

Social Hierarchy in To Kill a Mockingbird

Socio-Economic Status (SES): Key Points

Definition of Socio-Economic Status:

SES is a measure of a person's or family's economic and social position compared to others, based on income, education, and occupation.

Components of SES:

- Income: The money a person or family earns.
- Education: The level of schooling or training a person has received.
- Occupation: The type of job a person has, which often relates to their income and education.

Importance of SES:

- Determines access to resources like healthcare, education, and housing.
- Can affect a person's lifestyle, including what they eat, where they live, and their overall health.

SES and Society:

- Societies often have a range of SES groups, from low to high.
- Higher SES often means more privileges and opportunities.
- Lower SES can sometimes lead to challenges like less access to quality education or healthcare.

SES and Education:

- Education level can influence SES, as higher education often leads to better job opportunities and higher income.
- Families with higher SES often have more resources to support education.

SES and Health:

- SES can impact health; higher SES often correlates with better health due to access to healthcare, healthier food, and safer living conditions.

Global Perspective:

- SES varies widely around the world.
- Developed countries often have higher average SES than developing countries.

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Setting in the Great Depression:

- The story is set in the 1930s during the Great Depression.
- This era was marked by economic hardship, influencing the economic status of characters in Maycomb.

The Finch Family:

- Relatively higher SES in Maycomb.
- Atticus Finch, a lawyer, provides a stable and comfortable life for his children.

The Cunningham Family:

- Represents a lower SES.
- They barter goods and services instead of using money, showing economic struggles.
- Their pride in self-sufficiency despite poverty.

The Ewell Family:

- Seen as having the second-lowest SES in Maycomb.
- Live in extreme poverty and are not respected by the community.

People of Color in Maycomb:

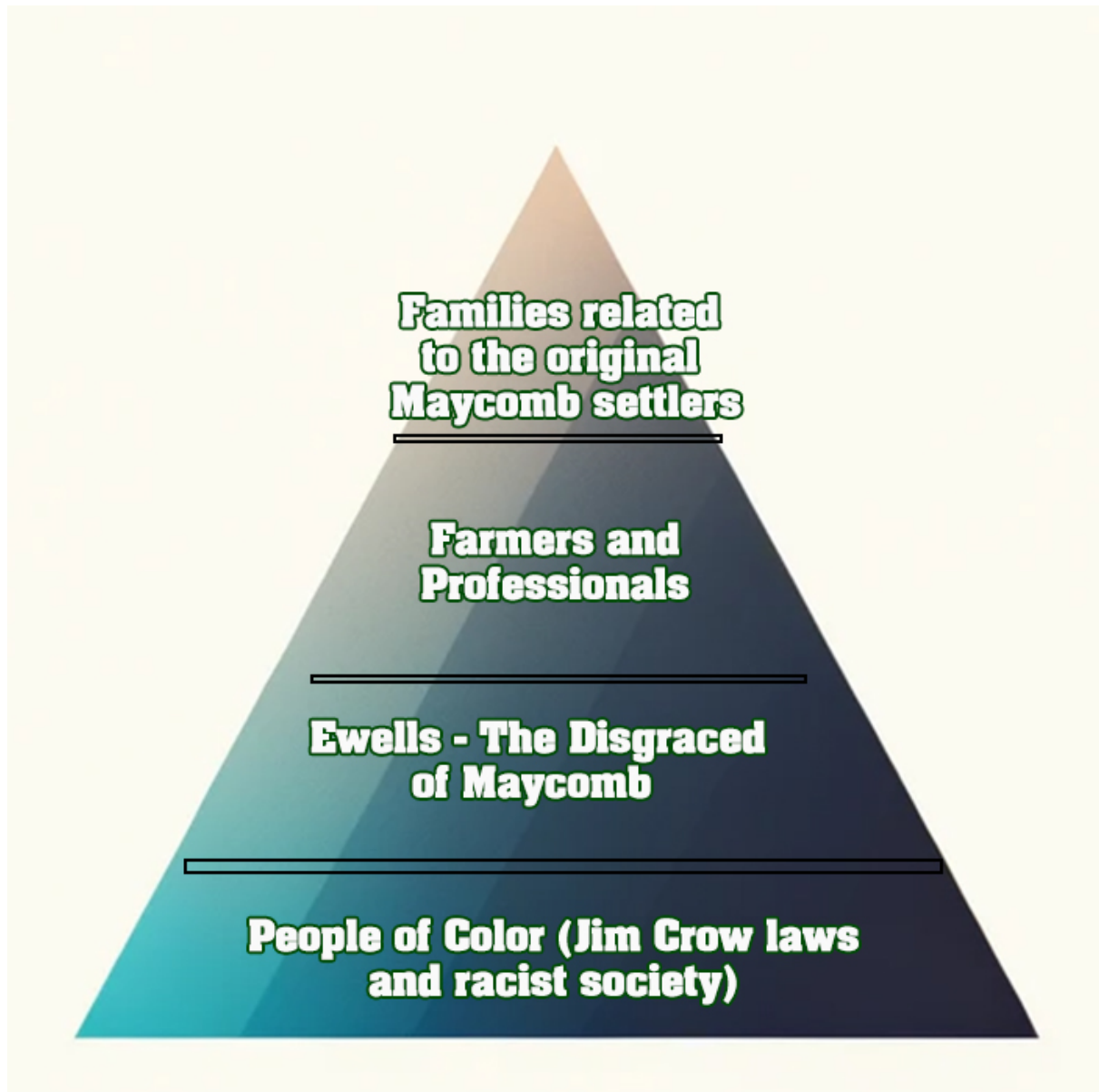
- Black citizens in Maycomb are generally depicted as having the lowest SES.
- They face systemic discrimination and prejudice, affecting their economic opportunities and social standing.
- The novel subtly introduces this through the setting and background narrative, although specific examples become more prominent in later chapters.
- This lower SES for Black citizens reflects the racial inequalities of the time, which is a central theme of the novel.

Impact on Children and Education:

- SES differences are evident in Scout's school.
- Walter Cunningham's inability to afford lunch highlights the impact of SES on daily life.
- Miss Caroline's misunderstanding of Walter's situation shows the gap in SES awareness.

Atticus's Teachings:

- Atticus teaches Scout and Jem to respect all people regardless of SES.
- His approach contrasts with the prevalent attitudes in Maycomb.



“Somewhere, I had received the impression that Fine Folks were people who did the best they could with the sense they had, but Aunt Alexandra was of the opinion, obliquely expressed, that the longer a family had been squatting on one patch of land the finer it was” (p. 130).