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Lesson Three

FOCUS: Narrative and Point of View

The narrator tells the story with a specific perspective informed by his or her beliefs and experiences. Narrators can be major or minor characters, or exist outside the story altogether. The narrator weaves her or his point of view, including ignorance and bias, into telling the tale. A first-person narrator participates in the events of the novel, using “I.” A distanced narrator, often not a character, is removed from the action of the story and uses the third person (he, she, and they). The distanced narrator may be omniscient, able to read the minds of all the characters, or limited, describing only certain characters’ thoughts and feelings. Ultimately, the type of narrator determines the point of view from which the story is told.

To Kill a Mockingbird is told in first person by Jean Louise “Scout” Finch. The novel begins from the point of view of Scout as she looks back on her childhood, revisiting memories through the filter of her adult experience.

Discussion Activities

Why might Harper Lee tell the story from an adult perspective, narrated many years after the fact? In the first seven chapters, can you find statements that remind us of an adult point of view? Or does the adult narrator enter completely into the world of her childhood?

How would this story be narrated, in the third person, from the point of view of Dill’s fabulous imagination? Have the class brainstorm the outline of a new version of the novel told from this perspective.

Writing Exercise

Based on the previous activity, have students write a few pages of Dill’s version of the story based on the first seven chapters.

Begin another version of the novel told in first person from Boo Radley’s perspective. How would Boo Radley describe Jem, Scout, and Dill?

Homework

Read Chapters 8–10 (pp. 63–99). Going through the first ninety-nine pages, how many characters have been introduced? Which are primary? What motivates the primary characters?