

## Lesson 8r: Understanding literary terms

**Goal 5.01c:** Students will interpret literary devices such as allusion, symbolism, figurative language, flashback, dramatic irony, dialogue, diction, and imagery.

**Literary Text:** *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

### Lesson Focus: Diction

Follow the link to the definition of “diction.”

<http://contemporarylit.about.com/cs/literaryterms/g/diction.htm>

Diction can be a hard literary device to understand. What you need to think about as you read, with regards to diction, is why author’s use certain words. As you read, make a list of any words that you think are particularly striking or unusual. Then, see if they appear in the questions connected to the reading selection.

### Independent Practice:

Now read the excerpt from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Answer the following questions about diction.

\*\*\* link *To Kill a Mockingbird* excerpt on pages 4 and 5 of this document\*\*\*

1. What purpose does the author have for using the line in paragraph 3, “until you climb into his skin and walk around in it?”
  - A. To teach Scout compassion for others.
  - B. To show Atticus’ compassion for others.
  - C. To help Scout understand the Ewells’ situation.
  - D. To explain what Miss Caroline learned.
2. What effect does “climbing into his skin” have on the reader as opposed to some other phrase like, “walk around in his shoes.”
  - A. It grosses the reader out
  - B. It makes the experience seem more personal
  - C. It stresses the need for violent action
  - D. None of these
3. Why is the simile in paragraph 9 effective?
  - A. To show Atticus’ sympathy towards the Ewells.
  - B. To reveal the lifestyle of the Ewells.
  - C. To stress Scout’s prejudice towards the Ewells.
  - D. To emphasize the town’s reactions to the Ewells.
4. Why is the comparison between the Ewells and “animals” more effective than another comparison like “criminals.”
  - A. It shows that the Ewells are really dirty
  - B. It shows that the Ewells are not educated
  - C. It shows that the Ewells are violent
  - D. It shows that the Ewells have been dehumanized by poverty.
5. What effect is the author most likely trying to achieve in the 12<sup>th</sup> paragraph with the use of exaggeration?
  - A. To show insight into Scout’s character.
  - B. To characterize the town.

- C. To show Scout's understanding.  
D. To mock hunters in Maycomb County.
6. In paragraph 26, what does the word "disapprobation" mean?
- A. Disapproval
  - B. Disgust
  - C. Rejection
  - D. Fear
7. What do you think is **MOST LIKELY** the reason that the author uses "disapprobation" as opposed to an easier word like "disapproval" or "displeasure?"
- A. The author wants the reader to broaden his/her vocabulary
  - B. The author has a big vocabulary and wants to show it off.
  - C. The author is showing that Atticus is very smart
  - D. The author is showing how Atticus talks to his children like they are adults.

**Closure:**

Check your answers: Part One:

- 1. A
- 2. B
- 3. B
- 4. D
- 5. B
- 6. A
- 7. D

How did you do?

Did any of the words highlighted in the questions show up in your list of interesting words? Remember to pay close attention to an author's word choice and think about what the author is really trying to say beneath the surface of the literal meaning of the words he/she uses.

For each question that you missed, look at the correct response and think about why that response was the correct one. What element of the question did you miss when you answered incorrectly? How might you avoid making that same mistake in the future? If you did not miss any, congratulations! If you did miss a few, use the following tips when answering questions like these in the future:

1. **Read the question completely and all answers completely.** Sometimes you can answer incorrectly just because you didn't pay close attention to what the question was asking you for, or because you missed a detail in one of the responses. Take your time.
2. **Pay very close attention to questions that ask for the BEST or the MOST LIKELY answer.** In these questions, the test will often trick you because more than one answer could be correct. What you have to do in these circumstances is think which one is the best.

**Excerpt from *To Kill A Mockingbird***  
By Harper Lee

"First of all," he said, "if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view--."

"Sir?"

3 "—until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

Atticus said I had learned many things today, and Miss Carolina had learned several things herself. She had learned not to hand something to a Cunningham, for one thing, but if Walter and I had put ourselves in her shoes we'd have seen it was an honest mistake on her part. We could not expect her to learn all Maycomb's ways in one day, and we could not hold her responsible when she knew no better.

"I'll be dogged," I said. "I didn't know no better than not to read to her, and she held me responsible—listen Atticus, I don't have to go to school!" I was bursting with a sudden thought. "Burrus Ewell, remember? He just goes to school the first day. The truant lady reckons she 's carried out the law when she get his name on the roll—"

"You can't do that, Scout," Atticus said. "Sometimes it's better to bend the law a little in special cases. In your case, the law remains rigid. So to school you must go."

"I don't see why I have to when he doesn't."

"Then listen."

9 Atticus said the Ewells had been the disgrace of Maycomb for three generations. None of them had done an honest day's work in his recollection. He said that some Christmas, when he was getting rid of the tree, he would take me with him and show me where and how they lived. They were people, but they lived like animals. "They can go to school any time they want to, when they show the faintest symptom of wanting an education," said Atticus. "There are ways of keeping them in school by force, but it's silly to force people like the Ewells into a new environment--."

"If I didn't go to school tomorrow, you'd force me."

"Let us leave it at this," said Atticus dryly. "You, Miss Scout Finch, are of the common folk. You must obey the law." He said that the Ewells were members of an exclusive society made up of Ewells. In certain circumstances the common folk judiciously allowed them certain privileges by the simple method of becoming blind to some of the Ewells' activities. They didn't have to go to school, for one thing. Another thing, Mr. Bob Ewell, Burrus's father, was permitted to hunt and trap out of season.

12 "Atticus, that's bad," I said. In Maycomb County, hunting out of season was a misdemeanor at law, a capital felony in the eyes of the populace.

"It's against the law, all right," said my father, "and it's certainly bad, but when a man spends his relief checks on green whiskey his children gave a way of crying from hunger pains. I don't know of any landowner around here who begrudges those children any game their father can hit."

"Mr. Ewell shouldn't do that--."

"Of course he shouldn't, but he'll never change his ways. Are you going to take out your disapproval on his children?"

"No sir," I murmured, and made a final stand: "But if I keep on goin' to school, we can't ever read any more..."

"That's really bothering you, isn't it?"

"Yes sir."

When Atticus looked down at me I saw the expression on his face that always made me expect something. "Do you know what a compromise is?" he asked.

"Bending the law?"

"No, an agreement reached by mutual concessions. It works this way," he said. "If you'll concede the necessity of going to school, we'll go on reading every night just as we always have. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes sir!"

"We'll consider it sealed without the usual formality," Atticus said, when he saw me preparing to spit.

As I opened the front screen door Atticus said, "By the way, Scout, you'd better not say anything at school about our agreement."

"Why no?"

26 "I'm afraid our activities would be received with considerable disapprobation by the more learned authorities.

Jem and I were accustomed to our father's last-will-and-testament diction, and we were at all times free to interrupt Atticus for a translation when it was beyond our understanding.

"Huh, sir?"

"I never went to school," he said, "but I have a feeling that if you tell Miss Caroline we read every night she'll get after me, and I wouldn't want her after me."

Atticus kept us in firs that evening, gravely reading columns of print about a man who sat on a flagpole for not discernible reason, which was reason enough for Jem to spend the following Saturday aloft in the treehouse. Jem sat from after breakfast until sunset and would have remained overnight had not Atticus severed his supply lines. I had spent most of the day climbing up and down, running errands for him, providing him with literature, nourishment and water, and was carrying him blankets for the night when Atticus said if I paid no attention to him, Jem would come down. Atticus was right.