

EXAMPLE ARGUMENTATIVE THEME WITH EXAMPLES

Prompt: Authors often design characters to represent the conflict between “good” and “evil.” Choose characters from one of the novels we have read this year, and write an Argumentative Theme based on your research showing that your chosen characters are examples of how an author depicts “good” and “evil.” Include at least two quotations, in-text citations where needed, and a reference list. Use the MLA style.

TITLE OF PAPER: The Faces of Good and Evil

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American Literature

20 January 2016

The Faces of Good and Evil

In *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1960), two of the main characters depict the conflict between good and evil. By way of background, the story is set in a fictional Alabama town during Segregation and the Depression in the 1930s. Atticus Finch is an attorney who decides to defend an African American man who has been falsely accused of raping a white woman. In contrast, Bob Ewell is the father of the false accuser. He has forced his daughter, Mayella, to falsely accuse Tom Robinson of rape to cover up his own abuse of Mayella. As a result, Atticus and Bob face off against each other in a legal battle that captures the attention of the whole community. Eventually, this battle becomes personal and deadly. As the plot unfolds, the way Harper Lee describes these men's appearance, their life styles, and their relationship to the law leads the reader to believe that Atticus was meant to depict "good" while Bob was meant to depict "evil."

First, Harper Lee, through the voice of Atticus Finch's daughter, Scout, describes the appearance of the two men very differently. Atticus is a tall, distinguished-looking man who wears a suit and carries a briefcase. He walks in a confident way with a straight posture. He is always dressed like a gentleman. Scout adds details to the description as follows: "His vest was buttoned; his collar and tie were neatly in place, and his watch-chain glistened..." (Lee 284). In contrast, Bob is a small man. When he approaches the bench during the trial to testify, his appearance is described as follows:

...a little bantam cock of a man rose and strutted to the stand, the back of his neck reddening at the sound of his name....his face was as red as his neck....A shock of wispy new-washed hair stood up from his forehead; his nose was thin, pointed, and shiny; he had no chin to speak of—it seemed to be part of his crepey neck (Lee 227).

Second, the general life style and behavior of the two men is also quite different. On the good side of the coin, Atticus works every day to earn an income for his family. As a result, they live in a two-story house. He returns home every evening from work to have dinner with his children. He is an active father who cares for and teaches his children. Not only does he insist his children go to school everyday, he also paid for his brother's medical school education. Additionally, he spends time helping others in the community. He takes on the job of defending Tom Robinson in court even though he knows that everyone wants him to reject the job and that Tom will probably be found guilty.

On the other side of the coin, Bob does not work; instead, he collects welfare. He is an alcoholic and spends his welfare money on alcohol. No one knows for sure how many children Bob has, but he could have as many as nine children (Lee 228). He does not ensure that his children go to school, and they rarely do. He beats his children when they do something he does not like. Their living conditions are Spartan and filthy; they live in a cabin that has a roof made of tin cans and windows with no glass. The children eat whatever they can find in the dump and any meat that Bob provides from hunting. They get their water from a spring that is located at one end of the garbage dump, and they rarely bathe. Bob often disappears into the swamp for several days and returns sick. His children are constantly sick, too.

Third, the two men function very differently on the two sides of the law. On the one hand, Atticus is a law-abiding citizen who works conscientiously to free a falsely accused man through legal activities. He follows court procedures in a careful and polite way. He does not break the law, nor does he try to work around the law. In fact, many of his activities throughout the novel support the law. For example, he works alongside the sheriff to kill a sick dog that is threatening the citizens of Macomb. He also guards the jail when he expects a group of men will try to hang Tom Robinson one night. On the other hand, Bob tries to get what he wants through illegal means. He is known to hunt out of season to kill game. He allows his children to skip school. He lies to falsely accuse a man of a serious crime and to save face in the community. When he learns that he has not saved face and that no one respects him, he becomes vengeful and tries to kill Atticus's children.

All in all, Atticus Finch and Bob Ewell are opposites, like good and evil are opposites. Everything about Atticus aligns with good while everything about Bob aligns with evil. Atticus looks and acts like an upstanding citizen who tries to help others, and Bob looks and acts like a criminal who cares only about himself. Atticus treats his children with love and respect; Bob is abusive and angry toward his children. Atticus lives his life like an honorable and good man, and Bob lives his life like an evil man. As a result, each man receives his "just desserts." Atticus continues to be respected by the community and his children while Bob is killed. Perhaps Harper Lee's depiction of good and evil in this way is to show that acting in good ways leads to benefits while acting in evil ways results in negative consequences and even death.

Work Cited

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. NY: Grand Central Publishing, 1960.