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to kill a mockingbird

Harper Lee's
Timeless Literary
Classic Still Stirs
Passions 50
Years Later

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It is timeless. It is timely. It is the Pulitzer Prize-winning book, "To Kill a Mockingbird," by Harper Lee.

The 1960 novel, still taught in schools and read by millions across the country, celebrates its 50th birthday this summer.

"It just really addresses some social issues that never seem to go away," said Kathy Jacobs, director of the Yankton Community Library.

"To Kill a Mockingbird" focuses on Atticus Finch, a moral man, lawyer and single father living in the south during the Depression. His 6-year-old daughter, Scout, narrates her life living in the "tired old town" of Maycomb, Ala., with her father and older brother, Jem. Together, they deal with themes of racism and social pressures of the times.

"To Kill a Mockingbird" was published on July 11, 1960, and won the 1961 Pulitzer Prize in fiction. The 1962 film adaptation of the book, starring Gregory Peck, was nominated for eight Oscars and won three.

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EDWARD ALLAN

In a 2006 poll by the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), librarians were asked "Which book should every adult read before they die?" Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird," won first place; the Bible came in second.

"It came out just at the time of the civil rights movement. You think of that book as one of the documents, core documents of the civil rights movement of the '60s," noted Edward Allan, an associate professor of 20th Century American literature at the

University of South Dakota.

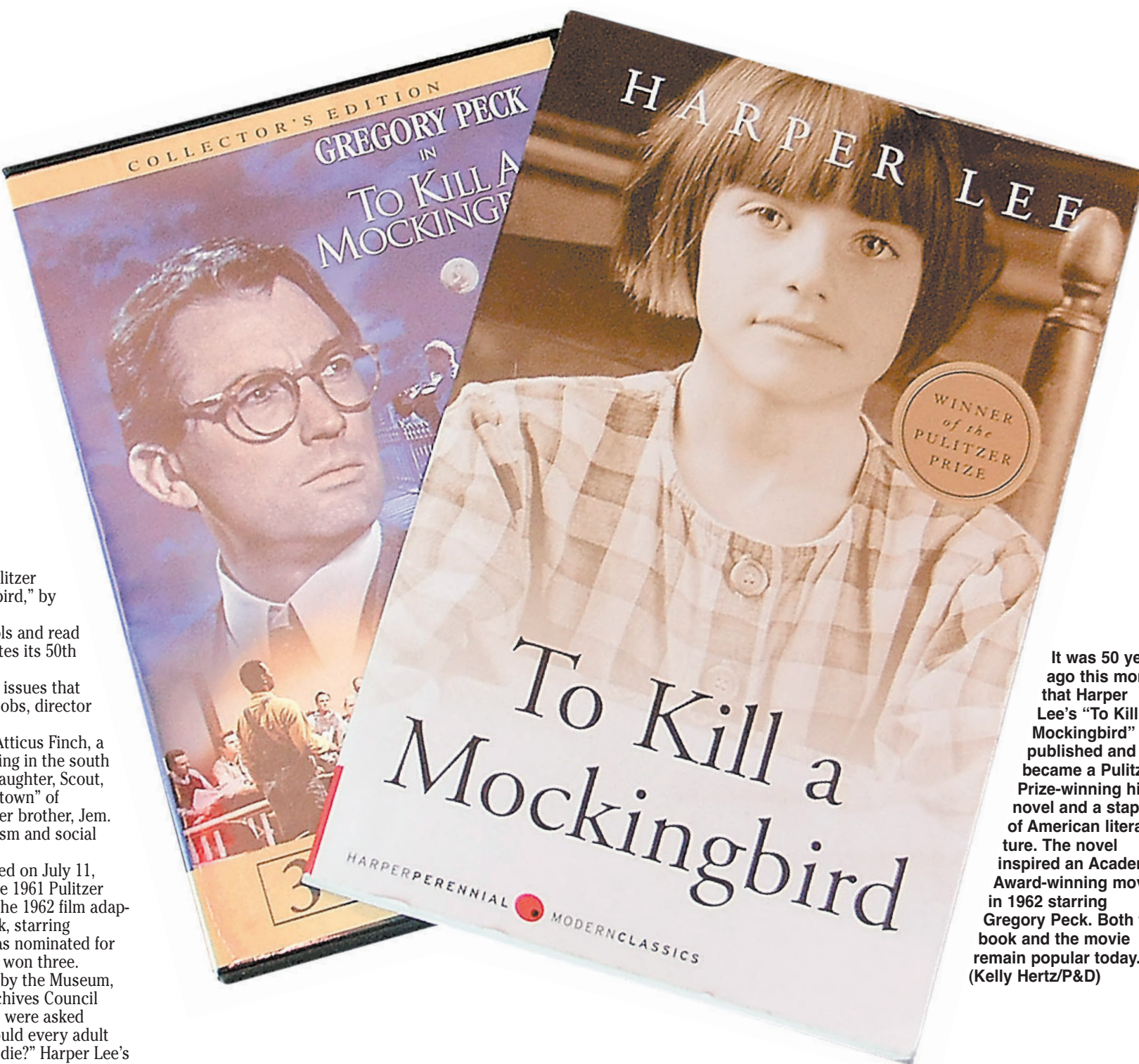
Allan believes the book's anniversary is worth marking for its historical significance.

"Students still respond to it, partly just because it's a great story and partly because the issues of racial justice are still live issues and still mean a lot to students," he said.

The Yankton community certainly has enjoyed "To Kill a Mockingbird," too. In the last two years, the book has been checked out at the Yankton Community Library 99 times, the movie 105 times and the book on CD 21 times, Jacobs said. The library also has the book in VHS and CliffsNotes.

"The kids give it great perspective when you parallel them with the adults and it's just a great story," Jacobs said. "It was set in another time, but certainly could be happening today."

In 2006, she helped organized "One Book One



It was 50 years ago this month that Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" was published and became a Pulitzer Prize-winning hit novel and a staple of American literature. The novel inspired an Academy Award-winning movie in 1962 starring Gregory Peck. Both the book and the movie remain popular today. (Kelly Hertz/P&D)

Siouxland," an effort to get all of Siouxland to read one book at the same time, then engage in discussions. The event was kicked off with "To Kill a Mockingbird."

The event even brought Mary Badham, who played "Scout" in the movie, to the Orpheum Theatre in Sioux City, Iowa, for book signings and readings from the book.

"It was just such a good book. That was the first time we'd done that program, and that was a great book to kick off with because of the interest," Jacobs said.

"I don't know of anyone who didn't like the book," she added.

Jill Mikkelsen, an English teacher at Yankton High School, has taught the book every year of her 25-year teaching career. She thinks the theme of discrimination is important, but sees other issues, too.

"Equally as important is the story of parenthood and the role of what it's like to be a parent and how to serve as a role model for your children," she said.

"I love that the little girl (Scout) isn't afraid of learning things, of exploring. Early in the book, her boundaries are set by her dad. She can only go down two doors each way. That's her world. By the end of the book, she's learned that life outside of that little world isn't fair and isn't just, but she always clings to her father and knows her relationship with her father will help her get through everything," she added.

And the book never gets old for Mikkelsen. Some

years, she teaches "To Kill a Mockingbird," twice, and because she rereads it every time she teaches it, she estimates she has read it 38 times.

"The 38th time I read it, it was just like the first time," she said. "It doesn't make any difference that the book was written in 1960. It's just the emotion of knowing that the man who is targeted in this crime, you know full well that he didn't do it. The jury convicts him anyway. People still don't want to see that."

The book is also one of Yankton resident Sean McDonald's favorite books.

"It follows the basic American ideal," he said. "The lower-class citizen is who (Atticus) is fighting for. The book shows that justice is the highest value."

McDonald likes the book because it also tells a great story.

"It's not just a straight plot," he said. "There's deviations that really add to the greater virtue of the story."

Yankton resident Gretchen Scoblic, who has taught English at the Vermillion Middle School for 10 years and will move to the Vermillion High School next year, considers the book to be in her top five favorite books.

"People should read it and recognize it for its really colorful language for a time period that a lot of people aren't really familiar with anymore," she said.

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