



In Their Skin

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In Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch famously encourages his daughter Scout to try to see things from other people's points of view, to "climb into (their) skin and walk around in it." All too often we focus on our immediate impressions when considering other's perspectives, forgetting that there is a world and a history that tails our every move. During this project, students examined three major themes in 1860 - 1960 American history: racism, modernization, and youth culture. The class read *To Kill a Mockingbird* and students chose a book with similar themes to read in a group. Using these readings as guide, students wrote a work of fiction based on a character's journey in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In order to be able to fully inhabit their characters, students needed to do significant research about their character's world.

Teacher Reflection

This project is now in its third iteration and each year I find new entry points to make this classic novel relevant to a modern audience. This project is about so much more than reading, writing and research. It's about understanding the motivations that drive individuals and society. Through the research and the fictional writing, students are forced to consider these forces as they construct character stories that fit with the time periods and development within the book. Parents who hated this part of the required reading when they were in school are often surprised to see how much their kids (some of them reluctant readers) thrive in this project.

Student Reflection

I learned a lot about the past from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I thought it was a well portrayed story of a terribly true time period. Every time I read a well written story it helps my writing improve. *To Kill a Mockingbird* gave me a knowledge of that time that I really needed to make a good character. The research process helped me find reliable secondary and primary sources.

—Rose Wilson

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