

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee: Summer Reading Unit Overview

Below are the Essential Questions, Theme Topics, Core Vocabulary, and Key Literary Terms that we will use for our analysis of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. These questions, theme topics, vocabulary, and terms will guide our discussion and analysis during this unit, so it is important for you to be familiar with them as you read. Use this overview to help guide your annotations and read through the background information *before* you read the novel. Also, use the attached study guide to help you focus on important details and understandings found in the novel. While completing the study guide is *optional*, it is highly recommended.

Overarching Essential Question

- To what extent are people defined by their actions?

Essential Questions:

- What relationship exists between personal growth and asking questions?
 - How is meaningful learning achieved?
- How do people develop compassion and understanding?
 - How do we evaluate this quality in others?
- How does society influence our identity and the choices we make?
- What choices do people make in the face of injustice?
- How can society's wrongs be righted?

Possible Theme Topics for *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

During your reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* look for and mark passages that make a point or statement about these possible theme topics:

- Prejudice
- Social Justice
- Growing Up

Core concept vocabulary: compassion, integrity, empathy, justice, and hierarchy/class system

Historical context: the Great Depression; Jim Crow laws; Scottsboro case; separate but equal; role of Southern women

Key literary terms: point of view, narrator, plot/subplot, theme, symbolism, characterization, historical context, and setting

By the end of the unit, students will be able to . . . (I can's)

- make inferences.
- identify the relationship between the main idea and supporting details to help me comprehend, interpret, analyze, or evaluate what I read.
- reflect on a text and connect to other texts I have read, the world, my own experience (etc.)
- analyze character, plot, setting, symbolism, and point of view
- compose a text with an effective beginning, middle, and end.
- use effective paragraphing in my writing.

Novel Introduction:

To Kill a Mockingbird is told through the perspective of Jean Louise “Scout” Finch as she remembers the events of her childhood. The narrator’s voice changes from an adult to a child as she begins the story of her life from the summer of 1933 to the fall of 1935 in a little Alabama town called Maycomb.

The MAIN characters are good people witnessing prejudice:

- Jean Louise (Scout)
- Atticus
- Jem
- Dill

Novel Structure

To Kill a Mockingbird is divided into two parts:

- Part I deals with the children’s attempt to get “Boo” Radley, the neighborhood recluse to “come out.”
- The events of Part II focus on Atticus’s efforts to defend Tom Robinson, a black man accused of raping a white woman, as well as his attempts to get the truth of the crime and the ugliness of racism to “come out” in the courtroom.
- The two plots seem separate at first, but seem to “mirror” each other as the story progresses.

Prejudice

Some of the prejudice described in the story includes:

white against black	poor against rich	girls against boys
black against white	rich against poor	boys against girls

Language/Dialect

The language of the novel is at times vernacular – meaning that the language includes slang words and even derogatory words that were used by prejudiced people.

A note on the “N-word”

The novel is set in the 1930s but was written in the late 1950s (published in 1960). The dialogue is marked by frequent use of the word "nigger". The use of this word indicates to the reader the racist attitudes of various characters. When she wishes to refer to African-Americans, Harper Lee uses the term "colored". It is not only racist whites that say this, however - at First Purchase church, Calpurnia addresses Lula as “nigger”.

Since the novel was published, attitudes have changed in the United States about what is acceptable to speak and write. In the trial of O.J. Simpson, the word "nigger" was considered too offensive to repeat in court, and was described as the "N-word".

While writing about *To Kill a Mockingbird*, you may need at some point to quote others, for example those who call Atticus a "nigger-lover". Use quotation marks to show that it is someone else's words that you are writing.

Historical Context:

Before we can explore the themes, characters, and larger ideas presented from the novel, we must learn the related historical events surrounding the time period. This background information coupled with the web quest and research presentations will give us a more complete understanding of the context of the novel. These historical events focus on the economical, social, and racial aspects of the south during this time.

The Great Depression - 1929

The Great Depression began with the stock market crash of late October 1929 and ran for over a full decade. One fourth of the entire labor force was jobless. Lifetime savings were wiped out. Homes and farms were lost. Businesses and banks failed by the thousands. Millions of people went hungry. The farmers suffered the most, and since the majority of agricultural farms were located in the south, many southern sharecroppers were destitute.



The novel is set in a southern town in the early 1930's, the middle of the Great Depression, when there was nothing to buy and no money to buy it with.

Segregation (Separate but Equal) and Black/White Relationships in the South

Contact between the black and white races in the south was limited and controlled by specific rules and expectations. The only acceptable relationship between the races was that of employee (black) and employer (white). Otherwise, each race lived in separate sections of town, attended separate churches, and attended separate schools. The laws enforcing this segregation are known as the Jim Crow laws. Although the town had one government, the black people knew they lived under a different set of laws.

Lynching

Lynching is a form of violence in which a mob, under the pretext of administering justice without trial, executes a presumed offender often after inflicting torture and corporal mutilation.

Statistics of reported lynching in the U.S. indicate that, between 1882 and 1951, 4,730 persons were lynched, of whom 1,293 were white and 3,437 were black. Often black people were murdered, or lynched, because of allegations of rape or murder of white persons.

Jesse Daniel Ames was an American suffragist and civil rights activist who fought, along with many others, to combat lynching in the southern United States. She argued to dispel the widely accepted myth that white women needed protection from African-American men. She pointed out that the rape of white women by black men, which was the supposed justification for lynching, seldom occurred and that the true motives for lynching were rooted in racial hatred. (Encyclopedia Britannica)



Social Ranking of Maycomb:

“Upper” Class – People who have enough money to get by without too much struggle. They employ cooks, drivers, etc., but they do not have expensive extravagant things. The Great Depression affected everyone, but this group was affected least. Received formal education.

Examples in novel: Finches, Miss Maudie, Aunt Alexandria

Lower Class – Typically farmers were hurt the most by the Great Depression, so they struggled severely to feed and take care of their families. These people worked hard and were proud. Limited formal education.

Examples in novel: Cunninghams

Lower Class/“White Trash” – Did not work so did not have anything. Made no attempt to take care of self or family. Lacked formal education.

Examples in novel: Ewells

Black Community – Worked hard and supported families and one another. Proud within their community but consumed with fear and submission in the white community. Similar economic status to the white Lower Class. Few received formal education, most were limited or uneducated.

Examples in novel: Calpurnia, Rev. Sykes, Tom Robinson

Roles of Women:

During the 1930's, white southern women were seen as proper, beautiful, and innocent. They were quiet, demure, and socially polite. Skilled in looks, posture, all things “ladylike,” the southern woman was put on a pedestal.

Black women were not thought of in a similar fashion. They were strong, not fragile like the white woman. They were used to hard work and were very knowledgeable about survival. Black women typically were hired to take care of white children. Because of this close relationship, many white children developed close relationships with their black caretakers.

In the novel, Calpurnia is more than a housekeeper and cook. She acts as a mother to Scout and Jem; and Atticus, Scout, and Jem respect her as such.

Harper Lee



Nelle—her first name is her grandmother's spelled backward—was born on April 28, 1926, in Monroeville, Alabama. Her mother, Frances Cunningham Finch Lee, was a homemaker. Her father, Amasa Cole Lee, practiced law. Before A. C. Lee became a title lawyer, he once defended two black men accused of murdering a white storekeeper. Both clients, a father and son, were hanged.

As a child, Harper Lee was an unruly tomboy. She fought on the playground. She talked back to teachers. She was bored with school and resisted any sort of conformity. The character of Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* would have liked her. In high school Lee was fortunate to have a gifted English teacher, Gladys Watson Burkett, who introduced her to challenging literature and the rigors of writing well. Lee loved 19th-century British authors best, and once said that her ambition was to become "the Jane Austen of south Alabama."

Unable to fit in with the sorority she joined at the University of Alabama, she

found a second home on the campus newspaper. Eventually she became editor-in-chief of the *Rammer Jammer*, a quarterly humor magazine on campus. She entered the law school, but she "loathed" it. Despite her father's hopes that she would become a local attorney like her sister Alice, Lee went to New York to pursue her writing.

She spent eight years working odd jobs before she finally showed a manuscript to Tay Hohoff, an editor at J.B. Lippincott. At this point, it still resembled a string of stories more than the novel that Lee had intended. Under Hohoff's guidance, two and a half years of rewriting followed. When the novel was finally ready for publication, the author opted for the name "Harper Lee" on the cover, because she didn't want to be misidentified as "Nellie."

To Kill a Mockingbird was published in 1960 to highly favorable reviews and quickly climbed the bestseller lists, where it remained for 88 weeks. In 1961, the novel won the Pulitzer Prize.

Though fans of the book waited for a second novel, it never came. In the meantime, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has sold more than 30 million copies in 18 languages. According to biographer Charles J. Shields, Lee was unprepared for the amount of personal attention associated with writing a bestseller. Ever since, she has led a quiet and guardedly private life. As Sheriff Tate says of Boo Radley, "draggin' him with his shy ways into the limelight—to me, that's a sin." So it would be with Harper Lee. From her, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is gift enough.

(www.neabigread.org – National Endowment for the Arts)

To Kill a Mockingbird Study Guide

Questions: Answer each question thoroughly, giving specific support from the text (this means **quotes** with **page numbers**) whenever possible.

Chapter One

1. Describe the character(s) using details from the book—consider physical, social, emotional, mental, and moral characteristics.

Name	Description
Scout Finch	
Jem Finch	
Atticus Finch	
Calpurnia	
Dill	
Boo Radley	

2. Why does Scout (the narrator) emphasize that they are Southerners and tell about the Finch family history?
3. Describe Maycomb, Scout's hometown. Use specific details from the book.

4. Describe the Radley Place. Use specific details from the book. What predictions can you make based on this description? How do people in the town feel about the house and its inhabitants? Be sure to answer all parts of the question!

5. From whose point of view is the story told? What is unique about this point of view? How might this point of view affect the story?

Chapter Two and Three

1. Describe the character(s) using details from the book—consider physical, social, emotional, mental, and moral characteristics.

Name	Description
Miss Caroline	
Walter Cunningham	
Burriss Ewell	

2. What does Jem explain to Scout at the beginning of this chapter? What does that show about his character in this story?

3. What does Miss Caroline think of Scout's reading and writing abilities? What does this reveal about Miss Caroline? About Scout?

4. Why does Walter Cunningham lie about not having his lunch and refuse to borrow a quarter from Miss Caroline?

5. What does Scout's attempt at explaining the Cunninghams to Miss Caroline reveal about her character? What does her explanation reveal about the community?
6. What does Atticus reveal about his character in his dealings with Mr. Cunningham, Walter's father?
7. "By the time we had reached our front steps Walter had forgotten he was a Cunningham" (31). What do you think Scout means by this?
8. What does Scout mean when she says about Walter, "...he's just a Cunningham" (33)?
9. What does Calpurnia's reaction to Scout's outburst at the dinner table reveal about her position in the house? About Calpurnia as a person?
10. What does the cooties incident reveal about the Ewells? How is Burris Ewell different from the other poor children like Walter Cunningham and Little Chuck Little?
11. What laws are the Ewell's allowed to break? Why do the "common folk" of Maycomb allow them to break these laws? From this incident (and what you've read of the book so far) what societal "classes" exist in Maycomb?

12. What does the conversation between Atticus and Scout at the end of the chapter reveal about their relationship?

13. “‘First of all,’ he said, ‘if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it’” (39). What does Atticus mean by this? What does this statement show about him as a person?

Chapters Four and Five

1. Describe the character(s) using details from the book—consider physical, social, emotional, mental, and moral characteristics.

Name	Description
Miss Maudie	

2. Re-read “Finders were keepers...but money was different” (47). Why are certain things allowed in their “ethical” culture, but money is different?

3. What does Miss Maudie reveal about Atticus when she says, “Atticus Finch is the same in his house as he is on the public streets” (61) and why is this a compliment?

4. In what ways does Jem try to demonstrate that he is older and more knowledgeable than Scout?

5. How do we see that Jem is still more immature than he believes he is?

6. What does Scout learn about Arthur “Boo” Radley from Miss Maudie?

7. What does Atticus do when he finds Jem and Dill trying to give Boo Radley a note through the shutters? Why does he act this way?

Chapters Six and Seven

1. Describe the character(s) using details from the book—consider physical, social, emotional, mental, and moral characteristics.

Name	Description
Nathan Radley	

2. Why does Jem’s comment about Scout “gettin’ more like a girl every day” (69) make her go with him and Dill to the Radley house?

3. What does Nathan Radley tell Atticus and the other neighbors about the gunshot they heard? What is the significance of Radley’s assumptions about his intruder?

4. Why does Jem go back to get his pants in the middle of the night? What does he discover when he gets there?

5. What “treasures” are left in the knot-hole of the tree? Who do you think is putting them there?

6. Nathan Radley says he cemented the hole in the tree because it was dying. Do you believe him? Why or why not?

Chapter Eight

1. Lacking snow, what do Jem and Scout do to build a snowman? How is their snowman different than normal snowmen? Why do you think Harper Lee included this incident? What happens to the snowman after the fire?
2. How do individual people react to the fire? Think about Atticus, Scout, Jem, Miss Maudie, and the others.
3. What characteristics do we see in Miss Maudie after the fire? What type of person is she?
4. What do we learn about Boo in this chapter?

Chapter Nine

1. Describe the character(s) using details from the book—consider physical, social, emotional, mental, and moral characteristics.

Name	Description
Cecil Jacobs	
Tom Robinson	
Aunt Alexandra	

Uncle Jack	
Francis	

2. Why does Scout get in a fight with Cecil?
3. Why is Atticus defending Tom Robinson? How does he feel about the case?
4. How does Aunt Alexandra feel about Scout and Jem's upbringing? Is she right? Why or why not?
5. Describe Christmas at the Finch house.

Chapter Ten

1. How does Scout describe Atticus at the beginning of the chapter? How is he different from the other parents in the town?
2. Why does Atticus say it is a "sin" to kill a mockingbird? How does Miss Maudie help explain this? What do you think she means?
3. Who is Tim Johnson? What happens to him?

4. What does Calpurnia’s reaction to the mad dog incident reveal about her character?

5. What do we learn about Atticus from the mad dog incident? How does this change how Jem and Scout view their father? Why didn’t Atticus tell his children about his skill?

6. What does Jem mean by calling Atticus a “gentleman” at the end of the chapter? How can we tell Jem looks up to his father?

Chapter Eleven

1. Describe the character(s) using details from the book—consider physical, social, emotional, mental, and moral characteristics.

Name	Description
Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose	

2. Initially (before the comments about Atticus), why do Jem and Scout hate Mrs. Dubose?

3. What are Mrs. Dubose’s complaints about Atticus and how he tends to his family?

4. What causes Jem to destroy Mrs. Dubose’s garden? Do you think he was justified in doing this? Would you have acted similarly in his shoes? Why or why not?

5. Why does Atticus say that Jem's behavior was inexcusable?

6. Atticus says, "Before I can live with other folks I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience" (140). What does Atticus mean? What does this show about his character?

7. Describe Jem's punishment. Atticus says that he would have made Jem do the same even if he hadn't destroyed Mrs. Dubose's garden. Why?

8. What do Jem and Scout discover about Mrs. Dubose at the end of the chapter?

9. What does Atticus call "real courage"? Do you agree with him?

Major Actions or Events: List any major events or actions that occur during Part I of the novel.

Examples: List examples of stereotypes and prejudice from Part I of the novel.

Chapters Twelve and Thirteen

1. How has Scout and Jem's relationship changed? Why has it changed?
2. Describe the preparation Jem and Scout endure to go to Calpurnia's church. Why does she spend so much time getting them ready?
3. Describe Calpurnia's church. Consider the structure, the atmosphere, and the people.
4. How is Calpurnia different when she is at church? Why is she different in this setting?
5. Does Calpurnia do a good job caring for Jem and Scout? Why or why not?
6. Why does Aunt Alexandra come to stay with Atticus and the children?
7. Contrast Atticus and Aunt Alexandra.

Chapter Fourteen

1. How is the Tom Robinson trial continuing to creep into Scout and Jem's daily life?
2. What is Aunt Alexandra's opinion of Calpurnia? How does Atticus differ in opinion?

3. Why does Dill come to the Finch house?

4. What does Scout mean by saying, “Then he rose and broke the remaining code of our childhood”? (187-188) What else does Jem do to try to place himself on an “adult” level?

5. Contrast Scout’s home life with Dill’s home life.

Chapter Fifteen

1. Describe the character(s) using details from the book—consider physical, social, emotional, mental, and moral characteristics.

Name	Description
Heck Tate	
Mr. Underwood	

2. Explain the incident in the front lawn. Are these men dangerous? Why or why not?

3. What worries Atticus when he is sitting in front of the jail?

4. Describe the feeling of the men in front of the courthouse. How is this crowd different than the crowd that Atticus saw outside of the house?

5. How does Jem interact differently with Atticus when they are at the jail and are surrounded by the Old Sarum gang? How does Scout remark that they are similar and different at this point?

6. Who does Scout recognize in the mob outside of the jail? Why does she start a conversation with him? What is the effect of that conversation?

7. What do we find out about Mr. Underwood at the end of the chapter?

Chapter Sixteen

1. Describe the character(s) using details from the book—consider physical, social, emotional, mental, and moral characteristics.

Name	Description
Dolphus Raymond	
Stephanie Crawford	
Judge Taylor	

2. Why does Aunt Alexandra disapprove of Atticus talking about Mr. Underwood when Calpurnia is present? How does Atticus respond to this?

3. How does Atticus explain the actions of people in groups?

4. How do Maycomb and its outlying areas react to the beginning of the trial? Use specific details from the book.

5. Describe the courtroom. Consider what it looks like and who sits where.

6. How does the town view mixed or biracial children?

7. What does Scout learn about Atticus from the Idlers' Club? Why does this confuse her?

8. Describe the jury. Judging from what you already know about Maycomb, does Tom Robinson have much of a chance? Give specific reasons to support your answer.

Chapter Seventeen

1. Describe the character(s) using details from the book—consider physical, social, emotional, mental, and moral characteristics.

Name	Description
Bob Ewell	

2. Summarize Heck Tate's testimony.

3. Describe Bob Ewell's behavior on the stand. What does this show about him as a person and how he views this case?

4. Describe the Ewell family. Use specific details from this chapter.

5. Summarize Bob Ewell's testimony.

6. Explain the significance of Bob Ewell signing with his left hand.

7. How do Scout and Jem respond differently to this new information about Bob Ewell? Which child most likely has a more accurate assessment of what will happen in light of this new evidence? Why?

Chapters Eighteen and Nineteen

1. Describe the character(s) using details from the book—consider physical, social, emotional, mental, and moral characteristics.

Name	Description
Mayella Ewell	

1. Summarize Mayella's testimony.

2. Why does Mayella take offense to Atticus (both before he starts questioning her and after he starts questioning her)?

3. Through the questions Atticus asks, what does the jury learn about Mayella's home life? Use specific details from the book.
4. Describe what the court sees when Tom Robinson stands up. What does Scout say she realizes?
5. What does Atticus suggest in his interrogation (while Mayella doesn't answer)?
6. How does Tom's testimony differ from Mayella's testimony? Think about how often he says he helped her, when the chiffarobe incident took place, and what happened when he went into the house.
7. What does Link Deas say when he stands up in the courtroom? Why do you think he says this (and chooses this time to say this)?
8. Why was it a mistake for Tom to say he felt "sorry" for Mayella?
9. Why does Dill say he started crying in the courtroom?

Chapters Twenty to Twenty-One

1. What do Scout and Dill discover about Dolphus Raymond outside the courthouse? What else do they learn from him?
2. Why do you think Atticus took off his coat during his closing statement?

3. Summarize Atticus's closing statement. What does he say about the code Mayella broke, the assumptions Mayella and Bob Ewell made in coming forward as witnesses, and what he believes about equality in the eyes of the law?

Chapter Twenty-Two to Twenty-Three

1. Jem claims to know more than Scout for most of the trial. He believes she is too young to "understand" what the evidence means, etc. In some respects, how does Scout know more than Jem?
2. "'This is their home, sister,' Atticus said. 'We've made it this way for them, they might as well learn to cope with it'" (285). What does Atticus mean and why does he say this?
3. What does Miss Maudie say to Jem to try to cheer him up a little? What is the "baby-step" to which she refers?
4. What threat do Atticus and thus his children receive at the end of this section?
5. Explain how Atticus sees Bob Ewell's motivation for revenge. Why does he say he would rather Bob take out his frustration on him? What does this demonstrate about Atticus's character?
6. How does Atticus explain the verdict of the trial? How does he have some hope that things are changing?
7. In what ways is Jem maturing?
8. What is Jem's view of "folks"?

9. Why would Boo Radley *want* to stay inside?

Chapter Twenty-Four

1. Why is the discussion in the missionary circle ironic? (Remember **irony** is a contrast between expectation and reality.)
2. Why does Scout attend the missionary circle's meetings?
3. Why does the missionary circle believe the Northerners are hypocrites? How does this confirm what we already know about Maycomb's population?
4. Why does Tom try to escape? What reaction does this prompt in the community?
5. How does Aunt Alexandra view Atticus in relation to the town? Why does Scout say she can be a lady like her?

Chapter Twenty-Five

1. How is the mockingbird symbolic of Tom Robinson? Hint: Consider Mr. Underwood's statement about shooting songbirds. What other "mockingbirds" have we encountered in this book? Can you think of any "mockingbirds" elsewhere—literature, film, current events, history, etc.?

Chapter Twenty-Six to Twenty-Seven

1. How is democracy defined? What examples are cited to show democracy and lack of democracy?

2. What does the discussion about democracy reveal about Miss Gates (in light of her conversation with Stephanie Crawford) and the community?
3. What three incidents are related to Bob Ewell?
4. How do Aunt Alexandra and Atticus differ on their views of Bob's actions?
5. How is Maycomb planning to celebrate Halloween? What are the preparations?

Chapters Twenty-Eight to Twenty-Nine

1. How does the setting create tension and an uneasy mood?
2. How does the discussion of "haints" contribute to the mood?
3. Summarize the events of the attack.
4. What is learned at the end of chapter 28?
5. Summarize Heck Tate and Atticus's discussion.
6. Describe Boo Radley as we meet him at the end of the chapter. Why does it make sense that he is the one to have saved the children?

Chapters Thirty to Thirty-One

1. Who does Atticus believe stabbed Bob Ewell? Why?

2. What does Heck Tate say happened to Bob Ewell? What does Tate really know and what does this reveal about his character?
3. What consensus do Tate, Atticus, and Scout reach at the end of the chapter? Why? Explain Scout's mockingbird comment.
4. How has Scout changed by the time she is standing on Boo Radley's porch?
5. In *The Gray Ghost*, Scout describes the events relating to Stoner's Boy. How does this incident relate to the novel? Explain Atticus's last comment before Scout goes to sleep.

Major Actions or Events: List any major events or actions that occur during Part II of the novel.

Examples: List examples of stereotypes and prejudice from Part II of the novel.