“Keep your head up, nothing lasts forever – here’s to the damned, to the lost and forgotten.” Just as Kelly Clarkson’s song “People Like Us” speaks of having courage in the face of oppression, the protagonists of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Jem and Scout Finch, struggle against the codes of their racist, prejudiced society when their father, Atticus, is asked to defend a black man in court. Jem and Scout witness southern injustice, prejudice and racism in the Alabama town of Maycomb in the 1930s. Through their experiences, they begin to see the world through older, more experienced eyes. Some of the most meaningful pieces of the story are Atticus’s assessment of Tom Robinson’s trial, Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose’s character, and Boo Radley’s appearance at the end of the book. Overall, Harper Lee uses her novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* to symbolize the necessity of having the courage to fight against all kinds of ethical and moral injustices.

A main plot point of *To Kill a Mockingbird* revolves around lawyer Atticus Finch’s defense of a black man accused of raping a white woman in a racist Alabama town. As Atticus puts it to his brother Jack, the normally reasonable people of Maycomb “go stark raving mad when anything involving a Negro comes up” (117). Atticus knew that his entire town would be against him, but he took the case nevertheless, and attempted to win it, to the dismay of many residents of Maycomb. Later, at the trial, Atticus gives a speech to the courtroom in which he states that the segregation of black people is a “rigid and time honored code of our society” (272). However, he is also clearly against it, as evidenced by both his taking the case and a later line in the speech – “the witnesses for the state…have presented themselves…in the cynical confidence that their testimony would not be doubted, confident that you gentlemen would go along with them on the assumption – the evil assumption – that all Negros lie, that all Negros are basically immoral beings…” (273). Atticus is courageous enough to go against the codes of his society for what he believes is right, even though people that once were his friends turn on him. His courage underlines Harper Lee’s message of standing strong in the face of oppression.

Another symbol of courage in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose, a resident of Maycomb County near Jem and Scout’s home. When her character is first encountered, she seems like an antagonist, hurling insults at the children as they walk by. However, later Atticus tells Jem that Mrs. Dubose was a morphine addict. She took the drug as a painkiller, but had decided to quit, so she would die “beholden to nothing and nobody” (148) Due to the pain of the illness Mrs. Dubose was suffering, she was very much entitled to take the drug to ease her suffering, but was courageous enough to stop anyway, because she believed in dying free. Since death was inevitable, she wanted it to come on her terms. As she attempts to break the addiction, she has Jem read to her so she has something else on which to concentrate. At the time Jem believes it to merely be a punishment. After her death, Atticus tells Jem “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 see it through no matter what” (149). This statement is perhaps the most evocative quote in *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Mrs. Dubose shows that the courage to overcome ethical challenges comes in many different forms, but is always just as significant.

The Finch’s mysterious neighbor, whom had become a ghost to the town of Maycomb, was another character who displayed the theme of courage. Arthur ‘Boo’ Radley came from a very religious family, who believed everything that was pleasure was a sin. Nevertheless, when he was younger, Boo had wanted to have fun like any teenager. This got him into trouble with his family, and he was never seen by the people of Maycomb again. Jem, Scout and their friend Dill had repeatedly shown interest in Maycomb’s stories about Boo, though they had never seen him. At the end of the novel, Boo at last makes an appearance, saving Jem and Scout’s lives from a vengeful Bob Ewell, Atticus’s opponent in the trial. Boo’s heroism reflects another part of courage, the courage to stand up for not only yourself but for others, in Boo’s case to save lives. In leaving the Radley place to save Jem and Scout, Boo also showed the courage to go against his family’s beliefs and the secluded life that he had in the end become too familiar with to change. Even though he was shy, and had gone unseen for years, Boo risked becoming a center of attention to save the children. With his heroism and his ability to overcome his own fears, Arthur ‘Boo’ Radley displayed many kinds of courage, great and small.

Harper Lee uses her novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* to indicate that the courage to fight against oppression and ethical challenges comes in many forms, but is always important. To do this, she shows the bravery of Atticus Finch standing against his entire racist society, uses Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose’s fight against addiction, and created a unique and yet significant circumstance for the character of Arthur ‘Boo’ Radley. So, why is this message of *To Kill a Mockingbird* important? In anyone’s life, there will be a time when it seems like it would be simplest to forget personal convictions to go along with societal norms. However, like in *To Kill a Mockingbird,* remember that standing up for personal ethics, even if others are opposed to them, can create a lasting effect for not only the person courageous enough to do so but the others whom their actions touch. Learn from the examples of strength of character set by Atticus, Mrs. Dubose, and Boo Radley in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Furthermore, courage does not have to come in the form of saving lives or standing against the flaws in society, sometimes it is just the bravery to overcome personal crisis. Courage can be in large scale actions, or simply shown through the power of deciding every day to try again tomorrow.