is frustrated by Atticus and the children, but this incident demonstrates the kind of justice that a black man accused of raping a white woman could expect. He is then a victim of the biased legal system, which was weighted against black people. The jury consists of the same kind of farmers who made up the lynch mob. They are all white because only voters could be jurors and black people did not have a vote.

Tom’s trial is the central focus of the novel and it was based, to some extent, on the Scopes’ trials which also concerned the alleged rape of white women by black men. In spite of Atticus’s brilliant defence, which clearly demonstrates that the Ewells are lying, Tom is convicted, as Atticus knew he would be. In his summing up, Atticus tells the jury that the Ewells knew the jurors would be on their side because they would accept “the assumption – the evil assumption – that all Negroes lie, that all Negroes are basically immoral beings, that all Negro men are not to be trusted around our women.” He argues for the principle that in a court of law everyone is equal, but in the world of Maycomb, as Tom’s trial shows, this is far from the truth.

The conviction destroys Jem’s faith in the legal process and in the people he has always trusted. Tom’s role is that of the mockingbird of the title – his desire to help Mayella Ewell because he felt pity for her has resulted in his destruction. In the process of that destruction, which has its final act in his being shot by the prison guards, the children’s innocence is also destroyed and the whole Finch family only just escape being destroyed by Bob Ewell. The prejudice that grips their community has far-reaching and tragic consequences, shown through Tom Robinson. As Scout later realizes, “Atticus had used every tool available to free men to save Tom Robinson, but in the secret courts of men’s hearts Atticus had no case. Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed.”

This is a well-structured answer that keeps its focus clearly on the question and puts Tom Robinson’s role at the centre. It shows evidence of wider reading and understanding of the context of the novel, when it was written and when it was set. It is well written and shows a perceptive response to the author’s intentions. It uses well-chosen textual evidence and quotations and evaluates them intelligently.

**What do you think about Atticus Finch?**

Think about:
- what you learn about him as a person
- his relationship with the children
- how he defends Tom Robinson.

Add anything else you think is important.