

In Common: Effective Writing for All Students Collection of All Student Work Samples, K-12

By The Vermont Writing Collaborative, with Student Achievement Partners and CCSSO

Ninth Grade Range of Writing Argument Writing Samples

File Name: A9-10R Is It Love?

Opinion/Argument

Grade 9

Range of Writing

Is It Love?

One of the most misunderstood emotions is love. There are so many different perspectives that it can be interpreted as something completely opposite of its intention. Harper Lee, the author of *To Kill a Mockingbird* states that “it’s a love story, plain and simple.” This statement confuses many people because her book is anything but a romance novel. However, that is not the kind of love she is referring to. This is the love among family, friends, neighbors, and enemies. This love is called *agape*, and as Martin Luther King defines it, it is “a disinterested love in which the individual seeks not his own good, but the good of his neighbor...it begins by loving others *for their sakes*...it’s a love seeking to preserve and create community” (King 19-20). In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, love is brought up in many ways. Love is shown throughout the book as different actions by the characters coming together so they can understand each other.

Atticus shows love towards his neighbor Ms. Dubose, even though she is completely disrespectful towards him. Everyday she insults Atticus and his children because he is defending Tom Robinson, but he does nothing to stop her. Instead, he sends Jem over to her house everyday for about a month to read to her. One day, it is Atticus who goes to her house, and he stays for most of the day. When he returns home, he tells Jem that she has died, and the reason he had to read to her was because “Ms. Dubose was a morphine addict”(147). Atticus knew that she wanted to die free, and he helped her achieve her goal by sending Jem to read to her, so she could get her mind off the drug. “She said she was going to leave this world beholden to nothing and nobody” Atticus tells Jem (148). This is when Atticus and Jem realize her true determination to no longer be a morphine addict, and it’s in this way that they both truly understand her. Even though she was dying, Atticus still sends Jem to read to her everyday to help her become sober. Even when she is dying, Ms. Dubose is still

Introduces a precise claim:

The introduction states a claim and then gives context about the subject, acknowledging it as a **substantive topic** (connecting upcoming claim with Martin Luther King’s concept of the Greek *agape*) **Distinguishes** upcoming claim from potential competing counterclaims or misunderstanding

States focus / claim

Supports claim with logical reasoning, accurate and credible evidence and demonstrates understanding of the topic / text; uses precise references to text, which are thoroughly analyzed and explained

trying to conquer her addiction, and it's for that reason Atticus says, "She was the bravest person I ever knew" (149). Love is shown here because even though Ms. Dubose is completely disrespectful towards Atticus, he steps up to help her die free. This is an example of agape because instead of fighting hate with hate, Atticus loves Ms. Dubose, and by doing so, he is able to understand her, and therefore love her.

Reminds reader of **claim**

Another place love shows up is during the trial. Atticus truly believes that Tom Robinson is not guilty, and he goes out of his way to prove his point in courts. A majority of Maycomb is mad at Atticus for even taking the case, let alone actually trying to set him free. Atticus turns to the jury and tells them, "I am confident that you gentlemen will review without passion the evidence you have heard, come to a decision, and restore this defendant to his family"(275). Atticus fights as hard as he can to prove his case, but it just isn't what people want to hear. The jury votes Tom Robinson guilty, and less than a week later he is shot. This upsets Atticus, and especially Jem. But Atticus comforts Jem by telling him it affected somebody on the jury, because one of the Cunninghams wanted to vote 'not guilty'. Confused, Jem says, " One minute they're tryin' to kill him and the next they're tryin' to turn him loose...I'll never understand those folks as long as I live" (298). Jem is too young to really understand, but Atticus knows his case is changing the views and thoughts of racism in their community. After the trial, Atticus is surprised to find that the entire black community gave his family a surplus of food as a thank you. This touches his heart because he starts crying, and he tell Calpurnia to "Tell them I'm very grateful" (86). We again see love in this situation because Atticus got the jury to understand Tom, even though he ends up dead. Also, when Tom's friends and family reach out to thank Atticus for his efforts and his true support in the trial, we can see that there is understanding. One step at a time, Atticus is changing the thoughts of the people in the community to make it stronger by using agape.

Supports claim with logical reasoning, accurate and credible evidence and demonstrates understanding of the topic / text; uses precise references to text, which are thoroughly analyzed and explained

Reminds reader of **claim**

Supports claim with logical reasoning, accurate and credible evidence and demonstrates understanding of the topic / text; uses precise references to text, which are thoroughly analyzed and explained

One of the places we see the most love is with Boo Radley. He is just a misunderstood man who Jem and Scout torment and talk about throughout the summer. Boo, however, does little things to change their opinion of him. One night when there is a fire, Boo Radley comes out of his

Establishes and maintains a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline

house and puts a blanket on Scout without knowing- a very loving and caring gesture. When Jem tells Atticus, he says, “Someday, maybe, Scout can thank him for covering her up” (96). After this, the kids start thinking of Boo differently. One night, after the play, Jem and Scout are attacked in the woods by Mr. Ewell when they are walking home. Suddenly, somebody kills their attacker and brings injured Jem home. It’s not until they are home that Scout realizes it was Boo who saved them. “Hey, Boo” she says (362). This is the part of the story that the reader sees how much Boo Radley loves Jem and Scout. When Scout looks out from Boo’s porch, she glimpses his perspective, and summarized the events that took place over the summer, and thinks, “Autumn again, and Boo’s children needed him” (374). Boo cares for these children so much that he considers them his own kids. This is another example of agape, because he’s giving without expecting anything in return. It’s when Jem and Scout finally realize this that they know they love him back, which brings them closer together.

We see countless examples of love throughout the book through the characters actions. Martine Luther states that agape is “understanding” (King 19). The more the characters understand each other, the more they come to care and love each other. This makes them all, as a community, much stronger. “It’s a love story, plain and simple” Harper Lee states. Not a romance, but a book in which agape is shown throughout. This is a book of understanding, and when there’s understanding, there is agape. This love is important because this is what human nature needs in order to become united. King and Lee see this importance, and consider agape a tool used to bring people together to make a stronger community.

Provides a concluding statement that follows from and supports argument presented; synthesizes arguments to talk about “stronger community”

Works Cited

- King, Martin Luther. “An Experiment in Love.” *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King*. Ed. James M. Washington. San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 199. 16-20.
- Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Grand Central, 1982. Print.

In this assignment from a language arts class, the student was asked, after studying *To Kill a Mockingbird*, to support the position that the book should be considered a love story. She gives an introduction of some background / context on the concept of love as *agape*, and makes a claim that in her view the book is indeed a love story.

The writer develops her claim with several reasons, which, here, take the form of deep evidence from the text. She develops her thinking thoroughly with relevant, accurate, credible evidence, showing deep understanding of the text and the concept of *agape*. She organizes her ideas clearly and relies on logical reasoning to develop her claim. In this essay, she does not address counterclaims except a bit in the introduction, but here the counterclaim is not needed.

The writer maintains a formal style and objective tone throughout the piece. The conclusion follows from the argument presented and synthesizes the key points.

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fighting hate with hate, Atticus loves Ms. Dubose, and by doing so, he is able to understand her, and therefore love her.

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