on Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and its character Boo Radley. To analyze disability studies, I would like to look at the character of Boo Radley and the way he is viewed and treated by the other characters in the novel. The story is a Southern Gothic told by the narrator Scout – a child growing up in her hometown of Maycomb, Alabama. Southern Gothic novels often center on gore and the Otherness of individuals within the community. In some cases, the Southern Gothic highlights deviancy and evil in the community:

Lee's Gothic depiction of autism reflects more considerable cultural anxieties about autistic difference. The Gothic mode is centrally concerned with interrogating the human's boundaries. The frequent dehumanization of autistic people in literary works and cultural representations has an exact parallel in the Gothic examination of the division between natural and supernatural.³

I do not claim to promote the depiction of Boo Radley as autistic as a positive representation of the autistic community; however, the evil produced by the Gothic mode is a

¹ Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Rept. ed. (2006) New York, NY: First Perennial Modern Classics (1960)

² Lee, 9.

³ Sonya Freeman Loftis, *Imagining Autism: Fiction and stereotypes on the spectrum*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015)

side effect of the type of literature. Scout, Jem, and Dill's fascination with Boo Radley characterize Boo as exotic, and his inability to communicate further separates him from the dominant culture. Laura L. Behling uses a similar framework to examine Flannery O'Connor's Gothic writing about disability that I am using in my own work. She explains, "The disabled are, in fact necessary in order to expose the imperfection and inhumanity"⁴ in our communities. Another aspect Behling observed that also connects to the discoveries I have found in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and includes the choice of the name "Helga" for the character of Joy in O'Connor's *Good Country People*. This name choice represents both ugliness in being and physicality. This piece of Behling's work felt immediately like the choice in calling Arthur Radley the nickname Boo instead of his given name. Again, very few characters in the novel call Boo his given name Arthur. One of these characters is the ever fair Atticus who even corrects Scout the first time she meets Boo face to face, though she continues to call him Boo.⁵

Core to the novel is the narration. Scout as an adult remembering her viewpoint as a child enables the use of descriptions and ideas that a child would have held to shape their perception of events as they occur. Kathrine Patterson's (1997) dissertation highlights how disability affects community in Southern Gothic literature. Patterson writes,

Even when the community is confronted with clear evidence which contradicts their beliefs, Arthur Radley still functions as scapegoat for all things morbid, inexplicable and mysterious. He is 'Other' for the community to use him as a catch all explanation for anything and everything they do not understand and cannot explain otherwise.⁶

While the mainstream scale of *To Kill a Mockingbird* focuses on themes of intolerance, unfairness and what happens to individuals who go against the status quo, it is important to recognize the idea of difference as also applying to disability. While many of the other scholarly articles I viewed focused on Lee's novel in terms of race and class, I have decided to look at the novel in terms of disability: more specifically, autism or neuroatypicality.

My paper is one of the first of its kind in both the examination of Boo Radley as a character with autism and practical applications for using this scholarship in classroom curriculum. The words we write matter, and the literary characters we invite our children to learn about, read about and analyze matter. With the correct terminology, we can attack large scale ideas such as ableism and discrimination based on disability. Loftis writes in *Imagining autism* (2015) that the literature that we are taught influences "the way we think about people with autism, the way we think about disabled people as a cultural minority group, and the way our society regards, values, or disvalues anyone who is different." If autism is not acknowledged or referenced to popular characters, then "depictions remain unquestioned, unexplained, and unexplored."⁷ As I begin the conversation, I intend to bring attention to literary characters who fall on the spectrum and how disability is used as a descriptor throughout Lee's novel.

Disability in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* with a disabilities lens led me to the discovery of disability in nearly every character. Atticus utters worldly advice to his children throughout the novel, many times disrupting much Southern Gothic literature's ideals. At the beginning of the novel, Atticus says, "You never really understand anyone a person until you consider things from

⁴ Laura L. Behling, The Necessity of Disability in "Good Country People" and "The Lame Shall Enter First." *Flannery O'Connor Review* (2006), Vol. 4, pp. 88-98.

⁵ Lee, 298.

⁶ Kathrine Patterson's (1997) *Representations of Disability in Mid Twentieth-Century Southern Fiction: From Metaphor to Social Construction* (Doctoral dissertation). ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

⁷ Loftis, "Imagining Autism"

his point of view-- until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."⁸ The 'his' in this statement could easily read "Boo" or, more broadly, any character in the novel demonstrating physical abnormality could be substituted in this quote. Lee also uses the idea of skin -- something present in covering every individual body. However, it can look different on different people. The work of Lisa Detweiler Miller analyzes performance and disability in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. She states, "To walk around in the skin of the members of Maycomb, Alabama, would mean participating in the community as a disabled individual."⁹ Nearly every character has in part a disabled body, or in part a disabled mind. Other characters in the novel sometimes understand the characters who are disabled; however, something prevents them from fitting into society. Ane Gilje examines disabled literary characters in her thesis and notes, "What people overlook when viewing literary characters as either normal or less normal is why we see them as different, alienated or queer, compared to other characters in literary works."¹⁰ Using this rhetoric to analyze disability as the reason characters are different can help understand why Boo is separate from the rest of Maycomb society. This is a society that prides itself on the ability to come from something. Scout mentions early in the novel that her family lineage is a cause of hurt pride from her because "it was a source of shame to some members of the family that we had no recorded ancestors on either side of the battle of Hastings."¹¹ Additionally, the commonality of many individuals in Maycomb is how they communicate. There were patterns in Maycomb with it being a "tired old town"¹² with a "vague optimism"¹³ despite life being slow. Yet, Maycomb was much more accommodating to people who looked and acted white and southern. A prime example is Mr. Dolphus Raymond who "lives by himself way down near the county line"¹⁴ and has a host of bi-racial children. Raymond does not fit into the Maycomb mold. Furthermore, his bi-racial children have no sense of belonging either. This emphasis on race means "colored folks won't have 'em because they're half white; white folks won't have 'em 'cause they're colored."¹⁵ This idea of presenting Dolphus as a drunkard in a way in which to appease the town standard is then twisted when readers realize disability is woven into the very fabric of the town itself.

In the wake of Jem's altercation with Bob Ewell, Lee's novel begins at the end, causing Jem to suffer a physical disability. The severity of Jem's broken arm is measured in how he will be able to approach his future. "When it healed, and Jem's fears of never being able to play football were assuaged, he was seldom self-conscious about his injury."¹⁶ Although, this injury didn't seem to cause Jem much worry and "he couldn't have cared less, so long as he could pass and punt."¹⁷ To talk about accident and injury in the first paragraph before traveling further back in time to the first summer of Dill and the "idea of making Boo Radley come out."¹⁸ The impact of disability can be seen in the foreshadowing occurring in the first pages of the novel. Lee introduces each new character highlighting flaws and imperfections. In Scout's narration, we see Jem and injured, and this injury stunting his summer of play. The disablement of his arm, though temporary, is eternalized at the beginning of the novel. Then circularly, the novel ends with

⁸ Lee, 33.

⁹ Lisa Detweiler Miller, *Enable Us to Look Back: Performance and Disability in To Kill a Mockingbird*. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*: New Essays ed. Michael J. Meyers. (Scarecrow Press, 2010.)

¹⁰ Ane Gilje, *Distinctly Different: "Bartleby, the Scrivener," Sula, and Disability Studies*. (2016). Web.

¹¹ Lee, 3.

¹² Lee, 5.

¹³ Lee, 5.

¹⁴ Lee, 177.

¹⁵ Lee, 177.

¹⁶ Lee, 1.

¹⁷ Lee, 1.

¹⁸ Lee, 1.

disability. Bookending her novel with physical altercation is curious about what Lee intended to prove to her audience.

At the core of this thesis is the necessity of linking themes of gore and the grotesque with disability and deformation. We see many characters represented as villainous and evil because they are either misunderstood or grossly deformed. Boo Radley easily fits this mold of the Southern Gothic recluse. As a "malevolent phantom"¹⁹ the mere idea of Boo Radley was twisted into the grotesque. In the town, Boo is a folktale. He mutilated people's chickens, and the Radley House had a pecan tree with nuts that could kill -- all ideas that made the Radley House unapproachable.²⁰ However, in the novel, Scout analyzes the impression Boo made on her. This is one way the town of Maycomb didn't shape the idea of a citizen. Scout learned more about Boo in the time he was in her house, checking on Jem than in years of stories and play provided by the neighbors.²¹ Of course, the moral of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is tolerance, seen in Atticus's choice of language, as someone who thinks differently than much of Maycomb. Humorously put, the first time Scout meets Boo Radley was right after Jem's accident in which Scout remarks, "If Atticus could blandly introduce me to Boo Radley at a time like this, well -- that was Atticus."²²

Another instance of disability is found in Atticus. Atticus can't see well, despite being an excellent shot.²³ Other fragilities of Atticus include his age and inability to participate in football with the other fathers.²⁴ His age makes him "feeble"²⁵ and acts as a disability for him in Maycomb, despite having many other citizens of a higher age. This may have to do with the fact Atticus still has young children and had to grow up quickly in his arrival back to Maycomb to pay for his younger brother Jack's education.²⁶ The most notable portion of this section of the novel is Atticus's use of his eyesight when killing the rabid dog. This instance of disability almost works in Atticus's favor because as "one shot Finch,"²⁷ he can destroy what Maycomb fears. Maycomb fears what they cannot understand which in this case is why a dog in the summer months might be rabid. The dog itself is a catalyst for disability. The mad dog's disability eventually led to its death. When the town is looking to shoot the mad dog, this becomes the most significant disability in the scene as even "the mockingbirds were silent."²⁸ This instance of disability is curious when we relate it to what we already know about the novel's other characters. Atticus's disability does not hinder his ability to work as a lawyer, nor does it hinder his ability to father children. In examining his privilege, you could argue his disability would affect him more if he were black or a woman.

In fact, Calpurnia's first character description is noted in difference features and facets of her body sharing, "Calpurnia was something else again. She was all angles and bones; she was near sighted; she squinted..."²⁹ This description points to one of her immediate flaws, her poor eyesight. Calpurnia's race is not mentioned once in this paragraph, mentioning instead her disability as an immediate descriptor. Her eyesight doesn't play a large role in her characterization in the novel but was mentioned very early on as something to be noticed by the reader. Another female character with a noticeable disability is Mrs. Debose. At first thought, a

¹⁹ Lee, 9.

²⁰ Lee, 9.

²¹ Lee, 306.

²² Lee, 298.

²³ Lee, 99.

²⁴ Lee, 99.

²⁵ Lee, 98.

²⁶ Lee, 5.

²⁷ Lee, 107.

²⁸ Lee, 105.

²⁹ Lee, 6.

reader may feel that she is a villain because of the way she speaks about Atticus to Scout.³⁰ Later it is revealed that Debose is a morphine addict, this crutch due to her disability, or more specifically her illness. Debose's condition also causes her to cough and spit, something Jem finds nasty.³¹ This ailment also makes Scout afraid. Again, the reader is led to instinctively villainize a character who the rest of the citizens of Maycomb don't understand because of their aversion to the abnormal.

Boo Radley and Tom Robinson

The character most similar to Boo in his ostracism from the society of Maycomb is Tom Robinson. Tom Robinson is a cripple and his arm is brought up multiple times in the trial.³² While Boo and Tom are both on the outside of society and nearly prosecuted for crimes they have not committed, the make-up of their disabilities looks different. The length of Tom's arm makes completing regular tasks more difficult. Tom suffers as he has to work harder to serve in the same fields and at the same capacity as his peers. Tom still has the ability to travel within the black community; where Tom finds trouble is when he enters white spaces.³³ As opposed to Tom, Boo lacks the ability to communicate as Maycomb expects him to. Boo's disability keeps him from participating in society as a whole, forcing him to remain hidden away in the Radley House. Even at the end of the novel, despite being happy that Boo saved Jem, Atticus and Heck Tate have to save Boo from what would be a prison sentence, insisting "Bob Ewell fell on his knife."³⁴ Boo returns to his home which is not much different from the prison he would've ended up in had Heck Tate and Atticus not shown Boo mercy. Boo is also understood as a character who needs protection. These two men, in deciding Mr. Ewell's fate, also sealed the fate of Boo. Heck Tate wants to "let the dead bury the dead."³⁵ Avoiding the creation of Boo as a scapegoat, Tate creates Boo as the hero. Though only eight, Scout understands that getting Boo in trouble for saving her life is "sort of like shootin' a mockingbird."³⁶ Boo Radley, as the mockingbird, helps readers/Scout to understand him as a fragile and meek presence despite the original fear and hesitation of the children to know him.

Much like Tom's isolation in prison, Boo's isolation in the Radley House could have shaped his inability to communicate. Years and years without social interaction not only make his disability something that he is, and not something he can manage, but also perpetuates his difference. Heck Tate's saving of Boo at the end of the novel was not the first time Boo had been saved from exile. As a young man Boo found trouble and was expected to be sent to the state's industrial school.³⁷ Even though Boo's father saved him from the fate of the industrial school, which is likened to prison, some of the hooligans Boo fell in with found success with an engineering degrees from Auburn.³⁸ Regardless, Boo Radley's prison sentence began inside the Radley house when "Mr. Radley's boy was not seen again for fifteen years."³⁹ The other citizens of Maycomb -- despite disability -- can interact in ways with their neighbors that are acceptable in society, and this is the difference of Boo. Despite race, class and family status, his disability makes him unable to join society as a participant. "All outsiders in Maycomb are grouped

³⁰ Lee, 110.

³¹ Lee, 119.

³² Lee, 205.

³³ Lee, 190.

³⁴ Lee, 304.

³⁵ Lee, 304.

³⁶ Lee, 304.

³⁷ Lee, 10.

³⁸ Lee, 10.

³⁹ Lee, 10.

together as 'mockingbirds,' placed into groups of victims in need of the (presumed white, able-bodied, and privileged) reader's pity and rescue."⁴⁰ Yet, I just examined numerous characters described as disabled in the novel. However, the brunt of trouble found in characters is the ones who reside on the outskirts of societal influence, those who are unable to participate, the mockingbirds that need rescuing.

Maycomb's Usual Disease

If the citizens of Maycomb are truly disabled, then the social condition acts as a "crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power."⁴¹ In fact, the one character who seems to merely be precocious is Scout, the narrator. Analyzing the seeming perfectness of Scout's body and mind as a control to model the rest of the time may suggest Scout is not facing "Maycomb's usual disease."⁴² Atticus suggests the usual disease has to do with racism, but what if it had to do with ableism as well?

"You know what's going to happen as well as I do, Jack, and I hope and pray I can get Jem and Scout through it without bitterness, and most of all, without catching Maycomb's usual disease. Why reasonable people go stark raving mad when anything involving a negro comes up is something I don't pretend to understand... I just hope that Jem and Scout come to me for their answers instead of listening to the town. I hope they trust me enough...."⁴³

Scout was caught listening to her father and uncle and was told to go to bed, but years later she realized Atticus "wanted [her] to hear every word he said."⁴⁴

In viewing Maycomb as a system of disability, it is important to analyze the structure of the town itself. Maycomb, Alabama fits many stereotypes about small southern towns. The value of an individual is found in their family name, literacy and, as so examined in critical reading of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, race. Scout readily recognizes Maycomb's old-fashioned pretenses in her retelling of childhood. "There was indeed a caste system in Maycomb, but to my mind it worked this way: the older citizens, the present generation who had lived side by side for years and years, were utterly predictable to one another: they took for granted attitudes, character shading, and even gestures, as having been repeated in each generation and refined by time."⁴⁵ This is Maycomb's usual disease, a tradition that seems eternal and makes it nearly impossible for an outsider to ever find themselves back inside. How in this Gothic mode is Boo ever supposed to enter society? He is not utterly predictable; he has not lived side by side with anyone, nor has he been understood by the older generation, the people at the top of the caste system. If Scout recalls the caste system of her childhood as an adult, does this mean the caste system hasn't disappeared or changed? It means Boo must hide in order to be forgotten, and if he is forgotten, he is not bothered and less feared.

Boo comes out at night, away from the eyes of the Maycomb community. "Boo compels us to reconsider what is normal and what is aberrant in Maycomb."⁴⁶ If we view Maycomb through the lens of disability, we see resident after resident suffers from the abnormality. In this case, why does Boo's ailment incite fear and gossip? Does Boo's isolation prompt fear of what occurs behind closed doors? Late in the novel, Jem sheds light on the dark side of Maycomb

⁴⁰ Loftis, "Imaging Autism"

⁴¹ Miller, *Enable Us to Look Back*

⁴² Lee, 98.

⁴³ Lee, 98.

⁴⁴ Lee, 98.

⁴⁵ Lee, 145.

⁴⁶ Hugh McElaney, *Just One Kind of Folks*. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*: New Essays ed. Michael J. Meyers. (Scarecrow Press, 2010).

when he shares, "I always thought Maycomb folks were the best folks in the world, least that's what it seems like."⁴⁷ This idea illustrates the naivety of a child learning for the first time his neighbors may not always be warm, despite being safe. This idea of safety is a bizarre standard to uphold when the town itself is unable to protect the townsfolk from disability. Boo visits Jem in the form of a nightmare after he rips his pants on the fence. Ironically to the way Boo uses his hands to mend the pants, Jem imagines "Boo Radley's insane fingers picking the wire to pieces."⁴⁸ This is also different than Boo's actual fingers, which are able to carve the children into soap figures.

Scout and Dill's precocious manner causes them to get in trouble with authority figures. In Maycomb, those with the ability to read are held above those who are not. Literacy is an indicator of class, race and age. Dill's first words to Scout and Jem are how he can read and Jem shoots back about how small he is.⁴⁹ Scout's age also gets her in trouble with the amount of knowledge she possesses in the classroom.⁵⁰ Scout was in a position in her upbringing in which she did not remember learning how to read. She says, "reading was something that just came to me."⁵¹ Maycomb is so fragile the very idea of literacy could topple it all if in the hands or mind of the wrong person.

Boo Radley as Autistic

In *Enable Us to Look Back*, the author challenges the idea that Boo is disabled, but that instead, his difference is constructed. Miller believes Boo is only able to gain control when he loses control.⁵² The only instance of violence where this may make sense is when Boo saves Jem and the reader is led to believe he also stabbed Bob Ewell.⁵³ If Boo truly is autistic, the isolation and mistreatment he faces at the hands of Mr. Radley would not create autism. These actions may cause Boo to suffer from managing his disability and also further his inability to communicate with others. Yet, in his actions, we see kindness and compassion, especially in the way he treats Jem and Scout. The children are thankful for the help he provides and Jem shares that "He ain't ever hurt us, Atticus."⁵⁴ Boo put a blanket around Scout's shoulders and showed her kindness, but even then, Atticus didn't want anyone else to know. Atticus says to the children, "someday, maybe, Scout can thank him for covering her up."⁵⁵ No one in Maycomb would be willing to accept this fact that Boo would be capable of showing kind actions.

To claim Boo is autistic, it is important to first consider the language of disability studies today. In *Representing Autism*, Stuart Murray explores the connection between autism and mainstream culture, as well as the effectiveness or harmfulness of terminology in the mainstream. One thing I hope to avoid in my research paper is diagnosing the fictitious character of Boo Radley with autism to create a negative idea about autism. Murray (2008) explains that "the label autistic today is not necessarily always a description of an individual with a clear neurological difference." He explains this phrase can be used in some vernacular to mean "generically 'odd' or even dangerous,"⁵⁶ thus taking away from the word referencing a disorder

⁴⁷ Lee, 237.

⁴⁸ Lee, 62.

⁴⁹ Lee, 7.

⁵⁰ Lee, 19.

⁵¹ Lee, 19.

⁵² Miller, *Enable Us to Look Back*

⁵³ Lee, 304.

⁵⁴ Lee, 81.

⁵⁵ Lee, 81.

⁵⁶ Stuart Murray, *Representing Autism: Culture, narrative, fascination* / Stuart Murray. (Representations (Liverpool, England)). (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

and instead of creating "an idea of autism" that "has spread through public culture."⁵⁷ Despite this concern, it is important to understand there have always been people with autism, and though historically, the language didn't exist for a diagnosis, any chance at bringing autism into the mainstream makes it something people can at least attempt to understand. Avoiding the use of autism as a metaphor when referencing characters will allow my research to work as a call to action for curriculum about disability, as opposed to creating a culture in which we try to diagnose famous historical figures or fictitious characters. Murray suggests his research on autism in stories by Herman Melville or Charles Dickens creates "different possibilities to what these stories might *mean*."⁵⁸ If *To Kill a Mockingbird* means something different, this opens the door for consequences of criticism brought to "activism, rights and the outcomes of representation"⁵⁹ and how this might affect individuals with autism.

In addition, scholarship from a published conversation about autism with experts in two separate fields— literature and disability studies— furthers the focus on correct terminology to be used in different settings. Lisa Zunshine and Ralph James Savarese have a conversation to take "cognitive approaches to literature" with the "insights of disability studies to think about mind, narrative, and agency in neurodiverse ways."⁶⁰ In this conversation, many paradigms are mentioned such as mindblindness and how a "neurotypical observer is quick to assume that the mental state behind the behavior is either absent or intentionally asocial"⁶¹ in dealing with behaviors that are typically deemed to be autistic traits. A phrase like neurotypical rivals the idea of normal vs. abnormal. In producing the impact of Boo Radley as autistic to the community of Maycomb with Murray's framework, words like normal and abnormal have to be defined. If normal is the "norm," this can also be translated to be the "ideal."⁶² Though heavily debated in research about autism and literary studies of cultural representation of autism, there are been strides to use person first language. This allows the person to be more than "his or her condition,"⁶³ and this seems to be the terminology for the framework used in most professional settings. My intended setting to use this scholarship is among educators, policymakers and high school students.

Childlike Fascination

One way *To Kill a Mockingbird* can serve as an accurate representation of autism in today's culture is with fascination. In the novel, Boo acts as the center of play for the children, as they act like him and his family, creating stories of his perceived life.⁶⁴ Patterson (1997) suggests the "play takes a more serious turn as the children use this creative exercise as a way to work through their understanding of their relationship to "the Other" which Arthur Radley represents."⁶⁵ The recent increase in culture representing autism both positively and negatively is all to do with wanting to understand something unknowable. This idea of a cultural shift is almost hopeful; Ralph James Savarese, the author of *Reasonable People: A Memoir of Autism and Adoption* says "As autistics continue to develop a literary tradition, one inexorably entwined with the dominant tradition, only a concept like neurocosmopolitanism will be up to the task of

⁵⁷ Murray, "Representing Autism"

⁵⁸ Murray, "Representing Autism"

⁵⁹ Murray, "Representing Autism"

⁶⁰ Lisa Zunshine and Ralph James Savarese (2014). The Critic as Neurocosmopolite; Or, What Cognitive Approaches to Literature Can Learn from Disability Studies: Lisa Zunshine in Conversation with Ralph James Savarese. *Narrative*, 22(1), 17–44. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2014.0000>

⁶¹ Savarese and Zunshine, *The Critic as Neurocosmopolite*

⁶² Murray, "Representing Autism"

⁶³ Murray, "Representing Autism"

⁶⁴ Lee, 49.

⁶⁵ Patterson, *Representations of Disability*

fully understanding the dynamic, neurocultural habits of different readers and writers."⁶⁶ Despite this hopeful shift, the work required to challenge tradition and understand autism and authors with autism is immense. Rises in ratings of TV shows like *The Good Doctor* or the staying power of Mark Haddon's (2003) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* attest to society's fascination with autism and the way it affects children and adults alike. Murray comments on autism as a social issue and why this is showing up in mainstream fiction. Because the taboo behind autism is lessening, neurotypical members of society are then able to look at autism. Differentiating between "looking for autism – the process of assessments and diagnosis – is complex, then looking at autism – seeing it in the world – is equally as far from a straightforward activity."⁶⁷ The children follow their curiosity and look at autism as they discover more about Boo throughout their summer of play. It is "in the process of scripting and revising these details the children make Arthur Radley familiar and, through empathy, humanize him."⁶⁸ It is crucial to remember that the children in the novel do not understand they are looking for autism at all. They instead are adjusting their perception to align with the general ideas of Maycomb. "The novel has a powerful social focus: thus, it is significant that the children's world is bound by disabled figures (and Gothic monsters) on both ends of the street."⁶⁹ The children are only allowed to travel as far away from home as Calpurnia's call. This means they are able to travel near Ms. Debose's home but don't dare get near the Radley Place. Scout would run past as fast as she could.⁷⁰ With Scout and Jem's inquisitive spirits, they search for the truth about Arthur Radley by questioning the neighbors.⁷¹ Ms. Maudie suggests Boo is alive "because [she] hasn't seen him carried out yet."⁷² Ms. Maudie refers to Boo's mortality as a morbid subject, despite the fact Boo is very much alive.

There are two ways in which Scout and Jem interact with Boo Radley as Other through play and knot tree communication. They first see Boo as different, thus prompting the children to fear him -- something that is taught to them as residents of Maycomb. After seeing what they rest of Maycomb fears about Boo, Scout then observes or watches. Murray describes watching someone with autism as something that can be extremely personal, specifically for parents of children with autism. He notes, "for anyone outside of the condition, seeing is what you initially do: you look for it and its signs."⁷³ There is also a difference in which someone would look at a stranger with autism vs. someone they know well. "If it is a stranger you encounter; you look for the ways it makes itself known. And then, when you know, when you're in the after world of knowledge, having read all the books and websites, it is common to watch."⁷⁴ At the end of the novel, when Boo stands in Jem's room stroking Jem's hair, Scout is able to finally watch. She gathered information and little truths through stories with her neighbors and father.⁷⁵ (Lee, 54). Atticus, a private man, told his children that though they were curious, there was nothing particular about Mr. Radley. He wanted his children to be respectful of Boo, even though he was different from what they were. Atticus even addresses to them that the "civil way to communicate"⁷⁶ is through the front door and not spying through a side window. This

⁶⁶ Savarese and Zunshine, *The Critic as Neurocosmopolite*

⁶⁷ Murray, "Representing Autism"

⁶⁸ Patterson, *Representations of Disability*

⁶⁹ Loftis "Imagining Autism"

⁷⁰ Lee, 36.

⁷¹ Lee, 49.

⁷² Lee, 49.

⁷³ Murray, "Representing Autism"

⁷⁴ Murray, "Representing Autism"

⁷⁵ Lee, 54.

⁷⁶ Lee, 54.

observation in civil communication is important to acknowledge because Boo is unable to communicate in this way.

Another conversation about disabilities and literature focus on how an approach to understanding autism in the future, and their suggestions to avoid talking about autism "now that [they] realize [they] cannot simply rely on mainstream scientific discourse and echo its impersonal "outside-in" view of the condition."⁷⁷ The argument against scientific discourse is one that would allow individuals with autism to humanize their condition. This could be done through self-expression in art or, as Savarese suggests, in literature. This allows those with autism to lead the conversation. One practical suggestion from Ralph James Savarese was to be more intentional in reading work by and from authors with autism. A way in which his advice could be practical to my research is bringing together "cognitive sciences to literary criticism,"⁷⁸ applying disability studies to understand literature written in a time the framework could not originally be applied.

Inside the Radley House

In *Imagining Autism*, Sonya Freeman Loftis (2015) tackles the idea of Boo's inability to communicate as being locked within himself. This, as a metaphor, also works to examine Boo locked within himself while simultaneously being locked inside the Radley house. In her paper, Miller's view and examination of Boo's behavior to be that of someone experiencing trauma, many of the adult characters in the novel believe Boo is abnormal because of the way his father treated him. "Nobody knew what form of intimidation Mr. Radley employed to keep Boo out of sight, but Jem figured that Mr. Radley kept him chained to the bed most of the time. Atticus said no, it wasn't that sort of thing, that there were easier ways of making people into ghosts."⁷⁹ Lee uses tall tales surrounding the mystery of the Radley house and what happened inside. What's inside the Radley house is behind closed doors -- doors that remained closed not only throughout the week but on Sundays as well.⁸⁰ These doors prevent Boo and the Radley's from interacting with the neighbors -- something that is seen as unacceptable to many Maycomb citizens. Scout, Jem and Dill challenge each other to touch the doors, as the idea of being so close to inside of the house is frightening to the children. At one point, Scout hears laughter coming from inside of the house⁸¹ making the inner workings of the Radley house seem like a classic haunted house. If Boo Radley is the ghost, he is all but forgotten inside the house. In fact, though Boo's father dies early in the novel, his sentence is not up as his brother Nathan takes his place as Boo's guardian.⁸² Even the adults in the novel are not sure exactly how Boo has been treated or if this treatment has kept him from learning despite being autistic. The house itself is described as "droopy and sick,"⁸³ a description similarly given to characters who have disabilities in the novel like Mrs. Debose and Boo himself. Even in looking at the unfairness of Boo's time spent locked away at the Radley Place, Atticus has the privilege of telling his children to mind their own business and leave Boo alone. Atticus even goes as far as challenging the idea Boo might not have left the Radley house because he didn't want to leave.⁸⁴ Leaving was unknown for Boo, even if staying meant he couldn't participate in society. Scout questions this end all be all solution to being a

⁷⁷ Savarese and Zunshine, *The Critic as Neurocosmopolite*

⁷⁸ Savarese and Zunshine, *The Critic as Neurocosmopolite*

⁷⁹ Lee, 12.

⁸⁰ Lee, 10.

⁸¹ Lee, 45.

⁸² Lee, 12.

⁸³ Lee, 16.

⁸⁴ Lee, 54.

shut-in, asking Dill why Boo had never run off.⁸⁵ Dill's response, wise beyond his years is that "maybe he doesn't have anywhere to run off too..."⁸⁶

An Element of Pleasure

Some of the clues Loftis provides to Boo's autism diagnosis are provided in the way he communicates with other characters. "Arthur communicates with his compassion for the children without words: by giving them gifts, by mending Jem's torn pants, and by giving Scout a blanket when she is cold."⁸⁷ In the transferring of objects, Boo is able to create a relationship with the children. The gifts Boo gives the children also reflect what might be his attention to detail. This "pleasure of autism"⁸⁸ represents the order and repetition many individuals with autism use to cope. Murray argues that in novels written specifically about autistic characters, there is often an element of pleasure missing.

Nearly all the stories that circulate about the condition are areas of difficulties, of screams and rage, of despair. It is frequently referred to, especially in the public media, as tragic, a terrible and cruel absence of so much that makes us human and the most familiar wonder we know. The idea that anything associated with this could in any way contain pleasure seems too perverse, too contradictory. Yet, in many ways, autism centers on an idea of pleasure.⁸⁹

Pleasure for Boo comes in the form of giving and carving and mending. Boo delicately designs two soap figures to represent Scout and Jem and places them in the knot-hole.⁹⁰ Part of the mystery behind these figures is that they are nearly professionally made. Jem had "never seen any this good."⁹¹ This attention to detail may be an autistic trait. Boo also showcases his ability to mend and fix things when he sews Jem's ripped pants. Unlike the soap figures, Boo's mending did not reflect perfection but instead was "all crooked."⁹² Still, Boo had Jem's pants ready for him, as if he knew he would return to pick them up.

His fascination with the children also may have to do with his own interrupted childhood and his still meek, childlike nature. His "body language is also unusual. When he appears at the end of the novel, he initially hovers in the corner and later waits for Scout to guide him through the house."⁹³ Boo's body language also differs from everyone else in the space. He stands while the others remain seated in the living room and always seems to gravitate toward the dark corners away from attention and social interaction.⁹⁴ Other aspects of Boo's physical differences that point toward autism are his hesitation and awkward gait, matched with his light sensitivity.⁹⁵ Even as a young child, Scout is able to perceive Boo's body language and adapts to aiding him through her house.⁹⁶ Scout also offers Boo instructions on how to stroke Jem gently.⁹⁷ In this scene, we see the compassion Boo has for the children which was previously expressed through

⁸⁵ Lee, 159.

⁸⁶ Lee, 159.

⁸⁷ Loftis, "Imaging Autism"

⁸⁸ Murray, "Representing Autism"

⁸⁹ Murray, "Representing Autism"

⁹⁰ Lee, 66.

⁹¹ Lee, 66.

⁹² Lee, 65.

⁹³ Loftis "Imaging Autism"

⁹⁴ Lee, 299.

⁹⁵ Loftis "Imaging Autism"

⁹⁶ Lee, 305.

⁹⁷ Lee, 306.

the gifts he provided. Boo also has difficulty with bright lights. Something Scout recognizes when she states, "Boo would feel more comfortable in the dark."⁹⁸

The stories told of Boo Radley also express the way he feels more heightened emotions and does not always have the ability to control his actions surrounding his emotions. "Although the idea that people on the spectrum do not feel emotion is a false and damaging one, it is sometimes true that they express emotion in unexpected ways or that their emotions may not be apparent to others."⁹⁹ This idea can be applied to the end of the novel, as Boo does not express the typical or socially acceptable reaction to having killed Bob Ewell. In fact, it doesn't appear that Boo emotes in this case at all. This rivals one of the rumors told about Boo which depicts him as leading a gang of young hooligans when he "fell in with the wrong crowd"¹⁰⁰ in his youth. Boo's lack of ability to communicate in a way that is socially acceptable makes it hard to believe he was the mastermind behind the wrong crowd's criminal activity. If not for this, what other reason would Boo's father have had for keeping him in the Radley place for nearly thirty years? One factor to analyze is Boo's physicality, as described throughout the novel. Lisa Zunshine explains, "physical actions of people with autism do not necessarily reveal their thinking abilities."¹⁰¹ Much of this research focuses on people who have autism and also are nonverbal, though Boo's inability to communicate makes it difficult for the reader to see the interworking of his brain.

Another result of Boo's autism is reflected in his childlike nature. Part of this childlike nature is reflected in Lee's metaphor and title. Boo as the mockingbird would make sense if he acts like a child, as most grown men don't need protection. The other mockingbird in this story is Tom, and though he is also a grown man, he does not have childlike tendencies. Tom's need to be protected stems from societal mistrust, while Boo's need for protection comes from being sheltered. It is not that Boo is in any danger until he leaves the safety of his house if you can call being locked in for twenty-five years a net of safety. Lee draws comparison to how the mockingbirds in the novel are often forgotten, as a creature of nature this makes sense, falling into the background. She draws a comparison between three of the characters on the outskirts of society's norms, "if Mr. Ewell was as forgotten as Tom Robinson, Tom Robinson was as forgotten as Boo Radley."¹⁰² Murray uses *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* to explain an author without autism's use of the creation of a character with autism that makes sense to the general public. Lee may have used this characterization of Boo in her novel to shape the general perception of how people like Boo acted and behaved. There is a dichotomy in the way in which characters in the novel chose to forget and deny him as part of society or accept and allow him to join. These choices are measured in different stares and witnesses of his autism. Murray (2008) writes, "to be autistic is often to be the subject of a number of different stares." We can't change the way Maycomb, Southern Gothic literature, or even Harper Lee herself stared at Boo Radley, at those who were disabled, or at those who were autistic. What we can do is use the treatment of Boo in the novel as a jumping-off point to represent how we should teach students how to treat each other. The consequences of ignoring disability in *To Kill a Mockingbird* allow for normative social views that give privilege to people without disabilities, helps to create these views as the only views. This is not an issue that is going away anytime

⁹⁸ Lee, 299.

⁹⁹ Loftis "Imagining Autism"

¹⁰⁰ Lee, 11.

¹⁰¹ Savarese and Zunshine, *The Critic as Neurocosmopolite*

¹⁰² Lee, 274.

soon. "Just as autism has always existed, so it will always exist,"¹⁰³ and, despite this, we can't pinpoint what it will look like in the future, but we can begin to educate students on what it looks like now in order to promote tolerance and equity.

Practical Approach to Education

My practical suggestion is adding two days of curriculum to a study of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in a high school classroom setting. I have included the schedule for a normal high school experience of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and how I would adapt to change that program. Kathy Power provides 13 different essays on how to teach Lee's novel. These essays explore topics of race, religion, womanhood, and language. A unique approach to teaching the novel would be instilling what Power suggests as "case-based" instruction, which facilitates "knowledge activation."¹⁰⁴ Something found in the study of a 1990 case-based approach to *To Kill a Mockingbird* found differences in-class participation:

The conclusions drawn from this study are that while students who wrote in their response logs did not write better essays, they talked more, discussed a wider range of topics, asked more abstract questions, and associated their own personal experience with the novels.¹⁰⁵

Taking this approach to implementing Boo Radley's autism as an area of study would create a direct impact on how students can view autism and disability in their own lives or own communities.

Another strategy Power suggests comes from *The Handicapped in Literature* (1981). While some of the teaching strategies in this guide may be outdated, two general concepts remain as key takeaways. The first "focuses on society's conceptions of the disabled and how often the disabled are victimized by society."¹⁰⁶ This idea is clearly expressed several times throughout the novel, and it may be beneficial to have students look for examples in which Maycomb as society has victimized or, more correctly to Boo, villainized some of its members. The second suggested lesson and key takeaway "focuses in on? how conceptions about the disabled can be changed."¹⁰⁷ This lesson can prompt students to develop a character study in order to look at the relationships and connections characters of the novel have with Boo. Exploring these themes in as much depth as other themes like racism and intolerance will help to promote the importance of examining disability in literature. Part of what makes this curriculum so tangible is developing attitudes that reflect positively of people with disabilities. In recognizing and attempting to emphasize with fictional characters such as Boo, children and teens can take some of this empathy into their own lives, translating the idea of tolerance to day-to-day interactions. A teacher utilizing unique novels or re-examining novels for significance can find themselves in a "position to positively influence the attitudes children have toward their peers with cognitive disabilities."¹⁰⁸ This forward way of thinking also helps to "include children with disabilities into general education classrooms in more than just a physical sense."¹⁰⁹

I have also provided my own lesson plan to explain what goals I have for a classroom to understand very basic disability studies and autism in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. My suggested curriculum would work to deconstruct the language used in the novel to describe Boo. Even

¹⁰³ Murray, "Representing Autism"

¹⁰⁴ Katherine Power 1996 *Thirteen Ways of Looking At A Mockingbird: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Doctoral dissertation). Ann Arbor, MI.

¹⁰⁵ Power, *Thirteen Ways of Looking At A Mockingbird: A Collection of Critical Essays*

¹⁰⁶ Power, *Thirteen Ways of Looking At A Mockingbird: A Collection of Critical Essays*

¹⁰⁷ Power, *Thirteen Ways of Looking At A Mockingbird: A Collection of Critical Essays*

¹⁰⁸ Wendy M. Smith-D'Arezzo (2003) Diversity in Children's Literature: Not Just a Black and White Issue. *Children's Literature in Education*, 34(1), 75–94. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022511917336>

¹⁰⁹ Smith-D'Arezzo, *Diversity in Children's Literature*

using the nickname Boo Radley to describe Arthur Radley is central to the idea of him being a monster. I have continuously chosen to use the word Boo in order to call attention to the name. This name depicts the phrase the boogeyman says from under the bed or ghosts whisper in the dark. Boo used this way is not endearing but instead fear-inducing. The first time Jem and Scout nearly see Boo, they unknowingly describe him as a shadow, something that exists only in a certain light and never on its own.¹¹⁰ Boo is also described as doing things like creeping or shuffling, never able to walk in a way that doesn't remind the reader of Frankenstein. Furthermore, Boo's appearance is depicted in a way that makes him ghost-like "his face was as white as his hands."¹¹¹ He is also hollowed-cheeked, wide-mouthed, and shallowed-eyed -- an appearance that gives him the look of a someone who is haunted.¹¹² All of these pieces depicting Boo as a monster are important to deconstruct through discussion. Sari Altschuler and Cristobal Silva look into Early American Disability Studies. Some of their work can stand for the framework in which students should examine *To Kill a Mockingbird*. They examine the "metaphorical weight" of words that act together such as "defect, deformity and monstrosity" to "emphasize what we would now call the allegorical, the aesthetic, and the moral dimensions of impairment."¹¹³ They also look into the use of the word disability as a blanket term to represent many subcategories. They write about phrases to use to describe those without disabilities as "nondisabled" or "TAB (for temporarily able-bodied)."¹¹⁴ They also explain situational disability and the range of disability, as "it can also wax and wane within a particular body."¹¹⁵ This concept can be used to further understand Maycomb as a town full of disability with an inclusive framework that offers an explanation to the language. While their research focuses on earlier texts, utilizing and understanding the prevalence of language at the time *To Kill a Mockingbird* was written can help to generalize the metaphors Lee used to describe Boo and disability as a whole in the novel.

Another aspect critical to the creation of the added curriculum is talking about what happens after the novel ends. This novel doesn't end fairly, and who, especially out of the mockingbirds, gets a happy ending? Themes of tolerance emerge fiercely throughout the story. But, because of the Othered perception of difference, there is not quite a culture or theme of acceptance by the time the end of the novel is reached. So how, if possible, would the characters in the story work past the end of the novel to extend help and acceptance to mockingbird-like characters? Or, because the novel is set in the 1930s, is it impossible to believe this would even be a possibility? Is it inappropriate to add the concept of 21st-century disabilities studies and language to a novel written in the 1960s? Loftis discourages the idea that acceptance could have been reached by the end of the novel.

Maycomb is fundamentally flawed and unable to make that much change in the few of Scout's years we get to glimpse through her eyes. Even Scout, the curious and inquisitive young person who has yet to truly feel the brunt of Maycomb's usual disease, is unable to completely accept Boo. "No matter how long Scout stands on his porch, readers are likely to leave the novel remembering Boo as a Gothic monster whose overpowering Otherness unites the Maycomb community with his symbolic outsider status."¹¹⁶ I want my work to act to change this to battle in

¹¹⁰ Lee, 59.

¹¹¹ Lee, 298.

¹¹² Lee, 298.

¹¹³ Sari Altschuler and Cristobal Silva, 2017 Early American Disability Studies. *Early American Literature*, 52(1), 1–27.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/eal.2017.0000>

¹¹⁴ Altschuler and Silva, *Early American Disability Studies*

¹¹⁵ Altschuler and Silva, *Early American Disability Studies*

¹¹⁶ Loftis, "Imaging Autism"

part what Atticus mentions as the unfairness in men, since, in fact, these men "couldn't be fair if they tried."¹¹⁷ There will always be disagreement, but working to create acceptance out of tolerance is imperative.

¹¹⁷ Lee, 243.

***To Kill a Mockingbird* Lesson Plan**

- I. Lesson Goals (Strategies Focus, Objectives, or Purposes)
 - Given the core focus of understanding and accepting disability in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the student will be able to identify three instances of disabilities in the book.
 - Given the reading material, the student will be introduced to the idea of Boo Radley as autistic and how the other characters view him.
 - Expanding on the idea of disability in the novel, the student will be able to write a one-page essay reflecting on a time they or someone they know has been Othered because of disability and how this relates to characters in the novel.
- II. Procedures
 1. Open discussion: Why do you think it's important to talk about disability when reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*?
 2. Talk about autism, statistics, and if possible, how it affects the immediate community of the school, of the city and of the state.
 3. Examination of three chapters: break the students into groups to explore the subject matter of Boo Radley. Each group will spend 30 minutes rereading their given chapter and beginning discussion. The first group will review chapter five (Ms. Maudie's analysis of Boo). The second group will review chapter seven (looking at the knot-hole communication Boo shares with Jem and Scout). The third group will review chapter 30 (the reveal of Boo Radley).
 4. After 30 minutes, the class will come back together to discuss the impact disability had on these chapters and share three things they noticed. After each group presents, the teacher can ask leading questions like, "how did the other characters react?" "Why did Lee choose to use this descriptor?" "How would this instance be different if it occurred today?" "Would you be scared to enter the Radley house?"
 5. Finally, students will be given their short homework assignment to relate Otherness and inequality in TKMB to their own lives. These short essays will work to create the core of the second day of curriculum.
- III. Assessment/Evaluation of Student Learning
 - Students will be able to articulate in a one-page essay Otherness in terms of disability.
 - The following class will focus more on the importance of classroom diversity, including stories and information about disability.
- IV. Materials
 - Student Materials: Copy of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, pencil, notebook
 - Teacher Materials: index cards for students, copy of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Diversity in Children's Literature- A Case for Boo Radley

My mom and I read the same books in high school. Our required reading lists differed by one or two titles.

What's more than that: my grandmother and I had three similar titles we were asked to complete. Titles like *The Great Gatsby*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Grapes of Wrath* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* have been circulating public high schools for decades. The harm in required reading lists for high school students is not found in the texts themselves but instead is found in the antiquated lesson and literary analysis required with the books.

Issues of racism, classism, and modernism are instilled in students' brains from between the pages of these books. Yet, one glaring "ism" is missing: the idea of ableism and lack of curriculum in education about disability studies and literature. How do we remedy this lost piece of difference? This minority culture that desperately seeks a voice? I have one character for the job: Boo Radley.

In identifying Boo Radley as autistic, students can begin to analyze and understand the Otherness placed on individuals who are unable to communicate with the dominant culture. *To Kill A Mockingbird* is commonly placed on high school reading lists all over the United States, and by adding two days of the curriculum in English classes, students can address autism and, more broadly, disability and its perception in society. This curriculum can cover stereotypes, tolerance and can give some students an idea that there are literary characters who exist that are like them, their family members, or their friends.

The CDC estimated in 2020 that 2.21% of adults living in the United States have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This overwhelming minority goes unseen, unheard, and unnoticed.

Shifting focus to ASD and its implications using canonical literature would not only diversify children's literature but also would work toward a more inclusive classroom curriculum. Canonical literature is defined by its staying power -- the books I read, my mother read, and my grandmother read. Why did we have to read them? Some educators would argue these books have powerful messages and lessons. So why not use these lessons for all that they are?

I challenge you this: educators, administrative staff, and even parents--- reread *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Talk to your students about autism. Talk to your students about communicating with people who are different than you. Talk to your students about Maycomb and the challenges found growing up in a town struggling to make amends with difference.

Atticus Finch urged us to understand the different points of view of others, "You never really understand anyone a person until you consider things from his point of view-- until you climb into his skin and walk around in it" (Lee, 33).

This true understanding of a person's point of view stems from learning and discussion. If we facilitate conversations about the inclusivity of disability in literature, minority groups like adults with autism can be seen, heard, and noticed. Additionally, students with disabilities will be more than noticed. They will see themselves represented in the books they read for school.

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