

I read *To Kill a Mockingbird* when I was fourteen years old – something I suspect I have in common with many of the people in our audience. Even then, I was struck by the power of Harper Lee’s decision to put this story in the hands and eyes of children. Scout, Jem, and Dill are a pure expression of the intersection of idealism and reality; innocence and understanding; acceptance and hope. The events surrounding Tom Robinson’s trial may have varying degrees of familiarity for us all, but as I have watched them unfold each night in rehearsal, I have tried to see them as those kids see them. And I have tried to hear the lessons with the fresh ears of childhood. And each night, Lee’s messages come through loud and clear, and remain all too relevant to this day: the importance of the tight bonds of a community, the absolute necessity of hope in the face of insurmountable odds, the stalwart belief that fair play must apply to everyone, and the certainty that each one of us carries responsibility for living up to each one of these ideals.