

## EXAMPLE SHORT CONTRAST ESSAY

**Prompt:** Contrast Lily in *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: Different as Night and Day?

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### Different as Night and Day?

The 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), illustrate several differences of children who are 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. Regardless of the similarity of the larger context of their lives, though, the girls are very different with regard to their personal circumstances, their relationships with the people in their lives, their understanding of prejudice, and the actions that they are able to take.

In relation to their personal lives, the two girls have totally different sets of circumstances in which their stories are embedded. Scout, who is only 6 years old at the beginning of her story,

has a brother, Jem, who is 10 years old, and a friend Dill, who is 6 years old. During their free time, they play together constantly, and Jem watches over her and protects her. He is constantly interacting with her and giving her his advice and wisdom. Also, because Scout's family lives in a neighborhood, she is constantly interacting with the neighbors. They also give her advice and interpret people's actions for her. Thus, Scout is surrounded by people. In contrast, Lily, who is 14 years old, has no brothers or sisters. She has no friends. To add to her isolation, her father requires her to sell peaches in a peach stand by herself at the roadside all day, but she has few customers. She reports this activity is very boring because her father will not allow her to read books. Moreover, because she lives on a peach farm, consisting of many acres, she does not have any nearby neighbors with whom she can communicate. Except for her father and her nanny, Lily lives an isolated existence.

With regard to their relationships with their adult family members, like their fathers and other relatives, the differences between Scout and Lily continue. Scout has a very loving father who is a constant positive force in her life. He reads to her each evening and explains the world to her. He is the positive center in her world. In contrast, Lily's father, T. Ray, is abusive and difficult. She describes him and her relationship with him as follows: "He had an orneriness year-round but especially in the summer... Mostly I stayed out of his way. His only kindness was for Snout, his bird dog..." (Kidd 3). Additionally, Scout has an aunt and an uncle who are often present in her life. Her aunt is especially active in Scout's life. Jem explains their Aunt Alexandra to Scout by saying, "You know she's not used to girls, ... least ways not girls like you. She's trying to make you a lady" (Lee 302). In contrast, Lily has no extended family. There is no one to teach her to be a lady and no one to temper the hot-headed nature of her father. Furthermore, Scout's ancestry is clear. She traces it to Simon Finch who immigrated to America

from England. She knows that her father was born and raised in Macomb County and that she is related to everyone in town “by blood or marriage” (Lee 6). She has roots and feels connected. On the other hand, Lily is disconnected. She knows nothing about her mother, who died when Lily was four years old, or her mother’s relatives. She never mentions her father’s relatives either. At one point, Lily remarks that, “There wasn’t a soul anywhere to help us” (Kidd 50), as she refers to her own and her nanny’s plight.

Another way in which Scout and Lily are dissimilar is with regard to their understanding of prejudice and racism. Possibly because of her young age, Scout is naïve about prejudice. She is very puzzled about racist events as they occur, and she asks questions to the people around her about these events. As a result of their explanations, her thinking about prejudice evolves over the course of the story. At the beginning of her story, Scout accepts segregation and racist ideas as a matter of course; toward the end, she starts to question them and wishes that circumstances were different. In contrast, Lily understands racism from the beginning of her story. She is very aware that when Rosaleen, her black nanny, breaks the law by sitting in a white church and then sasses some white men, she will be severely punished if not killed. She confirms her understanding by stating, “Franklin Posey was the man with the flashlight, and he was gonna kill Rosaleen. But then hadn’t I known this inside even before T. Ray ever said it?” (Kidd 38). She is frustrated and angered by these circumstances, but at first, she seems to accept Segregation and racism as the status quo.

Finally, Scout and Lily are different with regard to the actions that they are able to take during their stories. Perhaps because of her age and her understanding of the situations around her, Scout is mainly an observer in her story. She watches the story unfold about Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman. For the most part, she is removed from the

action. She does not know Tom and has no way of helping him or saving his life, especially after he is sent away to a prison farm. At one point, she unwittingly joins her father as he tries to calm an angry mob at the jail in which Tom is imprisoned; however, she acts more to save Jem and her father than to save Tom. At the end of the story, she becomes a victim of circumstances when Bob Ewell attacks and tries to kill her. She is not able to defend herself because she is imprisoned in her Halloween costume. Again, she is relegated to observer status. In contrast, Lily is an active participant in her story. She plots her escape and runs away from her abusive dad. In the process, she saves Rosaleen's life by helping her escape from a hospital where Rosaleen is imprisoned after being beat up by some white men. She decides where she is going, and she finds a way to get there. In the end, she finds a new home for herself and Rosaleen on a bee farm owned by a black family. She takes action in a positive way that results in positive outcomes for herself and Rosaleen.

In summary, Scout and Lily are very different with regard to their personal circumstances, their relationships, their understanding of prejudice, and their ability to take action. Their personal circumstances set the stage for their stories. Their ages vary enough that they have different opportunities, different understandings, and different access to options in their lives. Scout is surrounded by people who care about her and has roots, but Lily has almost no one who cares about her besides her nanny and no knowledge about her roots. Lily's isolation and her abusive father add further elements to the situation. Perhaps because of these circumstances and the girls' differing understandings of prejudice, Lily is willing to take action. She runs away from home, and she acts courageously to save Rosaleen's life. She is also open to living with a black family. In the process, she saves her own life. Lily is the hero of her story, while Scout is

an observer of all the events surrounding her. Although they both narrate their stories, the two girls are possibly as different as night and day.

Works Cited

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

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