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"You Should Be in a Dress and Camisole": Reading Gender in the Novel and Film Adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* Through Setting, Character, and Event

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Introduction

"Talking about gender for most people is the equivalent of fish talking about water." Judith Lorber ² When you ask people when they first came to understand the concept of gender through their own lived experiences, many people pause and struggle to answer with much specificity. Yet, for those who, in some form, challenged the established gender norms of their family, community, or larger society, those moments are easy to recall. Fathers grabbed the doll out of their son's hands, mothers wrangled their daughters into a dress for church, girls were suddenly told that they had to start covering their chest when boys were still able to be shirtless, or boys in pain were told that big boys don't cry. These moments are both small and substantial. Added together, they become an unwritten curriculum of shame where we learn by force to appease those policing the behaviors by denying some part of themselves.

Students across the nation still face the rigid rulebook of the gender binary every day. School systems, policy decisions, teacher language all actively and accidentally work to concretize the norms of gender at a huge cost. According to *Teaching Tolerance*,

Compared to the general population, gender-diverse kids face drastically increased rates of bullying, assault, depression, school drop-out, drug abuse, self-harm and suicide. A 2009 report from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network paints a grim picture. Nearly 90 percent of transgender youth surveyed had experienced verbal harassment at school because of their gender expression. Two-thirds expressed feeling unsafe at school; more than half experienced physical harassment. A quarter experienced physical assault. Most of these incidents were never reported to school officials.³

Our policing of a gender binary through policy and rhetoric limits the ability of our students to understand themselves and others in a safe space. Gender rigidity thrives when dialogue is restricted and dies in its deconstruction.

Part of this kind of identity work is learning how to separate the parts from the whole and, in this case, begin to see the water as a fish. In the novel and film adaptation the character Jean Louise “Scout” Finch first appears at age six. This is the age where gender identity begins to form through memory and repeated efforts of others to effectively socialize the child to the gender norms of society. Scout is a gender deviant, but her age and absence of a mother allow her a degree of gender freedom that others in Maycomb may not experience. This is particularly true for Mayella Ewell, the accuser in the novel and film. Mayella also deviates from gender norms largely because of her class status and, like Scout, the absence of a mother figure. Yet Mayella’s age, 19, does not afford her the same space to explore her gender identity and her failure to achieve the full form and presentation of Southern womanhood is likely a part of her motivation to accuse Tom Robinson of rape. The novel and film use different stories to shape the gender identity of each character. By comparing the novel to the film adaptation, students can begin to see how gender is formed through the unwritten rules of society, enforced by members of the community, challenged by Scout and, to some degree, Mayella through the violation of norms, and the final acquiescence of both to perform gender within the rules.

Rationale

I work at a math and science academy on the South Side of Chicago. Though we are a selective school where students test in, seventy percent of our students qualify for subsidized lunch and many will be the first in their family to attend college. As a result of the school’s thematic focus, entrance exam scores of our students are often higher in the science and math categories, but scores in reading comprehension vary widely. In addition, our students, like many across the nation, struggle with academic resilience—the ability to persevere through the early struggles of academic challenges and to know the joy of learning once a foundation of knowledge about a new topic has been built. This is particularly true when it comes to analysis of complicated texts in various mediums. Too often students will find ways to avoid complexity through fear of failure and due to their interpretation of struggle as weakness.

To address these needs this unit will serve as the baseline for my women’s studies course taught as an elective to 11th and 12th grade students. The purpose of the unit is to introduce the skill of reading various texts (fiction, non-fiction, and film) in order to examine the concepts of “reading gender” and to introduce the necessary intersectional awareness in text and film to prepare students for the kind of analytical thinking we will be developing throughout the year.

The choice of novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and its film adaptation is a purposeful choice based on the accessibility of both in terms of text complexity and film techniques. Many students will have read the novel in 8th grade and that familiarity will help serve the purpose of text analysis without having to do extended review of the plot and characters. The story also provides many places to discuss the three elements of writing/filmmaking that I plan to analyze—setting, character, and events. The film adaptation is close enough to the novel to allow for a rich comparison of meaning gained and lost through each medium.

Background

Though *To Kill a Mockingbird* is set in 1930's Alabama, it was published by Southern writer Harper Lee in 1960 and was immediately popular, earning Lee a Pulitzer Prize. Set in fictitious Maycomb, Alabama in 1933, the story is a remembrance of Jean Louise "Scout" Finch who serves as the narrator to tell a dual plot story of the years between her sixth and 8th years. One aspect of the plot is a coming of age story for both Scout and her brother Jem as they experience the mythology of Maycomb's most famous recluse, Arthur "Boo" Radley, a story of ambiguous justice in the failure to free Tom Robinson, and the willingness to ignore Boo Radley's murder of Bob Ewell to protect his need for solitude. The hero of the movie is Scout and Jem's father, Atticus Finch, who raises his two children with the help of their cook Calpurnia following the death of their mother. Atticus serves as the anchor of the story and the anchor in the lives of his children whose adventures throughout the neighborhood often get them a stern but loving lecture from their father. Atticus, a lawyer, agrees to defend Tom Robinson, who is an African American man falsely accused by a white woman of rape. Atticus and his children endure the ire of the community for his purposeful defense of his client. The first plot ends with an unsurprising guilty verdict against Tom Robinson, who later attempts to escape prison and is shot and killed. The second plot ends when the father of Tom Robinson's accuser, Bob Ewell, attacks Scout and Jem, and Boo Radley comes to their aid and kills Ewell.

The film adaptation was released quickly, in 1962, and was nominated for eight Academy Awards. The screenplay was written by Horton Foote who also wrote the 1992 screenplay for *Of Mice and Men*, and it was directed by Robert Mulligan who was nominated for the Best Director Oscar for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Gregory Peck won the Academy Award for his portrayal of Atticus Finch.

Content: Text to Film Comparison

Setting

Why does *where* matter? How is the setting like a character in itself? Why do authors often establish setting early in a text? Since a place never (or rarely) stays the same, why does *when* also matter when analyzing setting? These questions will be at the heart of our analysis of setting in both the novel and film adaptation.

In the novel, setting is established within the first ten pages. We are first introduced to the lineage of the Finch family and then to a description of the place called Maycomb. Here the text has work to do. It needs to situate the reader in a locale that offers our first insight into an understanding of the events of the rest of the novel. It is also the author, Harper Lee, establishing a voice and style through the use of figurative language and alliteration. In the second section of the paragraph that establishes setting she writes: "In *rainy* weather the *streets* turned to *redslop*; *grass* grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse *sagged* in the *square*. Somehow, it was hotter then: a black dog *suffered* on a *summer's* day; bony mules *hitched* to *Hoover* carts *flicked* *flies* in the *sweltering* shade of the live oaks on the *square*."⁴ The lyrical description is indicative of Southern writers, in particular female Southern writers of the time, and helps to create an older, nostalgic narrator whose memory is fastened to the syrupy smoothness of an upper-class Southern drawl. Since, unlike in the film, we cannot hear that in her voice, the author must use language to establish it. This paragraph also introduces us to the

type of town and the time period of the novel.

People moved slowly then. They ambled across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, took their time about everything. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people: Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself.⁵

The slowness of the people, the ambling, is meant to convey both the pace of a small, Southern town as well, perhaps, as the slowness of small town traditions to change. They were ambling toward the future, but there was no hurry and Maycomb County was an enclosed space save for the “vague optimism” of the president’s message of hope.

The film adaptation, by contrast, introduces the items left by Arthur (Boo) Radley in the knot of the tree and other items mentioned in the film or related to the particular attribution identified (e.g. the whistle comes into focus to identify Elmer Bernstein as the creator of the musical score) by panning across them in close up. Near the end of the introduction, a child is using a crayon to color a rough, but identifiable image of a bird and humming to herself with playful giggles as she tears the paper, creating a divided image on the screen with blackness between the two halves of paper. From there, the camera dissolves into the next scene that begins with a view of tree leaves with sky in the background. The camera is shooting from below looking up into sky with tree branches in the foreground with diegetic sounds (connected directly to the events on the screen) of birds. The camera then pans downward to a street view of a newspaper deliveryman walking across the street and the non-diegetic sound (separate from the events on the screen) of the narrator selecting some of the words directly from the novel to describe the town as we view the morning events of the day and the view from what we come to see is that of six-year old Scout. The narrator’s genteel Southern voice, performed by Kim Stanley, describes Maycomb as a “tired old town when I first knew it” where “men’s stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning; ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o’clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum.”⁶ (3:30-3:35) One dissolve transition shifts from a man in a horse-drawn cart to another who is stopped and unloading a bag. Here the narrator introduces the times. She says, “A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with though Maycomb county had recently been told it had nothing to fear but fear itself.”⁷ (4:20-4:23) Right after this moment, the camera switches from the child’s viewpoint to the child swinging playfully into the frame from a rope swing and we learn that this is the narrator’s memory from when she was six years old.

Character

Why does *who* matter in a text and film? How do authors establish character in text and film? How do author’s and filmmakers use character to advance their purpose? What are the advantages and disadvantages of film in establishing and using character?

The novel is rich in character description, yet limited by the single view of a nostalgic narrator. Many of the richest descriptions of character are those left out of the film adaptation, yet for the sake of comparison, I have selected a few that have some shared similarities between the two versions. Scout, throughout both, is an inescapable character since she serves as the narrator of the story. As such, her character is both ubiquitous and hard to define. For that reason, I am going to use more overt descriptions of character for

analysis. The first characters are from the scene of Scout's first day of school, where we are introduced to Walter Cunningham and the characters of Calpurnia, Jem, and Atticus are further developed. In order to set up this scene, I will use the short description of Calpurnia from earlier in the text and the paragraph that follows that explains the absence of a mother in Jem and Scout's life. Lee describes Calpurnia as follows: "She was all angles and bones; she was nearsighted; she squinted; her hand was wide as a bed slat and twice as hard.... Our battles were epic and one-sided. Calpurnia always won, mainly because Atticus always took her side. She had been with us ever since Jem was born, and I had felt her tyrannical presence as long as I could remember."⁸ Here, according to Scout, Calpurnia's role was that of disciplinarian rather than the nurturing, maternal role of stand-in mother. This introduction is juxtaposed by the next paragraph where Scout as narrator reveals more about the absence of a mother figure. She says, "Our mother died when I was two, so I never felt her absence.... I did not miss her, but I think Jem did."⁹ The author's positioning of this revelation helps to situate Scout as having little maternal guidance, which explains her lack of Southern femininity. These two paragraphs are particularly useful in the scene where Walter Cunningham (whom Scout had fought earlier in the day because his economic situation had forced Scout to explain why he would not accept the loan of a quarter from their new schoolteacher because he could not pay it back, thereby getting Scout in trouble on her first day of school) joins Jem and Scout for lunch at their house.

Two excerpts in particular help establish character in the novel. Atticus and Walter's conversation, as the narrator explains, was a "discussion about crops neither Jem nor I could follow" because they talked "like two men...to the wonderment of Jem and me." There is much in these small passages that use the character of Walter to explain the various intelligences of people in Maycomb and the strong desire of Scout and Jem to know their father more deeply. This is followed by Walter Cunningham's request for syrup and Scout's horrified response asking him "what the Sam hill he was doing." Unmoved by her father's gentle admonishment, Calpurnia calls Scout into the kitchen to further press the topic. Calpurnia reminds Scout, "'That boy's yo' comp'ny and if he wants to eat up the table cloth you let him, you hear?'" and Scout replies that Walter is not company "'he's just a Cunningham.'" Calpurnia models her role of disciplinarian by challenging Scout's understanding of class hierarchy and Southern hospitality when she states: "Hush your mouth! Don't matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house's yo' comp'ny, and don't you let me catch you remarkin' on their ways like you was so high and mighty! Yo' folks might be better'n the Cunninghams but it don't count for nothin' the way you're disgracin' 'em."¹⁰ At once, Scout is learning her family's position in the town's hierarchy as well as the mores of Southern hospitality which is largely defined and maintained by Southern women.

The film version begins with a street scene where Miss Maude is crossing the street and cuts to the breakfast table inside the Finch house. Miss Maudie enters and says she is here to see Scout off on her first day of school. Scout is not in the scene and Calpurnia calls her name and goes to find her. Calpurnia returns with eyebrows raised to the group and we wait for Scout to appear. She is slowly comes around the corner, head down with a newly ironed dress. Jem immediately begins to laugh, which causes Scout to hide herself once again. At Atticus's urging, Scout makes her way to the table and tugs at the collar of her dress until she is scolded by Calpurnia. Scout's facial expression allows the audience to see her understanding of Calpurnia as "tyrannical," and to introduce Miss Maudie as a mother figure in the children's lives through her kind comments and knowing looks to Atticus. As the adults watch the children run off to school, the scene cross-dissolves to the children running out of the schoolhouse door for lunch recess. Scout immediately runs to Walter Cunningham (though we have not been introduced to him formerly) and attacks him. It isn't until Jem pulls her off that understandable dialogue begins and we are introduced to Walter Cunningham and learn his economic situation and Scout's confrontation with the teacher as a result. Jem intervenes and invites Walter

for lunch. The scene cross-dissolves to Walter sitting at the dining room table in the Finch's home and Atticus handing him a plate. We are reminded that the Cunningham's are poor when Walter says that he cannot remember the last time he had roast and that they had mostly been eating squirrel and rabbit that he hunted with his father. The movie, rather than using dialogue between Atticus and Walter about crops, creates Jem's separateness through the fact that Walter has a gun and Jem does not. It also introduced the meaning behind the book's title when Jem asked Atticus when he got his first gun. The film adaptation largely parallels the book scene once Walter pours syrup on his food and Scout loudly expresses her shock through the phrase, "what in Sam hill are you doing?!" One difference from the text is that Atticus's look shows that he is anticipating a reaction from his children and is ready to stop Scout once she responds. Once Scout is called into the kitchen, the film uses a medium shot of Calpurnia standing over Scout, whose head is down, with Calpurnia performing an abridged version of the novel's text. This scene in the film moves the plot along to another important moment when Atticus explains to Scout that "you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view," which further establishes Atticus's fundamental philosophy on human nature.¹¹

The character of Ms. Dubose, like many others, is much richer and more developed in the novel and, in the end, serves to show Atticus's unwavering moral compass when he instructs Jem to read to her daily. The novel's introduction of Ms. Dubose provides a model for how an author quickly establishes a character through narration and dialogue. We learn first about Ms. Dubose earlier in the text when the narrator says, "Mrs. Dubose lived two doors up the street from us; neighborhood opinion was unanimous that Mrs. Dubose was the meanest old woman who ever lived." We return to Ms. Dubose later where layers are added to her character and we find out she lives alone in the care of a black attendant and that it is "rumored that she kept a CSA pistol concealed among her numerous shawls and wraps."¹² These anecdotes introduce us to a character from the perspective of a child who only sees the person and hears stories, but does not yet know how to fully make meaning of the information. The verbal cruelties that Ms. Dubose shouts from the pulpit of her front porch help us to better understand the growing adolescent anger in Jem and the perfect self-control of Atticus in his interactions with Ms. Dubose. Harper Lee uses Ms. Dubose's character to expose what are likely the thoughts of others in Maycomb about Atticus's parenting style, Scout's clothing, the maturation of Jem throughout the text, and the choice of Atticus to defend Tom Robinson.

In the film, Ms. Dubose is a minor character and is situated earlier in the story when Jem, Scout, and Dill go to meet Atticus on his way home from work. The scene loses much of its meaning in the abridged form and serves mainly to show Atticus's magnanimity and Southern charm.

Event/Action

Why does *what* matter in text and film? Why and how do author's and filmmakers create important events? What are the advantages and disadvantages of film in creating important events?

Another important aspect in the novel and film is the portrayal of key events. The trial of Tom Robinson is an excellent example to use in comparing the novel and the film. The examination of Mayella Ewell is part character and part event/action in the novel. The Ewells, as a family, have been introduced by the author in various places in the text. The first is in Scout's classroom where the reader meets Burris Ewell, whose cooties terrify Miss Caroline on her first day as a new teacher. We learn the most when Bob Ewell is brought to the stand and Scout narrates her knowledge of the Ewell family history in Maycomb, and through the dialogue when Mayella is testifying in court. The novel, because of this repetition, has fully established the Ewell's situation in town by the time of the trial, which helps the reader better understand why Mayella falsely

accuses Tom Robinson of rape. In the narration following Bob Ewell being called to the stand, a two sentence description of the Ewells in Maycomb is included: “No economic fluctuations changed their status—people like the Ewells lived as guests of the county in prosperity as well as in the depths of a depression. No truant officers could keep their numerous offspring in school; no public health officer could free them from congenital defects, various worms, and the diseases indigenous to filthy surroundings.” The novel goes on to describe the location and living conditions of the Ewells whose dilapidated home is close to the local dump. Yet, within this section, one paragraph shifts and describes an unusual sight in the corner of their yard. Lee writes, “Against the fence, in a line, were six chipped-enamel slop jars holding brilliant red geraniums, cared for as tenderly as if they belonged to Miss Maudie Atkinson, had Miss Maudie deigned to permit a geranium on her premises. People said they were Mayella Ewell’s.” Here the novel adds layers to Mayella’s character by including these nurtured examples of frivolous beauty. Scout’s narration of Mayella’s movement to the stand and description of her physical presence includes the lines, “she seemed somehow fragile-looking, but when she sat facing us in the witness chair she became what she was, a thick-bodied girl accustomed to strenuous labor”, yet one who, unlike her father, “tried to keep clean.” Lee largely uses dialogue to take us through the event of the trial so that it feels as though we are not being told about the trial, but are actually present in the courtroom. Lee uses colloquial language to help the reader *hear* Mayella’s voice.

The film’s adaptation of Mayella’s testimony scene uses a great deal of the dialogue from the novel. In order to show Mayella’s fragility, the camera films her on the witness stand from high angle looking down making her appear smaller. The body language of the actor indicates fear and discomfort. Her body is stiff and her hands are behind her gripping the chair for support. She looks as awkward in a clean, ironed dress as Scout on the first day of school. Conversely, Atticus throughout the trial (and most of the film) is shot from below, making him seem strong and larger than life. The film version of Mayella’s trial scene removes much of the dialogue from the novel and violates court rules by using a brief monologue by Tom Robinson to establish his disability. The scene’s apex comes when the camera shifts to a close-up on Mayella, who sits up, looks around, and announces that she has one, final thing to say. She repeats her accusation of Tom and then moves the accusation to the wealthy white men in the room. Mayella says, “‘if you fine fancy gentlemen don’t wanta do nothin’ about it then you’re all yellow stinkin’ cowards, stinkin’ cowards, the lot of you. Your fancy airs don’t come to nothin’—your ma’amin’ and Miss Mayellerin’ don’t come to nothin’, Mr. Finch —.’” She broke into hysterical tears and ran down the aisle only to be grabbed roughly by her father who sits her down in the seat next to his. The camera movement, the actors’ physical expression, the lines she delivers, and the voice with which she is delivering them make this a profound moment in the film where the viewer understands that this she is lying, but that her calling up of the traditional role of white society will, in the end, be the deciding factor.

Gendered Lens

Gender, like the fish in water analogy, is hard to “see” yet ever present. Gender is constructed through the socialization of children by adults, peer groups, media, etc. Children learn that there is meaning beyond their sex category and they are often praised when they adhere to norms and admonished when they violate them. Such reactions enable children to begin to internalize these social norms and create a gender identity for themselves. Feminist theorists and others have created multiple theories that examine gender as a social construct to explain how it forms and what it means.

The gender theory I will be using is called the Status Characteristics Theory. This theory is an interactionist theory so named for the importance it places on social interactions as the constructor of one’s idea of gender. The Status Characteristics Theory, according to *Questioning Gender: A Sociological Exploration* by Robyn

(Rae) Ryle, claims that gender is produced in groups among individuals, rather than as residing within an individual." In this theory, cultural cues about appearance and behavior help us categorize people by sex into male and female. Research shows that this mostly happens unconsciously. In addition, this theory focuses on "goal-oriented interactions." Through these interactions we form performance expectations which assume "how useful your own contributions will be in accomplishing the goal and how useful other people in the group will be." This usefulness is dependent on the status characteristics of to the identified sex. Some characteristics deem one sex greater esteem and others lesser. Gender is a status characteristic and the beliefs about worthiness or aptitude are called "gender status beliefs." The beliefs generally confer greater value/worth to men's contributions rather than women's, putting women at a disadvantage. This disadvantage is perpetuated by self-fulfilling prophecies that bestow greater resources on men and fewer on women. In short, "for status characteristics theory, gender is understood largely as an interactional effect of sex categorization and gender status belief."

Intersectionality is a concept that evolved out of many fields, but much of this idea came from feminist scholarship, and is defined by *Oxford Dictionary* as, "The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage." This frame of analysis recognizes the layers of identity in each person and how those identities move them into and out of positions of privilege or and oppression. "Intersectional analysis posits that we should not understand the combining of identities as additively increasing one's burden, but instead as producing substantively distinct experiences." As a consequence of their multiple identities, some women are pushed to the extreme margins and experience profound discriminations while others benefit from more privileged positions. "Intersectional analysis helps us to visualize the convergence of different types of discrimination – as points of intersection or overlap."

After our analysis of the novel and film adaptation, students will read and watch the same excerpts to learn how to analyze them through a gendered lens using the status characteristic theory. Our first opportunity is when the narrator, an older Scout, describes the rituals of the town where the "men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o'clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum" (p. 5). The rituals themselves are different for men and women. Men in Maycomb also suffer from the Southern heat, yet it is only the women who bathe more than once a day in order to stay well presented. Women, too, nap in the afternoon when, it is safe to assume, men are at work. This is also a great moment to explore the intersection of gender, race, and class by showing students what and who is valued in the text and who has been left out.

According to the status characteristics theory, our understanding of gender (as well as race and class) comes through interactions and the unwritten rules that aim to indoctrinate the younger generation to maintain the status quo. When Scout and Jem confront Ms. Dubose in the novel, Ms. Dubose says, "'what are you doing in those overalls? You should be in a dress and camisole, young lady! You'll grow up waiting on tables if somebody doesn't change your ways—a Finch waiting on tables at the O.K. Café—hah!'" Here we can see the elder women of the town naming the norms using the word "should" and shaming Scout, the violator of the norms, by indicating that she will have to work in a lower-class occupation. It seems safe to infer that someone waiting tables is not married into a family of a similar caste as the Finches. A scene from the film with an equal intention is Scout's first day of school where she is clearly forced to wear a dress and is expected to maintain her look throughout the day when Calpurnia stops her from fiddling with her too tight collar. Scout is uncomfortable and frustrated, stating that she does not understand why she has to wear it. In the same scene, Miss Maudie, a stand-in mother told Scout that she would "get used to it." There are many layers to the socialization process occurring in this scene; the sudden lack of choice that Scout has in her

clothing options, her clear discomfort in the dress, and Miss Maudie's response indicating a tradition that does not have to be explained. While Scout is being forced into a gender identity that she does not yet want, she also unknowingly participates in upholding the racial rigidity of Southern society and enjoys a class privilege that many others in the book do not. Two examples stand out. In the nostalgic narrator's description of Maycomb, she describes the town from the perspective of the white, and more well-to-do, members of society. Her privilege can also be seen in her response to Walter Cunningham when he came to their home. In these ways, Scout is both oppressor and oppressed.

Mayella Ewell is in most ways the opposite of Scout Finch except for one critical similarity—they both are motherless and being raised by their fathers. As a Ewell, Mayella has lived her entire life in desperate poverty under the watchful eyes of her drunk father and numerous brothers. She is the oldest of the children and is clearly expected to take on the responsibilities of raising the children and keeping the home. Though by far the greatest victim of the story is Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of raping Mayella, Mayella herself, when viewed through a gendered lens, certainly becomes a more sympathetic character, her power and powerlessness is firmly situated between Southern womanhood and white supremacy. Her accusation only serves to maintain her modicum of power in a racist society, yet, at the same time, it also solidifies the gender hierarchy that keeps her from any real control over her life. It is in Atticus' cross-examination where race, class, and gender overlap in ways that show the complexities of intersectionality. The values placed on Tom and Mayella's racial differences made the act of sexual relations a social crime. In order for Mayella to regain membership in white society, she had to claim rape to fit the assumption that the only way a black man and white woman would have sex was by force. Mayella benefitted from the social construct of gender in Southern white society that demanded the protection of white womanhood. Yet, that very assumption limited her ability to advance in society and be seen as an equal member. Finally, in Atticus' cross-examination, he uses Mayella's social class to confer a lesser status on her and thereby to assume a morality different from his own and others of his social status. Mayella is both oppressor and oppressed.

The final part of this unit is meant to examine the different ways text and film can communicate and how to "read" both closely. While the core of the story is the same, both the author and filmmaker use their separate mediums in different ways that make reading gender in both richly rewarding. The ability of the text to weave narrative at length and provide complexity to characters is apparent in the novel. The relationship between Jem and Scout is far more developed in the book and the slow efforts by Jem to separate from his sister using gender as (along with age) are far more common. Aunt Alexandra's role in the book is also more developed and therefore more gendered moments are available for analysis in the text. Yet, the film offers something that the text cannot. To see gender performed rather than to read about it provides more opportunities for students to enter conversations at various points.

Activities

Differentiating Sex and Gender

Through the research to prepare for this unit, I found an article entitled "Walk Like a Man, Talk Like a Woman: Teaching the Social Construction of Gender" that describes an activity to teach students the difference between sex and gender. In short, the activity has a set of volunteer students (8 total, 4 female and 4 male students) who agree to act out assigned actions. The first action is walking. The male students are assigned to

walk across the room like a woman and the female students are assigned to walk across the like a male. The next pair are assigned to act out their opposite gender sitting. Finally, a pair of same gender students are to act out a scene where old friends see each other after a long break. The simulations set up the more important conversation to follow. The class will be asked to discuss how gender was portrayed in each of the scenes and what made something masculine or feminine. Finally, students will be asked how they learned how to walk, sit, and greet like they do. The purpose is to help students see the difference between biological differences in terms of sex at birth and gender as a social construct. It is also important to note that sex itself is not the binary that many people believe it is.

Storytelling in the Classroom

To teach the concept of gender, I am going to ask students to tell the story of when they learned about gender. That is, identify a moment when they understood the differences between the roles of boys/men and girls/women or the concepts of what was masculine and what was feminine? Storytelling in the classroom is most effective when the prompt is small and there are multiple examples that could be used by the students. For some this prompt can be intensely personal and evoke painful memories of rejection and shame. It is important to tell students to choose a story or a part of story that they are willing to share with others. Another critical part of successful storytelling is the willingness to be what I call the “first nerd” or the first one to share in order to model the vulnerability and courage we are asking of our students. Your story should model the appropriate length of time, the details of the story, how you felt, and how the story connects to the topic of gender. For those teachers who are reticent to show this kind of vulnerability in the classroom, I encourage you to overcome this fear for the often amazing response of students and the culture-building such moments help create for the rest of the year.

Introduction to Setting

Numerous books on teaching film in the classroom (see bibliography) discuss the importance of tapping into student prior knowledge using their favorite films as the access point to discussing setting, character, and events in both novels and films. Ask students to think of their favorite film (perhaps even their favorite scene in the film) and to describe how the setting of the film supports the overall story being told. Once students have thought about the prompt and written their response, they share out with their table groups to save to time. Afterward, students can choose to explain one of their table partner’s examples as a way to gather a few examples. Afterward, the class will read aloud the section from the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* that establishes the setting of the town of Maycomb with the prompt how does an author help the reader “see” setting. Then we will watch the opening scene of the film that establishes the setting of Maycomb and discuss how the film uses its own tools to convey sense of place, and compare the novel to the adaptation. Finally, students will describe the setting in their memory about gender.

Introduction to Character

Ask students to think of a friend they met at school. What was their first impression of that person? What was the evidence for this impression? What is this person like? What is their evidence for their answer? If this person was a character in a novel or film, how could you introduce your friend in five sentences or a very brief clip and yet show who they are as fully as possible? The aim of this opening is to show how challenging it is to show (and not tell) the complexity of a character in a few words or moments of a film. From here we will examine the parts of the novel when various people are introduced and discuss how the author uses description and dialogue to create rich characters. Students will pull sentences from the novel to explain how the author’s words help the reader get to know the person. Then we will watch the clips from the film where

the same characters are introduced and discuss the benefits and limitations of film in establishing character. Finally, students will consider the characters in their story about gender and attempt to think about who they are as people in that moment taking the actions they did. A part of this exercise will be asking students to consider the complexity of each actor in scene.

Introduction to Events

Similar to the sections on setting and character y asking students to think of a major event in their life and to briefly explain the event and what it means to their lives or understanding of their world. Two parts of the novel are excellent for this kind of analysis. First, the mad dog scene where Scout and Jem begin to see a more complex Atticus. The trial of Tom Robinson is another, longer, scene that shows a much more painful coming of age moment for Jem and Scout. These two scenes are also in the film so that we may compare the film’s ability to convey meaning to the novel. To end, students will rewrite their gender story to include setting and character and work to elaborate on the scene to fully convey the event.

Gender Analysis

Armed with a story of their own, the students can begin to examine how gender is learned and performed in text and film. For this we will break down socialization into four phases. First is the establishment of unwritten rules. Second is the performance or violation of the rules, which is followed by the third—the recognition of following the rules or the enforcement of the rules in response to a violation. Finally, the fourth is the acquiescence or assimilation to the rules. We will examine which of the phases are found in their story.

Strategies

Three-Five-Three

Students are given three minutes to think about the prompt, five minutes to write, and three minutes to share out with their table or the whole class. I will use this strategy to guide the beginning of the activities below.

The Missing Adjectives

In order to help students understand the power of adjectives in describing place, this strategy takes a descriptive passage and removes the adjectives. Without the descriptive language, students read a relatively dry text that describes a place, but that largely fails to come to life in their imagination. They read the same passage with the adjectives and see the how the language helps create a more vivid scene.

Paper Lenses

A good way to help students begin to see the power of the camera to shape what a viewer sees on the screen is to have students roll up a piece of paper, loosely to start so that ends barely meet and the circle is relatively large. Students will look through the “lens” at objects at a distant and then zoom in for close-ups of a specific object or person. Students will also use their “lens” to look at different angled shots. You can stand on the table and students use their lens to look up to you. You can sit in a chair or on the floor and students stand on their chairs to look down to you. You can also have students cover their lens with their other hand whenever

you clap to get a sense of the difference in the speed of the cuts of the film.

Appendix

Objectives

The aim of the unit as it is positioned at the beginning of the year is to both introduce students to the kind of analysis we will be doing throughout the year and to pre-assess where they are in those skills. The standards that I will use as my learning indicators are from the Common Core State Standards. There are four standards, specifically, that will guide this unit. The first standard expects students to “compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.7) The first part of the unit will use the novel and film adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* to compare the use of literature and film strategies to craft a story. To do this, the three other Common Core Standards will work in tandem. Here, students will also be asked to “cite strong and thorough textual [and film] evidence to support analysis of what the text [and film] says explicitly, as well as inferences drawn from the text [and film], including determining where the text [and film] leaves matters uncertain” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1) and “analyze the impact of the author’s [and filmmaker’s] choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3) These two standards build off and model ways to enable students to do the kind of compare and contrast required of them in the first standard listed. Finally, students will be reading excerpts from journal articles and monographs to model examples of academic writing. For this, we will use the standard that requires students to “evaluate an author’s [and filmmaker’s] premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8)

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Notes

1. Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960), p.
2. Lorber, Judith. "Night to His Day: The Social Construction of Gender," in Goodman *Global Perspectives on Gender and Work*, 15.
3. Kilman, Carrie. "The Gender Spectrum" *Teaching Tolerance*. Number 44: Summer 2013 Retrieved on July 12, 2015 at 11:05am from <http://www.tolerance.org/gender-spectrum>
4. Lee, p. 10
5. Ibid, 9-10.
6. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, directed by Robert Mulligan. (1962; Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures) Streamed through amazon.com
7. Ibid
8. Lee, p. 10.
9. Ibid, p. 10.
10. Ibid and Mulligan
11. Mulligan
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