
KÖNIGS ERLÄUTERUNGEN

Band 478

Harper Lee, **TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD**

von Hans-Georg Schede

PRÜFUNGSAUFGABEN MIT MUSTERLÖSUNGEN

In Ergänzung zu den Aufgaben im Buch (Kapitel 6) finden Sie hier zwei weitere Aufgaben mit Musterlösungen. Die Zahl der Sternchen bezeichnet das Anforderungsniveau der jeweiligen Aufgabe.

Task 5 **

Characterise Bob Ewell.

CHARACTERI-
SATION

Model answer:

Bob Ewell represents a small group in the population of the American South in the first half of the 20th century, which is the dregs of the local society: those people who live from the work done by others or from state benefits, who undertake nothing of their own volition and resent those whose contempt and antipathy they can sense. Their only pride is in their – thoroughly baseless – sense of superiority over blacks, whom they believe to be even more worthless than themselves: a belief which is fatally shared by the majority of whites, especially those living in rural areas. Every town the size of Maycomb, the narrator knows, has families like the Ewells, whose situation is just as bad in economically prosperous times as it is in times of crisis (p. 227). No one can exert a positive influence on them, and so their existence has to be regarded as an unavoidable evil.

Even Atticus, who makes efforts not to judge others by his own standards and tries to accept all people for themselves, views people like Bob Ewell with despair and open dislike. When Scout is so disappointed by her first day at school that she would rather not return, and tells her father that she'd rather do it like Bob Ewell's children who only ever appear at school for the first day of the school year, Atticus makes it clear that the Ewells are not to be seen as role models: "Atticus said the Ewells had been the disgrace of Maycomb for three generations. None of them had done an honest day's work in his recollection." (p. 40, see also pp. 117 und 332)

Bob Ewell only appears in person in the second half of the novel. He is called as a witness in the court, because of his allegation that Tom Robinson had raped his daughter. At first he is calculatedly complacent and self-righteous to show that he will not be intimidated. When the judge asks him if he is the father of Mayella Ewell, he gets a cheap laugh from some members of the audience in the courtroom by saying that if he isn't, it's too late to do anything about it now as his wife is dead. The fragility of this self-satisfied façade is already revealed by the repetition of the question by the thoroughly unimpressed judge. Now Ewell answers, in an orderly and cowed manner: "Yes, sir," Mr. Ewell said meekly." (p. 230) The narrator describes Bob Ewell as a little man with a pointed nose and receding chin (p. 227). She is familiar first-hand with the squalid and unhygienic conditions in which Ewell and his children (it's never made clear how many there are) live, because Atticus had taken her and Jem in the year before, as he had been asked by the mayor to check up on the Ewells (p. 228 ff.). When Atticus questions the witness in court in his usual modest and polite manner, Ewell regains some of his initial confidence, which had been swept away by a rebuke from the judge. It is only when the questioning reveals that he is left-handed – which raises the question of whether Mayella Ewell's injuries had maybe been inflicted by her father – that Bob Ewell realises that Atticus is not an "easy match" (p. 236). He protests indignantly and claims to have been tricked: "Tricking lawyers like Atticus Finch took advantage of him all the time with their tricking ways." (p. 237) In the end Tom Robinson is declared guilty, but Bob Ewell presented himself in public in a way which was less flattering than he had hoped. He feels that he has been publicly humiliated by the judge and defence lawyer. The accused man also seriously incriminates him: Robinson states under oath that Ewell had seen his daughter and Tom Robinson, and had called out "you goddamn whore, I'll kill ya" (p. 260). This admission indicates that he had correctly understood the situation and immediately realised that Robinson had not raped his daughter, but that instead she had seduced the visitor. Robinson's statement that Mayella had told him that she had never kissed an adult and that what her father did with her didn't count (p. 260) is also a heavy accusation. That this hint at sexual abuse is not pursued says a lot about the contemporary situation, as does the fact that Tom Robinson is declared guilty despite his obvious innocence. The fact that they have sentenced the black man does not necessarily mean that the white citizens have misunderstood the facts of the case, and Bob Ewell knows this, or at least fears it. This awareness of public exposure increases his hatred of Atticus Finch

and Judge Taylor. Shortly after the trial, Ewell spits in Atticus' face in front of the post office and throws out wild threats (p. 290 ff.). Atticus remains calm and explains Ewell's reaction to his frightened children and concerned sister: "Jem, see if you can stand in Bob Ewell's shoes for a minute. I destroyed his last shred of credibility at that trial, if he had any to begin with. The man had to have some kind of comeback, his kind always does. (...) We don't have anything to fear from Bob Ewell, he got it all out of his system that morning." (p. 292 ff.) That Atticus is wrong in his assessment is proven by the course of events. Ewell not only takes Robinson's death as an opportunity to make more threats (p. 323) and blames Atticus, irrationally, for his own misery (p. 332): he also appears one night as a shadowy trespasser on Judge Taylor's property, in the futile hope of scaring the judge (p. 333). He has more success in his efforts to terrify Tom Robinson's widow, until her employer Link Deas learns about this and berates him with expressions of utter contempt, at which Ewell cowers and relents (pp. 333–335). In an attempt to shake off this most recent humiliation and to avoid the risk any similar situations in the future – with an adult, that is – he ambushes Atticus' children with murderous intent. It is however Bob Ewell who dies here, as the Finch children are protected by Arthur Radley (pp. 348–352, 357, 360).

Task 6 **

Characterise Miss Stephanie Crawford.

CHARACTERI-
SATION

Model answer:

Gossip thrives in a small town. When something new happens everyone knows about it in record time. If nothing new happens, a person is chosen who is, for whatever reason, interesting to others, and stories are made up about this person. Some residents of small towns, in particular female ones, are more adept at this than their fellow citizens. Miss Stephanie Crawford is one of these particularly stubborn and thoughtless gossips. She may have other personality traits, but these don't feature too prominently in Harper Lee's novel. Miss Stephanie is a minor character who always appears when there's gossip to be spread, or when there's an opportunity to moan and complain. At the beginning of the novel, when Jem tells Scout and Dill the monstrous story of Boo Radley, he is drawing his information from Miss Stephanie's chatter, "who said she knew the whole thing" (p. 13) "[and] who had more to say about the Radleys than anybody in Maycomb" (p. 53).

The narrator comments on Miss Stephanie's role in unambiguous terms: she introduces her as "a neighborhood scold" (p. 13) and assures us that "no one with a grain of sense trusted Miss Stephanie" (p. 59). She repeatedly resents her as an adversary of Miss Maudie Atkinson, in whom the children (rightfully) have full trust, and who often subtly exposes and reprimands Miss Stephanie when she takes things too far.

When Tom Robinson's trial begins and spectators are coming from near and far, Miss Stephanie of course wants to be present. She comes by, dressed up in her finest with hat and gloves, while Miss Maudie is talking with Jem, Scout and Dill. When Miss Maudie asks where she is going she replies with a small lie that she is off to Jitney Jungle, a local store, because she is obviously embarrassed to freely admit her morbid curiosity. It's only when Miss Maudie drily comments that she has never seen her going shopping with her hat on that Miss Stephanie admits: "Well, (...) I thought I might just look in at the courthouse, to see what Atticus's up to." But this attempt to pretend that she's only casually interested in the trial is also challenged by Miss Maudie: She says that Miss Stephanie had better be careful that Atticus doesn't summon her to court. When the children ask Miss Maudie what she had meant by that, she tells them "Miss Stephanie seemed to know so much about the case she might as well be called on to testify" (p. 213). After the trial is lost, Miss Stephanie triumphantly confronts Atticus' children and tries to embarrass them with her questions. "Miss Stephanie's nose quivered with curiosity." (p. 287) "Miss Stephanie was trembling with excitement" (p. 290). Who had allowed them to attend the trial ("she didn't see us but it was all over town this morning that we were in the Colored balcony"; p. 287)? Had Atticus intentionally placed them up there? Wasn't she just mad that her daddy had lost the trial? Dill is so bothered by this *Schadenfreude* that he announces that he wants to be a clown when he grows up, because there's nothing left but to laugh (bitterly and sadly) when it comes to people.

Soon afterwards, Miss Stephanie enjoys her next triumph: "At that moment Aunt Alexandra came to the door and called us, but she was too late. It was Miss Stephanie's pleasure to tell us: this morning Mr. Bob Ewell stopped Atticus on the post office corner, spat in his face, and told him he'd get him if it took the rest of his life." (p. 290) Miss Stephanie knows all the details, and the next time she tells the story, she had been present "and had seen it all—passing by from the Jitney Jungle, she was" (p. 291). She can even recount verbatim what the two men had said.

That Miss Stephanie finds pleasure in provoking the children, who are on the defensive following their father's failure at the trial and are disturbed and frightened by the threats against their father, sheds a particularly dim light on her character. In the circle of "Christian ladies" which Aunt Alexandra has gathered in her brother's house, Miss Stephanie asks Scout whether she also wants to become "a lawyer" like her father (p. 308) and makes fun of her boyish appearance. Once again it is Miss Maudie who comes to her defence, but given the social situation, which demands poise and restraint, she refrains from being overly stern. The next situation in which Miss Stephanie shows herself to be a malicious gossip involves Jem: "Maycomb had lost no time in getting Mr. Ewell's views on Tom's demise and passing them along through that English Channel of gossip, Miss Stephanie Crawford. Miss Stephanie told Aunt Alexandra in Jem's presence ('Oh foot, he's old enough to listen.') that Mr. Ewell said it made one down and about two more to go." (p. 323) With this threat, which is obviously aimed at Atticus and Judge Taylor but which is intended to be made real at the cost of two innocent victims, Atticus' children Jem and Scout, the final movement of the novel's plot begins. Miss Stephanie is no longer needed and consequently does not appear again in the book. She will not be missed.