

# 9

## Lesson Nine

### FOCUS: Themes of the Novel

Lesson One through Lesson Eight should assist the class in developing an interpretation of the novel. The development of characters, the implications of Lee’s figurative language, and the unfolding plot contribute to the themes. The themes of a novel explore the meaning of human life. Themes are issues—love, war, freedom, and responsibility—that grab a reader’s attention and don’t let up.

Use these themes as springboards. Themes should lend to a specific interpretation of the novel. Use the historical references provided to support your ideas. For example, try to decide if the novel is about justice, race, small towns, the South, or coming-of-age.



### Discussion Activities and Writing Exercise



Students can come up with five themes in the novel. Here are some samples:

#### Race

At what points do different characters make remarks about race? At what points do other characters’ actions speak louder than their words? Does the novel make a final statement about how race should affect our treatment of others? Does Dolphus Raymond provide us a clue to this question?

#### Justice

Return to Sandra Day O’Connor’s statement that the “idea of justice pervades everything” in the novel. What evidence supports or rejects O’Connor’s view? If Lee is using the novel to provide us with a definition of justice for the twentieth century, what is her definition? Remember, she published the novel in 1960, during the Civil Rights era.

#### Literacy/Illiteracy

Explore Jem’s statement about literacy. Review the novel, noting occasions where reading plays an important role. How is the novel developing an argument about the value of reading? What is more important: the activity of reading or the content within the text?

#### Gender

A tomboy, Scout becomes more feminine as the novel closes. How does Scout battle with her gender role? Does she give a new definition to feminine? How does this relate to the rest of the story? In what ways do Jem and Dill face the same coming-of-age dilemma? Finally, does this reflect the 1930s, 1960s, or both?



### Homework

Read Chapters 28-31 (pp. 254-281). Begin essays, using “Essay Topics” at the end of this guide. Outlines due next class.