

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The 1930s was a turbulent and desperate period for race relation in the United States. The whites had prejudices toward African-Americans in this time (“Issues of Racism in the 1930’s”). In connection to race relation is racism, which is defined as “a belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human races determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one’s own race is superior and has the right to rule others” (“Racism”). At its worst, racism prevented African-American people from having no civil rights; they could not own lands, could not receive formal education and could not expect to have a fair trial in the courtroom.

The information about *To Kill a Mockingbird* in this paragraph has been borrowed from Janet Maslin. Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which was published in 1960, is one of the literary works focusing on Racism. Lee is a contemporary American author who is praised for being intelligent. She gives advice and life lessons in her only novel. Interestingly, the plot and characters are

based on her observations of her own family and neighbours, as well as on an event that occurred near her hometown, Alabama, in 1936 when she was 10 years old. Maycomb County, Alabama, is a fictional town based on Lee's home town of Monroeville, Alabama. Alabama was chosen as the setting of *To Kill a Mockingbird* because racism toward African-Americans happened here, especially around 1930s. She observed the Scottsboro Boys interracial rape case in 1931 and the incident inspired her to write *To Kill a Mockingbird*. After writing *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee wrote her second novel *The Long Goodbye*, but eventually filed it away unfinished. In 1980, she started writing a factual book about an Alabama serial murderer, but she put it aside because she was not satisfied with her work. Thus, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is her only book which is published. It turned out to be a best-selling novel with more than 30 million copies. In 1999, *To Kill a Mockingbird* was voted as Best Novel of the Century in a poll by the Library Journal. It was also awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President George W. Bush in 2007. This is the highest civilian award in the United States that recognizes individuals who have made an especially commendable contribution to the national interests of the United States, world peace, and culture.

To Kill a Mockingbird describes discrimination in many cases, such as discrimination in the field of education, job opportunity, religion and justice. It tells about Atticus Finch, a white respected lawyer who takes on a case of an innocent African-American convicted of rape. This case becomes controversial because the lawyer assists an African-American so that the racist white people mock at the lawyer and his children. This controversy brings the family to a lot of

conflicts. According to Harry Shaw, “conflict is an important element of plot; they are the material from which a plot is constructed” (91). Shaw also categories conflicts into three types:

First type is physical conflicts, a struggle between man and the physical world. It represented man versus forces of nature. Second type is social conflicts, a struggle between man and man. Third type is inner conflict, a struggle between desires within a person. (91-92)

I choose to focus only on the social conflicts that happen between the Finches and the people around them because social conflicts are most frequently found.

Statement of the Problem

The problems I am going to discuss are:

1. What social conflicts happen in the novel?
2. What are the causes of the social conflicts?
3. What are the resolutions of the social conflicts?

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of the study are:

1. To analyze the social conflicts in the novel
2. To analyze the causes of the social conflicts
3. To analyze the resolution of the social conflicts

Method of Research

I used library research in writing my thesis. First, I read *To Kill a Mockingbird* as my primary text. Second, I found the most important elements to be analyzed, which were social conflicts in the novel. Third, I searched for the theories to support the analysis. After that, I analyzed the social conflicts and drew some conclusions from my analysis. Finally, I wrote the thesis.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research, and Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two contains the analysis of the social conflicts in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Chapter Three is the Conclusion; it is followed by the Bibliography and the Appendices, which contain the Summary of the Novel and the Biography of the Author.