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Discovering the Local Phantom

The book *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, takes place in the tiny town of Maycomb, Alabama in the 1930s during the Great Depression where there are hard times. One of the interwoven stories in the book is about three neighborhood kids named Jem, Scout, and Dill who try to expose the local phantom Arthur Radley. They find out that just because somebody is different and not really social, it doesn’t mean that they aren’t caring and aware of what is going on.

Arthur Radley is a recluse who the children have never seen, so there are many stories that are made about him. Some of the myths that people say about Arthur Radley are believed by Scout. “Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom. People said he existed, but Jem and I had never seen him. People said he went out at night when the moon was down, and peeped in windows. When people’s azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he breathed on them.”(13) Another myth that Jem says about Arthur Radley is “he is about six-and-a-half feet tall, judging from his tracks; he dined on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch, that’s why his hands were bloodstained—if you ate an animal raw, you could never wash the blood off. There was a long jagged scar that ran across his face; what teeth he had were yellow and rotten; his eyes popped, and he drooled most of the time.” (17). The whole town has their own ideas of what Arthur Radley is like.

Because Arthur Radley never comes out of the house, there are many things that the kids try in order to expose Arthur Radley. The very first thing they do is dare Jem to go and touch his house. This seems brave to the kids because they think he will poison them. They also try to stick a note through the window in order to attract him. “Jem was merely going to put the note on the end of a fishing pole and stick it through the shutters. If anyone came along, Dill would ring the bell.” (51). Finally they decide they are going to take a peek through the window in order to see him. This ends badly as Nathan Radley appears on the porch and fires a shotgun in order to warn off prowlers. In all of their attempts the kids were unsuccessful in seeing the malevolent phantom who they called Boo Radley.

Some of the things that Arthur Radley actually does make Jem and Scout change their minds about him. Even though he is inside of the house and shy all of the time he places items like a broken pocket watch, chewing gum, dolls carved out of soap, and a chain with a pocket knife in the hollow of a tree for Jem and Scout to find.(39) Another thing that makes you feel Arthur Radley is caring when scout is watching Miss Maudie’s house burn down in the cold, she is so focused on the fire that she barely notices Arthur putting a blanket around her. “I looked down and found myself clutching a brown woolen blanket I was wearing around my shoulders, squaw-fashion.” (76)

Just because somebody is different and not really social, it doesn’t mean that they are not aware of what is going on, and are not afraid to lend a helping hand. The three points show how Arthur Radley came to light, the myths that people said about him, the things that the kids did in order to bring him out, and what he actually did all helped to show that Arthur Radley wasn’t a terror at all, but more like a friend and a savior. In my opinion, I think that this book would be a good book for younger grades to read, because it shows that even though a person is different, not all up to date with something, or is just not social with anyone, it doesn’t mean to leave them out and exclude them from the rest of the group.

Work Cited

Lee, H. (1960). *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York, NY: Warner Books, Inc