

Student Essay on Jem

Jem by Harper Lee

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Essay

Jem's experience with Mrs. Dubose is a defining moment in his journey through adolescence. Through his interaction with Mrs. Dubose, Jem learns the real meaning of courage, the importance of atonement, and he begins to appreciate that evil within somebody is usually equally matched with something more. Jem's encounters with Mrs. Dubose have him believing that she's just a senile old crank who enjoys being mean to people. What he doesn't learn until after her death is that her crazy fits and raw behaviour were morphine withdrawal symptoms. It's at this time, with the help of Atticus, that Jem begins to understand the true meaning of courage. "It's when you know you're licked before you begin, but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what." Jem sees the bravery Mrs. Dubose had to have possessed to beat her morphine addiction, knowing that she would experience terrible withdrawal symptoms, but refusing to die until she was "beholden to nothing and nobody." The importance of making amends is at first lost on Jem: "She wants me to come every afternoon after school and Saturdays and read to her out loud for two hours. Atticus, do I have to"" Again, Jem's understanding comes after her death, when he realizes that through his reading to Mrs. Dubose, he was helping her to kick her morphine addiction. Lastly, the hardest truth for Jem to comprehend comes with the white camellia from Mrs. Dubose. It represents the essential goodness and innocence of soul that every human keeps under their mortal persona. Jem, initially unable to believe that Mrs. Dubose could embody anything good, matures a great deal from the camellia, a gesture of her forgiveness. He comes to see that good and evil can coexist within the same person, and that sometimes you have to search for the hidden motives which often balance the darkness people seem to be consumed with. Mrs. Dubose's darkness was balanced with her strength and determination to overcome her addiction. Because of his experience with Mrs. Dubose, Jem comes to realize that sometimes there are mitigating factors behind what may seem like irrational behaviour, and that until we know what events in somebody's life have made them how they are, we have no right to judge them as anything more than human.