**Curriculum Advisory Committee Meeting**

August 16, 2016

Odessa Schools District Office

**A G E N D A**

1. Approval of minutes posted online
2. **Unfinished Business:**
* Math Curriculum and Science Kits have been ordered for the 2016-2017 school year.
1. **New Business**
* Literature Sets for secondary ELA classes presented for review
	+ Laura Caler
		- To Kill a Mockingbird
		- The Help
* Policies
	+ Review on policy minimum requirements for CAC membership
	+ Review of discussion on syllabi (for a future meeting)
	+ Review policy on adoption of literature sets for more than 6 copies.
* Notification to school board regarding 2016 meeting dates.
	+ Wednesday mornings at 7:30 am dependent on business to be covered. Agenda via e-mail, and posted in Odessa Record weekly calendar.

To Kill a Mockingbird is one of those books that almost everyone reads at some point in their lives. Whether you've been forced to read it at school, or you've had a look because everyone's been urging you to, most people have their own personal experience of reading Mockingbird.

The book is about Atticus Finch, who appears as an unconventional hero and role model due to his morality rather than his physical capabilities. The theme of morals is apparent throughout the whole novel, especially in relation to religion and perception of sin. Take Mrs Dubose, a recovering morphine addict: she vows that she'll die beholden to nothing and nobody. She's pursuing her own dream of being a free human being because she knows deep down that it's right.

To Kill a Mockingbird focuses on that gut instinct of right and wrong, and distinguishes it from just following the law. Even the titular quote: "Shoot all the blue jays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird" is in itself an allegory for this message. Being in itself a generic message, the idea of 'doing what's right' obviously has a different meaning depending on when and where you're reading the book. If you take 1960, when the book was written, America was in a state of ethical development as social inequality was - very - gradually being overcome. Women's rights and black rights movements were beginning to emerge and some campaigned through violence. Would Atticus Finch condone this?

In the 1930s, when the book was set, America was in the midst of the Great Depression. This was a time when economic difficulties meant that the American Dream was receding further and further away. We could consider that Atticus Finch felt that his own dream of an equal, morally decent society was also heading in the wrong direction.

Without denying the constancy of the moral message, and the pure ingenuity of the book, it's still open to debate whether, as with all classics, schoolchildren should be forced to read the novel and go over it page-by-page. The beauty of literature and the reason why I love it so much is that a writer must eventually relinquish the meaning of his or her book. Therefore everyone who reads it can take something out of it which no one has before. I find that a beautiful notion myself, but it seems that looking for these life lessons has become a less and less popular exercise as the years have gone by. Let it not be forgotten that a true piece of literature, like To Kill a Mockingbird, is meaningful in every period and that today, Atticus Finch's message should be heard in the midst of all the global conflicts that we hear of on the news every night.

To think that children are suffering across the world because of a tyrannical regime or an unfair justice system is a depressing notion, and I think a modern Atticus Finch would agree. I don't think he would be comfortable knowing that innocent lives were suffering because of inequality. Atticus would now be defending issues that [Harper Lee](https://www.theguardian.com/books/harper-lee) did not consider when writing the book, such as gay and lesbian rights, because what is at the heart of his character is an acceptance of who people are. That is a moral standpoint that you can hold whoever you are or wherever you are born. Atticus Finch is not xenophobic or homophobic. He's not racist or sexist. He's human and he sees everyone else in the same way. Who knows? Maybe Atticus Finch would even be an animal rights supporter.

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Should it be analysed, taught in schools and pulled to pieces? I can't say, but what I will say is I'm not against anyone reading for the sake of reading. I've read many a book which I've enjoyed, put down and never thought about since. But I honestly feel that Mockingbird is a book which should be read, be it in school or in adult life (or both), without complete and utter absorption. It's a book with so many layers of meaning that you can get so much out of it. I for one know that To Kill a Mockingbird is a book that really has changed my life and that every time I go back over it, I find something new that I assimilate into my own code of ethics. Going over it, whilst being an arduous task, was in the long run worth all the time it took, and plenty more besides.

I would really advise picking up a copy of Harper Lee's magnificent novel and giving it a try. Because whatever happens, it will never stop being a good book, and it will never stop inspiring good people.

In “The Help,” Kathryn Stockett’s button-pushing, soon to be wildly popular novel about black domestic servants working in white Southern households in the early 1960s, one woman works especially tirelessly. She labors long into the night. She is exhausted. Her eyes are stinging, her fingers bloody and sore.

[Skip to next paragraph](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/19/books/19masl.html?_r=0#secondParagraph)

Kem Lee

**THE HELP**

By Kathryn Stockett

451 pages. Amy Einhorn Books/G. P. Putnam’s Sons. $24.95.

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[An Excerpt From 'The Help'](http://us.penguingroup.com/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0%2C%2C9780143144182%2C00.html?sym=EXC) (penguingroup.com)

Is she ironing pleats? Scrubbing toilets? Polishing silver for an all-important meeting of the local bridge club? No way. She is Miss Skeeter Phelan, a white woman. And the white women of “The Help” don’t do those demeaning jobs. They don’t do much of anything else either.

But brave, tenacious Skeeter is different. So she is slaving away on a book that will blow the lid off the suffering endured by black maids in Jackson, Miss. Skeeter’s going to call the place “Niceville,” but she won’t make it sound nice. All of Jackson’s post-sorority girls from [Ole Miss](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/u/university_of_mississippi/index.html?inline=nyt-org) will be up in arms if Skeeter’s tell-all book sees the light of day.

The trouble on the pages of Skeeter’s book is nothing compared with the trouble Ms. Stockett’s real book risks getting into. Here is a debut novel by a Southern-born white author who renders black maids’ voices in thick, dated dialect. (“Law have mercy,” one says, when asked to cooperate with the book project. “I reckon I’m on do it.”) It’s a story that purports to value the maids’ lives while subordinating them to Skeeter and her writing ambitions. And it celebrates noblesse oblige so readily that Skeeter’s act of daring earns her a gift from a local black church congregation. “This one, this is for the white lady,” the Reverend of that church says. “You tell her we love her, like she’s our own family.”

A brief word now about Ms. Stockett: When she moved to New York City from Jackson, she came to understand how deeply ambivalent she felt about her roots. If a New Yorker told her that Jackson must be beautiful, she would say it was fraught with crime. But if a New Yorker spoke contemptuously about Jackson, Ms. Stockett would rise to its defense. “Mississippi is like my mother,” she writes in an afterword to “The Help.” And you will see, after your wrestling match with this problematic but ultimately winning novel, that when it comes to the love-hate familial bond between Ms. Stockett and her subject matter, she’s telling the truth.

Expectations notwithstanding, it’s not the black maids who are done a disservice by this white writer; it’s the white folk. The two principal maid characters, the lovingly maternal Aibileen and the angry, scrappy Minny, leap off the page in all their warm, three-dimensional glory. Book groups armed with hankies will talk and talk about their quiet bravery and the outrageous insults dished out by their vain, racist employers.

The worst of these bosses, a woman known as Miss Hilly, treats Minny like a thief. And she campaigns to have Jackson households install extra toilets so that colored help will not have to use white families’ restricted bathrooms. With the kind of lead-footed linkage that runs throughout this novel — even though it may accurately reflect what Ms. Stockett witnessed in her Southern girlhood — Miss Hilly’s Junior League does its fund-raising for the sake of “the Poor Starving Children of Africa” while treating the poor African-Americans of Jackson as if they were subhuman.

Miss Hilly is enough of a witch for readers to wait eagerly for a house to fall on her. She makes herself the nemesis of each of the book’s black characters and many of its white ones. Sounding decades older than Skeeter even though the two were college roommates, Hilly shrieks villainously about the virtues of segregation and the rectitude of Mississippi’s politicians.

News of the real world seeps into the book only occasionally, with a brief televised glimpse of James Meredith integrating Ole Miss or other muffled rendered news. “There is a skirmish in Vietnam,” Skeeter notices. “The reporter seems to think it’ll be solved without much fuss.”

The tide of soapsuds rises as Skeeter comes across a copy of Jim Crow laws and is galvanized into action; as Skeeter the liberal-minded spinster begins dating the son of an intolerant local politician; as Skeeter begins wondering what happened to Constantine, the maid who lovingly raised her; and as both Aibileen and Minny become increasingly privy to the secrets of their employers’ households.

Though “The Help” might well have veered off into violent repression of these maids’ outspokenness (one character is blinded for having accidentally used a whites-only bathroom), Ms. Stockett doesn’t take it there. She’s interested in the affection and intimacy buried beneath even the most seemingly impersonal household connections.

Aibileen is this book’s loveliest character, especially in scenes that have her raising Mae Mobley, the toddler now in her charge. Having endured the pain of raising white child after white child only to see them grow up and away from her, Aibileen is still ready to embrace another one. On the evidence of Ms. Stockett’s autobiographical afterword, this is the part of the story she knows best; she herself had an absentee white mother and was raised by a black woman named Demetrie. She loved Demetrie dearly without ever giving much thought to what Demetrie’s life was like, and she says that “The Help” was written to fill in that gap.

Mae Mobley’s little games include pretending to stage a sit-in at a Woolworth’s counter and pretending to ride the bus with [Rosa Parks](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/p/rosa_parks/index.html?inline=nyt-per). Or so it goes in this ultimately soft-pedaled version of Southern women’s lives, one in which real danger is usually at a distance.

At one point Skeeter hears a strange new guy, [Bob Dylan](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/d/bob_dylan/index.html?inline=nyt-per), singing a strange new song, “The Times They Are A-Changin’,” and finds herself full of optimism. Had she heard the same Bob Dylan singing “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” his accusatory song about the fatal caning of a 51-year-old black barmaid by a young white patrician, “The Help” might have ventured outside its harsh yet still comfortable, reader-friendly world.