

Sample Introduction and Conclusion

Suppose you had to write an essay on chapters 1-6 of Mockingbird, and the question was, “What motivates Dill and Jem to misbehave so much with respect to Boo Radley?” Here are possible introduction and conclusion paragraphs for this essay, along with topic sentences for the body paragraphs:

INTRODUCTION: In Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird, Jem and Dill meet on page 8, and by page 10 they are already making trouble for their neighbor Arthur “Boo” Radley. Jem’s father Atticus tells them several times to leave Radley alone, but they never obey Atticus for very long. Finally their pranks go so far that they put themselves into real danger, when Boo’s brother fires a shotgun to scare them off at night. While many children like the thrill of misbehaving, few take it quite this far. What drives Dill and Jem to put their lives in danger? A close look reveals that while their motives look different on the surface, on a deeper level both boys misbehave due to unresolved feelings about their parents.

PARAGRAPH 1 TOPIC SENTENCE: While Jem seems to be driven by a desire to prove his manhood, Dill appears to want to gratify his vivid imagination.

PARAGRAPH 2 TOPIC SENTENCE: A closer look, however, reveals that on a deeper level Jem and Dill are both driven by a need to cope with unresolved feelings about their parents.

CONCLUSION: The misbehavior that bugs us in other people is often a masked cry of pain, but sometimes this pain is so deeply buried that even the person feeling it doesn’t know it is happening. If you told Dill he was interested in Boo Radley’s dark story because it reminded him of his own, he would probably be confused. If you told Jem that he was obsessed with toughness because he had lost his mother and had a father who didn’t seem manly enough, he might not have known what you were talking about. How many people around us are the same way? That kid who always disrupts the class, does he have a sick parent? If so, does he even know how much it’s bothering him? That guy who smokes weed every morning before school, does he have undiagnosed learning disabilities? Has his sister left for college and decided never to come home? Until we get the ability to read people’s unconscious minds, we will never know. Maybe that’s why Atticus told Scout that it is important to be able to “get inside [another person’s] skin, and walk around in it.” In dealing with other people’s misbehavior, empathy, not punishment, may be the most effective answer.