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Courage in the Face of Adversity

In the book *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee there are many themes displayed that will help readers learn and live their lives with a new perspective. One of those important themes is the way Atticus describes and acts upon his definition of courage, which is following through with something even though one knows they will lose. Atticus displays this theme of showing courage by following his conscience at all times no matter what the situation. Atticus has a clear definition of what courage is, he sees courage in other people, and he also shows bravery through his actions.

Atticus has a distinct definition of courage and what it means to him. He says to Jem and Scout, “I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It’s when you know you’re licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what,” (116). Atticus defines his version of courage in this statement and says that courage is following one’s conscience even if s/he knows they’re going to lose in the end. Courage is about supporting what one believes in even if s/he knows the odds are against them.

As well as having a clear definition of what bravery is, Atticus also finds courage and instills it in other people. One of the bravest people Atticus knew was Mrs. Dubose who was a morphine addict who decided to break her addiction before she died. This goes along with Atticus’s definition of courage because she knew she was “licked” before she started but she did it anyway (116). Atticus also teaches courage to his two children, Jem and Scout. Jem is older than Scout and therefore better understands and grows as a character as he learns what real bravery is. At the start of the story, Jem thinks bravery is “never declining a dare,” or running up to Boo Radley’s house and touching it (17). As Jem matures, though, he realizes that bravery is not doing these things, but using his conscience and his morals to do the right thing. An example of when Jem shows moral courage is when he tells Atticus about finding Dill in Scout’s room because he knows it is the right thing to do (143). Throughout the book, Jem develops into a person that shows real moral courage just like his father.

Atticus is the character in the story that shows the most courage through his actions. He is put in charge of defending a black man, Tom Robinson, who is accused of raping a white woman. Atticus says, “This case, Tom Robinson’s case, is something that goes to the essence of a man’s conscience—Scout, I couldn’t go to church and worship God if I didn’t try to help that man” (109). Despite being called a “nigger-lover” by many people in the town, and pushing through setbacks in the case, Atticus is able to show enough moral courage to persevere throughout the trial even though he knows he has no chance of winning (87). Atticus shows a different kind of courage in this novel when he faces a lynch mob that comes after Tom Robinson when he is in the jail. This instance shows that Atticus is not afraid of the consequences as long as he does what is morally right. Atticus portrays his definition of courage, and his life matches his words.

The theme of courage is apparent throughout this novel and is portrayed best by Atticus Finch. Atticus displays the theme of showing courage by following his conscience at all times no matter what the situation. His clear definition of what courage is, the courage he sees in other people, and the courage he shows through his actions makes Atticus an exemplary model for his children and his community.

Work Cited

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird.* New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1960. Print.