Those Who Speak for the Voiceless

Though the last slaves died long ago, the ripples of slavery are still alive. But what does it take for society to change, and for the ripples to stop? In Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird,* it takes Atticus Finch, a strong willed white lawyer who defends an African-American from charges of rape. In the film *The Help,* it takes Skeeter, an educated white woman from the South, to commit the stories of the African-American help, to a book to show the world their perspective. In both *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Help,* we see injustices being challenges and norms being changed, albeit it different ways. In spite of those differences, there are two key similarities: a strong person with the bravery to stand up for what's right, and the relationships that they had to teach them what's right. **(need a “so what”)**

Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes were two of the most influential poetic geniuses of the Harlem Renaissance. One wonders, what was it like to be a “black poet” during this time? Although many at the time thought of African Americans as illiterate and intellectually inferior, the works of Cullen and Hughes during the renaissance prove otherwise, and led to an increasing sense of a unique African American culture. They came together in Harlem during the Roaring 20s and changed the landscape of poetry and the African American community forever. However, being a “black poet” meant different things to the two. Cullen and Hughes lived very different lives, wrote very different poetry, and had very different views on poetry. By studying their lives, one can see the impact they had on Black culture and how there is no one way to inspire a generation to break the stereotypes.

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Each day, many people are mistreated because of the colour of their skin, so **what are the effects of discrimination (on characters) in the two novels?** The book *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, is set in Maycomb, Alabama. This small southern town expresses strong racial prejudice, which becomes evident through the conflict of the story: Tom Robinson’s trial. The novella, *Of Mice and Men*, written by John Steinbeck, is set in California after the Great Depression. Crooks, a black stable hand who has lived almost his entire life on the farm, lives on his own since he is the only black man on the farm. **Both *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Of Mice and Men* show the negative effects of racial prejudice on characters. In *Mockingbird,* Lee uses Tom Robinson’s trial to highlight the racist flaws of the American justice system that black people faced in the 1930’s. Conversely, in *Mice and Men,* also set in the 1930’s,Steinbeck uses the character of Crooks to show the segregated effects the Jim Crow laws. Ultimately, we learn through the plot in both pieces of literature, the devastating effects of discrimination on black people during the 1930’s**.

Conforming to society’s rules and social norms is a normal part of life, but what is considered ‘the norm’ changes again and again, from generation to generation. Material items, family, friends and relationships all seem to be a popular deciding factor for how people fit in, but how did those in the Civil rights era decide where members of the community fit in? In *The Help* and *To Kill A Mockingbird*, the reader explores small towns with distinct communities of people who fit in based on wealth, class and ethnicity. In *The Help*, a book that takes place in Mississippi in the 1960s, there is a familiar returning theme of racism, but it is not by far the only prejudice the reader sees take place. Those of a lower class were looked down on by those of higher social standing, whereas in *To Kill a Mockingbird,* a book taking place in the fictional town of Maycomb in the 1930s,there is mainly a theme of prejudice towards the African American community simply for the colour of their skin.

Silence to Voice to Change

Humans talk to each other every day but not using real voices. How can one fight discrimination and change society’s views? The movie, *The Help,* written by Kathryn Stockett and directed by Tate Taylor, is a story set in the 1960’s in Mississippi, southern United States. Set in a time before the movement for rights of African Americans began, racial discrimination plays a big part in the story. The protagonist, Skeeter, is not a direct victim of discrimination, being a young white women, but notices and is aware of the discrimination happening in her town. “The Danger of Silence” is a spoken word poetry by Clint Smith. Smith is a teacher, writer, and researcher who grew up in New Orleans. Even though he grew up in a modern society, he still encountered many forms of discrimination. After going through mistakes and troubles of his own, he now understands that all he needed to do was speak up. Both the characters in *The Help* and the speaker in the “Danger of Silence” tell a story of fighting against discrimination in society. In *The Help*, Skeeter raises awareness of racial discrimination by showing the African American Helps’ point of view. “The Danger of Silence” differs in how the speaker teaches his students to use the privilege of their voices to stand up. Regardless, both express one voice can fight back.