

### EXAMPLE SHORT COMPARE ESSAY

**Prompt:** Compare Lily from *The Secret Life of Bees* to Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* on at least three dimensions. Make sure your Informative Theme has at least five paragraphs. Be sure to include in-text citations where needed as well as a reference list. Use the MLA style.

TITLE OF PAPER: Sisters Across Time

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### Sisters Across Time

Two main girl characters in well-known novels, Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee 1960) and Lily in *The Secret Life of Bees* (Kidd 2002), have a lot in common. Most notably, they are both white girls growing up in the midst of Segregation. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout tells the story of her attorney father's attempt to defend a black man who has been falsely accused of raping a white woman. She chronicles the events surrounding the man's trial and the effects of these events on herself, her family, and her neighbors. In *The Secret Life of Bees*, Lily tells the story of how she comes to live with a black family of three adult sisters on a bee farm. She chronicles the complex relationships that exist among the sisters, their friends, and society. Both novels take place in the South. Lily is growing up in South Carolina; Scout is growing up in Alabama. Although the time frames of the two novels are different, many of the same issues that are related to prejudice against blacks are similar across the novels. The events in *To Kill a Mockingbird* take place in the Depression during the 1930s, whereas the events in *The Secret Life of Bees* take place in 1964 at about the same time that the Civil Rights Act was signed by President Johnson. Nevertheless, the two girls are so similar with regard to their general character, their relationships with their black nannies, and their curiosity about black culture that they might be called "Sisters across time."

With regard to their character, Scout and Lily are remarkable girls in several ways. First, even though they are younger than the other characters in their respective novels, they take a

leading role by being the narrator of the story. All of the events of each novel from the beginning to the end are seen through their eyes. Their perspective on each event is therefore important, and it is clearly described by each girl in an engaging and sometimes surprising or funny way.

Additionally, both girls are very smart. They love to read and devour books. In fact, Scout probably taught herself to read while her father read to her each night. When her first-grade teacher discovers that Scout can read, she tells Scout that her father has to stop teaching her, but Scout declares that her father is too tired to teach her anything. Fortunately for Lily, Mrs. Henry, her teacher, appreciates her intelligence. She tells Lily, “You could be a professor or a writer with actual books to your credit” (Kidd 16). Furthermore, both girls are courageous. They are both willing to say what they think. In addition, six-year-old Scout often gets into trouble for beating up boys who are older and bigger than she is. She threatens her friend Dill when he tells her a made-up story about how he can smell death by stating, “Dill if you don’t hush I’ll knock you bowlegged” (Lee 48). Lily, a 14 year old, takes on bigger foes with similar courage. When her nanny gets put into jail and then into a hospital under guard, Lily masterminds and leads her nanny’s escape. Then she figures out a way that they can hide from her father and the police.

With regard to their relationships with their black nannies, Scout and Lily both have especially close relationships with them. Importantly, both girls lost their mothers when they were young, and their nannies are replacements for their mothers. Scout’s mother died of a sudden heart attack when Scout was two years old; Lily’s mother was shot and killed when she was four years old. In fact, Scout calls Calpurnia “our cook” (Lee 6), but Calpurnia watches over and disciplines Scout as a mother might. She came to live with the family when Scout’s older brother Jem was born. Lily’s nanny, Rosaleen, came to live with Lily after her mother’s death. Lily calls her “my stand-in mother” (Kidd 2) and describes Rosaleen’s love for her by stating, “I

was the only one who knew that despite her sharp ways, her heart was more tender than a flower skin and she loved me beyond reason” (Kidd 11). Despite the love bond between the girls and their nannies, there is also an element of distance between them. Scout describes her frustration with Calpurnia by saying, “Our battles were epic and one sided....I had felt her tyrannical presence as long as I could remember” (Lee 7). Lily has her frustrations with Rosaleen, too. At one point in the story, she wishes that Rosaleen could “...be more cultured” (Kidd 73); at another point, she wishes that Rosaleen would “...get some manners” (Kidd 75). Nevertheless, one might imagine that these are the same kinds of frustrations any child might have with a mother figure.

Probably because of their close relationships with their black nannies, both Scout and Lily are curious about the black culture. Calpurnia takes Scout and Jem to church with her, which is quite a revelation to them. Scout is fascinated by the way they sing their hymns and collect their offering. Later, Scout wants to visit Calpurnia’s home, but her aunt will not allow her to go. During the trial, Scout sits in the courtroom balcony with the black people. She accepts them, and they accept her. Similarly, Lily is curious about Rosaleen’s life. She visits Rosaleen’s home and notices many details about Rosaleen’s daily activities. She moves in with a black family of sisters, and she fully participates in their business and home life. She even participates in their invented religious activities. She meets, becomes friends with, and falls for a black boy.

To conclude, Scout and Lily have a great deal in common. They are both growing up in the South in the midst of Segregation and prejudice for black people. They are smart and fearless, and they are both willing to say what they think and take action when needed, even to the point of beating someone up or breaking the law. Also, they both have black nannies who serve as their substitute mothers. Possibly because of their closeness to their nannies, they are

curious about and open to the black culture. They empathize with black people and abhor their persecution. As a result, both girls and both novels illustrate how white and black people can have good relationships with each other. The girls are indeed “Sisters across time.”

Works Cited

Kidd, Sue Monk. *The Secret Life of Bees*. Penguin Books, 2002.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Grand Central Publishing, 1960.