

## 2. Literary value and *To Kill a Mocking Bird*

Have you ever considered what makes a book worth reading? When you read a work of literature, you can determine whether it has substance. Value Literary value refers to the importance of the piece of literature to individuals and society. When a text has literary value it is considered to have literary merit. Some texts have more substance and richness than others. In literature the characters have depth, the setting suits the characters and plot, the storyline is poignant.

Determining literary merit is subjective and is affected by the cultural, social and economic background of the reader. However, certain texts are considered to be important and worthy of reading as they tell an engaging story through well-developed characters and interesting settings. The style of writing is also exemplary.

Each reader brings his or her tastes and opinions to the text and therefore a text may be considered worthy of high praise whereas another reader may deem it to be average. Literary merit is also determined by what the reader knows about literature as someone who reads not only literature but theories about literature will have a developed sense of what makes a text worthy or not. It's important to consider a text objectively and not from personal judgements.

Some of the things to consider when determining literary merit include:

- the storyline should have enduring qualities which would make the story loved for years to come
- the characters are unique and believable and have qualities that are realistic, as shown through representation of many of the qualities a human possess: emotions such as jealousy, love, hate, etc. and behaviour that either enhances their values and beliefs or contradicts them to show their humanness
- the setting reflects the time being written about in a way that enhances the storyline and the characters
- the themes make the reader think about life, society and culture
- the context of the time being written about is meaningfully reflected
- the language is sophisticated and eloquent.

Read a key scene in *To Kill a Mocking Bird* that reflects literary merit. For example, when Scout rolls on the Radley's front porch or Atticus shooting the rabid dog.

Complete the exercise below.

### Exercise 2: Analysing literary value in *To Kill a Mocking Bird*

1. What is your general opinion of this scene? Are there any qualities that you find engaging. Describe them. How would a male or female differ in their views of this scene?
2. Why do you think this scene is still engaging today? What is it about the ideas that have stood the test of time?

3. Fill in the table by identifying aspects of the scene that determine literary merit.

<b>Aspect of the scene</b>	<b>Examples of aspect</b>	<b>Why example gives text literary merit</b>
<b>Storyline</b>		
<b>Characters</b>		
<b>Setting</b>		
<b>Themes</b>		
<b>Context</b>		
<b>Language</b>		

**To Extend yourself**

1. Write an analytical paragraph explaining how the key scene chosen demonstrates literary merit. (250 words)

