Having considered related elements of plot and setting, you should now be ready to compare the characters in the texts. In examining main and secondary characters, first consider their common behavioural traits and the elements of personality that they share. Characters may have similar values and morals, and they may also make similar judgments of the behaviour of others. In addition to comparing the characters themselves, it is also worth comparing their responses to confrontation or conflict. Most characters will generally undergo some sort of transformation over the course of a narrative and such transformations can also be explored.

**MAIN CHARACTERS**

Both ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ and ‘Twelve Angry Men’ feature main characters with a strong moral code. Atticus Finch and the unnamed Eighth Juror are firmly established as being willing to pursue justice and fairness, even in the face of strong opposition. The following extracts serve as the introduction to each character.

In this passage from ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’, Scout Finch relates the story of her father’s earliest experience as a lawyer in Maycomb. The passage illustrates Atticus’ horror at the fate of his first clients and clearly demonstrates his underlying values.

**TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, HARPER LEE**

When my father was admitted to the bar, he returned to Maycomb and began his practice. Maycomb, some 20 miles east of Finch’s Landing, was the county seat of Maycomb County. Atticus’ office in the court-house contained little more than a hat rack, a spittoon, a checker-board and an unsullied Code of Alabama. His first two clients were the last two persons hanged in the Maycomb County jail. Atticus had urged them to accept the state’s generosity in allowing them to plead Guilty to second-degree murder and escape with their lives, but they were Haverfords, in Maycomb County a name synonymous with jackass. The Haverfords had dispatched Maycomb’s leading blacksmith in a misunderstanding arising from the alleged wrongful detention of a mare, were imprudent enough to do it in the presence of three witnesses, and insisted that the son-of-a-bitch-had-it-coming-to-him was a good enough defence for anybody. They persisted in pleading Not Guilty to first-degree murder, so there was nothing much Atticus could do for his clients except be present at their departure, an occasion that was probably the beginning of my father’s profound distaste for the practice of criminal law.


This passage from the play Twelve Angry Men is taken from the moments just after the first vote by the jury. Expecting a unanimous guilty verdict, the other jurors are shocked when the Eighth Juror casts an opposing vote. Facing surprise and even hostility from his fellow jurors, the Eighth Juror is required to defend his decision and outline the reasoning behind his vote.

**12 Angry Men -vs- The Crucible**

**COMPARING CHARACTERS**

Having considered related elements of plot and setting, you should now be ready to compare the characters in the texts. In examining main and secondary characters, first consider their common behavioural traits and the elements of personality that they share. Characters may have similar values and morals, and they may also make similar judgments of the behaviour of others. In addition to comparing the characters themselves, it is also worth comparing their responses to confrontation or conflict. Most characters will generally undergo some sort of transformation over the course of a narrative and such transformations can also be explored.
TWELVE ANGRY MEN, REGINALD ROSE

THIRD JUROR [leaning over towards the EIGHTH JUROR]: Well, look, do you really think he’s innocent?

EIGHTH JUROR: I don’t know

THIRD JUROR: I mean, let’s be reasonable. You sat in court and heard the same things we did. The man’s a dangerous killer. You could see it.

EIGHTH JUROR: The man! He’s 16 years old.

THIRD JUROR: Well, that’s old enough. He knifed his own father. Four inches into the chest.

SIXTH JUROR [to the EIGHTH JUROR]: It’s pretty obvious. I mean, I was convinced from the first day.

THIRD JUROR: Well, wasn’t it? [to the EIGHTH JUROR]; I really think this is one of those open and shut things. They proved it a dozen different ways. Would you like me to list them for you?

EIGHTH JUROR: No

TENTH JUROR: Then what do you want?

EIGHTH JUROR: Nothing. I just want to talk.

SEVENTH JUROR: Well, what’s there to talk about? Eleven men here agree. Nobody had to think twice about it, except you.

TENTH JUROR: I want to ask you something. Do you believe his story?

EIGHTH JUROR: I don’t know whether I believe it or not. Maybe I don’t.

SEVENTH JUROR: So what’d you vote ‘not guilty’ for?

EIGHTH JUROR: There were eleven votes for ‘guilty’. It’s not easy for me to raise my hand and send a boy off to die without talking about it first.

SEVENTH JUROR: Who says it’s easy for me?

EIGHTH JUROR: No one

SEVENTH JUROR: What, just because I voted fast? I think the guy’s guilty. You couldn’t change my mind if you talked for a hundred years.

EIGHTH JUROR: I’m not trying to change anyone’s mind. It’s just that we’re talking about somebody’s life here. I mean, we can’t decide in five minutes. Suppose we’re wrong?


Questions

Answer the following questions based on the passages from ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ and ‘Twelve Angry Men’.

1. What impression do you get of Atticus Finch and the Eighth Juror? What similar personality traits do they appear to have?

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2. What underlying values do both men appear to share?

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3. Both men appear to place great value on human life. How do the passages show that this is unusual in the circumstances?

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4. What attitudes do Atticus and the Eighth Juror appear to have towards the justice system?

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5. Both men share characteristics that are essential for the pursuit of justice. What are these characteristics?

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Answer the following questions about the protagonists of the texts you are reading for comparative study.

a. Describe the physical traits of both characters. Are they young or old, sick or healthy, strong or vulnerable? What traits do they have in common? How are they different?

b. List six to eight adjectives that describe the personality of each character. Highlight any adjectives both characters have in common.

c. What position does each character hold within their society? Do they occupy a similar role?

d. How do they feel about their society and their role within it? What feelings do they share?
e  What challenges does each character face over the course of the text? How are these challenges similar?

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f  Which other characters have the greatest influence over each individual? Compare these influences on the main character.

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g  How has each character changed by the end of the text? Have they both experienced growth?

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SECONDARY CHARACTERS & RELATIONSHIPS

While the most obvious connections are between the texts’ main characters, secondary characters shouldn’t be overlooked. One of the most useful points of comparison between secondary characters of different texts is the relationships that they have with the main characters. These relationships may be supportive, such as a friendship, romantic connection or family relationship. They could also be antagonistic, bringing about conflict and discord. Either way, these relationships offer a good opportunity to compare the power dynamics depicted within the texts, as well as the influence of a secondary character upon the main character.

TRANSPOSING CHARACTERS

One way of exploring the related aspects of characters is to consider how the characters would react to one another if some connection between them could be established. While the geographical and historical settings of each text may make an actual meeting rather unlikely, characters could also encounter one another through the accounts of others, through writing or through art.
The following letter considers the potential for a connection between Atticus Finch from ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ and the Eighth Juror from ‘Twelve Angry Men’. Written from the perspective of the Eighth Juror based on an imagined connection in the past, the letter considers Atticus’ pursuit of justice and relates the way in which his actions during the trial of Tom Robinson continue to be an inspiration long after the event.

Letter to Atticus Finch

Dear Mr Finch,

You do not know me, but I wanted to write to tell you of the great influence you have had on not just my life, but the life of another man, a stranger to us both. Many years ago, when I was much younger, I happened to be visiting Maycomb at a time that coincided with your defence of Tom Robinson. As you will recall, the trial was quite a spectacle, with the courthouse packed with onlookers. At the behest of my family, I attended with them, although I doubt they shared my perspective on events.

As I am a northerner, the views of the majority in the south are often alien to me, and none more so than the attitudes I saw on display in that packed sweaty courtroom in Maycomb. What has stayed with me all these years, though, is not the intolerance and judgment that I saw from witness after witness, from officials and from every person on the main floor, but the way in which you were able to stand firm against this. As I have recently realised, it takes great courage to stand up for what is just, especially in the face of widespread hostility and resentment. It could not have been easy for you to stay true, and yet you did because a man’s life was at stake, because it was the right thing to do.

I know I was horrified at the outcome of the trial, as you must have been, although looking back neither of us should have been surprised. But while the trial perpetrated the worst kind of injustice, your influence has perhaps helped prevent another from occurring.

I recently had the experience of sitting on a jury in a murder case. The accused was a 16 year old suspected of murdering his own father. Poor and friendless, the defendant also had inadequate legal representation, and the presumption of his guilt was palpable in the jury room. Yet when the jury was polled, I found I could not raise my hand and condemn him with the rest of them. I could not condemn a man to death simply because of who he was, as happened to Tom Robinson. I needed to be certain that he had committed the crime for which he was on trial.

My fellow jurors ranted at me. A number just wanted the trial to finish so that they could go home. Others had deeply held prejudices that could not help but shape their views. Time and again, I was encouraged to vote with them, to finish the matter. It would have been easy to do so. But it would not have been just.

Having seen a man such as yourself strive for justice when all seemed hopeless, what could I do but aspire for the same? I do not know if the man on trial was innocent, but only that to execute him without proof of guilt was something that in good conscience I could not allow, as you would not have allowed.

I would like to thank you with deepest sincerity for the line example that you set for me. I can only assume that the young man who has been allowed to live would offer his thanks as well, had he known the debt of gratitude that he owes to you.

Sincerely
R Davis
New York City

The writer of the letter is revealed to be the Eighth Juror.

A connection is made between Tom Robinson and the defendant in Twelve Angry Men.

This sums up much of the discussion in the jury room.

The guilt or innocence of the defendant is left open to question, as it is in the play.

The juror reflects on how the example set by Atticus has shaped his own actions.

While the play leaves all jurors unnamed, the film adaptation names the Eighth Juror as ‘Davis’ in the closing scenes.