

To Kill a Mockingbird



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HARPER LEE

The youngest of four children born to Amasa Lee and Frances Finch Lee, Nelle Harper Lee earned a law degree from the University of Alabama in 1949 and spent a year at Oxford in England, but in 1950 moved to New York to focus on writing. In 1960 she published *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which became an immediate and immense success. Yet Lee never published another novel, instead retreating from the spotlight to her hometown of Monroeville.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1931, nine black teenage boys were accused of rape by two white girls. The trials of the boys lasted six years, with convictions, reversals, and numerous retrials. These trials were given the name The Scottsboro Trials, made national headlines, and drastically intensified the debate about race and racism in America. Ultimately, after six years of trials in which the boys were kept in jail, and despite the fact that one of the girls ultimately changed her testimony and claimed that no rape had actually occurred, five of the nine were convicted of rape.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

To Kill a Mockingbird is set in the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, and while it is the story of Scout's growing up it is also a story of the racially charged atmosphere of the town in the years of the Great Depression. *To Kill a Mockingbird* therefore falls into that particular subset of American literature called Southern literature, since it deals both explicitly and implicitly with themes and issues that were uniquely Southern. *To Kill a Mockingbird* also shares many connections with what is perhaps the most important book written by an American Southerner: [Huckleberry Finn](#) by Mark Twain. Both novels have a trouble-making child as their protagonist and narrator, and both novels chart the growth of those narrators as their adventurers force them to see the unfairness and brutality of their community and society, particularly in regard to the treatment of blacks.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- **When Written:** 1950-1960
- **Where Written:** New York City and Monroeville, Alabama
- **When Published:** 1960
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Coming-of-age novel (bildungsroman); social novel

- **Setting:** The fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama during the Great Depression
- **Climax:** The trial of Tom Robinson; or when Bob Ewell attacks Scout and Jem
- **Antagonist:** Bob Ewell
- **Point of View:** First person; Scout is looking back at the events of the novel from some unspecified future time.

EXTRA CREDIT

Descendant of General Lee. Harper Lee is actually a descendant of the famed Confederate general Robert E. Lee.

"Dill" Capote. The character of Dill in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is based on Harper Lee's real-life childhood friend, Truman Capote, who went on to become a national literary star in his own right, and wrote the bestselling true-crime book [In Cold Blood](#).



PLOT SUMMARY

In the town of Maycomb, Alabama, in the middle of the Great Depression, six-year-old Scout Finch lives with her older brother Jem, and her widowed father, Atticus. Atticus is a lawyer, and makes enough to keep the family comfortably out of poverty, but he works long days. He relies on the family's black cook, Calpurnia, to help raise the kids.

Scout and Jem spend much of their time creating and acting out fantasies. One year a boy named Dill comes to spend the summer with his aunt, who is the Finches' neighbor. The three children become friends, and, pushed by Dill's wild imagination, soon become obsessed with a nearby house. A man named Nathan Radley owns the house, but it is his reclusive brother, Arthur (Boo) Radley, who interests and terrifies the children. On a dare, Jem actually runs up and touches the Radley house, and Scout is sure she sees someone watching them from inside behind a curtain.

The summer ends, and Dill returns to his hometown. Scout starts school, and hates it. On the first day, her teacher actually criticizes her for already knowing how to read. The highlights of the school year come when Scout and Jem occasionally find presents stuffed into a knothole of a tree next to the Radley's fence. Summer arrives, and Dill returns. The children grow more daring and sneak onto the Radley property. But Nathan Radley sees them and thinks they're thieves. They run, and Jem's pants get caught in the Radley fence. He leaves them behind. When he goes back to get them later that night, the pants are mended and folded. Meanwhile, Scout and Jem

continue to find gifts in the knothole until Nathan Radley cements it shut. A few months later, in the dead of winter, the Finch's neighbor Miss Maudie Atkinson's house catches fire, and as Scout and Finch watch it burn someone Scout doesn't see puts a blanket around her shoulders. Jem realizes that Boo Radley must have done it.

That year, Atticus is appointed by the court to defend a black man, Tom Robinson, who is accused of raping Mayella Ewell, the daughter of a poor, notoriously vicious white man named Bob Ewell. Racial tensions in Maycomb flare. Scout and Jem become targets of abuse from schoolmates, neighbors, townspeople, and even some family members. In contrast, when Calpurnia takes the children to attend her black church, they are for the most part warmly received.

Before the trial starts, Atticus' sister Alexandra comes to live with the Finches. Dill also arrives, after sneaking away from his mother and her new husband. Alexandra's social views are more conservative than Atticus's. She treats Calpurnia more like a servant than a family member and tries to make Scout act more like a girl. The day before the trial, a mob surrounds the jail where Tom Robinson is being held. Scout, Jem, and Dill, who have snuck out of their house, join Atticus, who anticipated the mob attack. Scout doesn't realize what's going on, but recognizes a man in the crowd and asks him about his son, who is Scout's classmate. The man, shamed, disperses the mob.

At the trial, Atticus presents a powerful defense of Tom and makes it clear that Ewell is lying. The children sneak into the trial and watch the proceedings from the balcony, where the black people are forced to sit. Jem is sure Atticus will win the case, but the all-white jury still convicts Tom. Jem is particularly hard hit by the verdict, and his faith in justice is even further shaken when Tom tries to escape from prison and is shot and killed.

Even though Robinson was convicted, Ewell is furious that Atticus made him look like a fool. One night, as Jem and Scout walk home alone from a Halloween pageant, Ewell attacks them. Jem's arm is broken, but someone rushes in to help. In the scuffle, Ewell is killed. The man who saved Jem and Scout carries Jem home, and Scout realizes that the man is Boo Radley. Heck Tate decides to keep Radley's involvement in Ewell's death quiet, and Scout walks Radley home. As Scout stands on the Radley porch, she sees the world as Boo must see it. When she gets home, Scout falls asleep as Atticus reads to her at Jem's bedside.

novel covers, she grows from six-years-old to nine. Scout is intelligent and loves to read, but is also headstrong, outspoken, and a tomboy. As the novel opens, Scout is both innocent and intolerant of anything new or different. Scout's innocence falls away in part because she is growing up and in part from the trial of Tom Robinson: she discovers how cruel and violent people can be. But she also learns, through Atticus's careful teaching, that the necessary response to intolerance is to try to understand its origins, to relate to people in terms of their dignity rather than their anger, and to use that foundation as a way to try to slowly change their minds.

Jeremy Atticus Finch (Jem) – Scout's older brother and Atticus's son. Jem is four years older than Scout, and therefore understands many of the events in Maycomb in a way that the younger Scout can't. Intelligent and adventurous as a child, Jem never loses these qualities but also grows into a young man who is strong, serious, idealistic, and sensitive. While both Scout and Jem love Atticus, Jem also reveres the justice and moral character that Atticus stands for, and which he wants to one day stand for himself.

Atticus Finch – Scout and Jem's widowed father, and Alexandra and Jack's brother. He employs Calpurnia, but thinks of her as family. A distinguished lawyer in Maycomb, Atticus believes in moral integrity, and stands up against the racism of Maycomb to defend a black man, Tom Robinson, falsely accused of rape by a white man, Bob Ewell. Yet as much as Atticus believes in acting morally, he does not believe in righteously condemning those who don't always act morally. Instead, Atticus teaches his children to search out and respect the dignity of every human being, to try to see the world from their individual point of view. Atticus Finch has become one of the great father figures in American literature.

Arthur Radley (Boo) – A recluse who never sets foot outside his house, Arthur is an object of fascination for many Maycomb residents. Many rumors describe Arthur as a kind of monster who stabbed his father as a boy, eats cats, and haunts the neighborhood at night. He turns out to be innocent, gentle, kind, protective of children, intensely shy, and one of the mockingbirds to which the title of *To Kill a Mockingbird* refers.

Charles Baker Harris (Dill) – Jem and Scout's friend, who visits Maycomb each summer from his home in Meridian, Alabama. Miss Rachel Haverford is his aunt. Dill is an intensely imaginative and sensitive boy who uses his imagination to hide loneliness and pain: though his mother is divorced, he constantly makes up stories about the greatness of the father he barely knows. Dill is obsessed with Boo Radley.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Calpurnia – The Finches' black cook, she essentially raised Scout and Jem. Atticus considers her family. Calpurnia is strict but loving. As a child, Scout resents Calpurnia's rules and



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jean Louise Finch (Scout) – The narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout is Atticus's daughter, Jem's sister, Alexandra and Jack's niece, and friends with Dill. In the three years the

restrictions, but as she grows she comes to recognize and respect Calpurnia for her strength, intelligence, and kindness.

Miss Maudie Atkinson – A widowed neighbor of the Finches' and a childhood friend of Atticus, Alexandra, and Jack. Miss Maudie Atkinson is a friend and confidante to the Finch children. Her moral outlook is similar to Atticus's. She loves flowers and nature.

Aunt Alexandra – Atticus and Jack's sister, and Scout and Jem's aunt. Alexandra is stern and often haughty, and she believes in the importance of social class and gender roles.

Tom Robinson – A black man accused of rape by Bob Ewell, and defended by Atticus. Tom is a family man, father, and churchgoer. He does not have the use of his left arm.

Bob Ewell – Mayella's father and the patriarch of the poor, vicious Ewell clan who live in an old cabin near the town dump. Ewell is thoroughly awful, a man who buys alcohol while letting his children go hungry.

Mayella Ewell – Bob Ewell's daughter and oldest child. Lonely, friendless, and the only woman in her family, Mayella accuses Tom Robinson of raping her.

Uncle Jack – Atticus and Alexandra's younger brother. Scout and Jem's uncle.

Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose – An old woman and neighbor of the Finches. She is an old and bitter woman, and a racist through and through, though Jem and Scout discover she has her own dignity and courage deserving of respect.

Nathan Radley – Boo Radley's older brother. A cold and very religious man, he runs the Radley household.

Heck Tate – The sheriff of Maycomb.

Link Deas – Tom Robinson's employer.

Mr. Underwood – The writer, editor, and publisher of Maycomb's newspaper.

Mr. Dolphus Raymond – A wealthy white man who lives outside town with his black mistress and interracial children.

Mr. Cunningham – One of the poor Cunningham farmers and the father of Walter Cunningham.

Walter Cunningham – Mr. Cunningham's son and Scout's classmate.

Miss Rachel Haverford – Dill's aunt and one of the Finch's neighbors.

Mrs. Grace Merriweather – A member of Aunt Alexandra's social circle in Maycomb.

Miss Stephanie Crawford – A neighbor of the Finch's and a big gossip.

Mr. Avery – Another of the Finch's neighbors.

Cecil Jacobs – One of Scout's classmates.

Judge Taylor – The judge at the trial of Tom Robinson.

Mr. Gilmer – The prosecutor at the trial of Tom Robinson.

Miss Caroline – Scout's first grade teacher.

Miss Gates – Scout's third grade teacher.

Reverend Sykes – The reverend at Calpurnia's church.

Lula – A member of the congregation at Calpurnia's Church.

Burriss Ewell – A son of Bob Ewell.

Simon Finch – The first member of the Finch family to come to America.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



GOOD, EVIL, AND HUMAN DIGNITY

To Kill a Mockingbird is largely remembered of in terms of the trial of Tom Robinson and its racist outcome. For this reason, people often think that the book's theme is simple, a straightforward criticism of racism and evil. But *To Kill a Mockingbird* is actually more complicated (and interesting). Except in the case of Bob Ewell, the novel avoids simple portrayals and criticisms of "evil." Instead, it shows through Scout and Jem's experiences that Maycomb and its citizens are a complicated mixture of good and bad, full of people with strengths and weaknesses.

There are two characters of almost complete good in *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Atticus and Boo Radley. But they are good in different ways. Boo maintains his goodness by hiding from the world, while Atticus engages with it. Atticus acknowledges the evil in people and the world and fights against that evil, but he also appreciates what is good in the very same people who through fault or weakness might be supporting an evil cause. Atticus believes that everyone has a basic human dignity, and that he therefore owes each person not only respect, but the effort to try to understand their point of view. Atticus tries to instill this worldview in Scout when he tells her that instead of condemning people for doing things that she thinks are cruel, or unfair, or just plain weird, she should first try "standing in their skin."



PREJUDICE

Atticus's belief in treating and respecting everyone as an individual is contrasted in *To Kill a Mockingbird* with a number of other worldviews. These other visions are all quite different from each other—they are religious, racist, classist—but they all share one thing in

common: they treat people as groups, demand conformity, and give no respect or credit to individuals. In other words, they are all forms of prejudice, which is a preconceived notion about a person based on the groups to which that person belongs. Over and over again, *To Kill a Mockingbird* reveals prejudice not just as closed-minded and dangerous, but also as ridiculous.

The most obvious form of prejudice in the novel is racism, which causes otherwise upstanding white citizens of Maycomb to accept the testimony of an obviously corrupt white man over the evidence supporting the testimony from a black man. Yet prejudice is also visible in the racially condescending Mrs. Grace Merriweather; in Aunt Alexandra's and many other character's belief in the importance of social class; in the gender stereotypes that people try to force on Scout; and even in the way the town views Boo Radley as a monster because he acts differently from everyone else.



GROWING UP

In the three years covered by *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout and Jem grow up. At the start of the book they are innocents, with an uncomplicated sense of what's good (Atticus, the people of Maycomb) and what's evil (Boo Radley). By the end of the book, the children have lost their innocence and gained a more complex understanding of the world, in which bad and good are present and visible in almost everyone. As the children grow into the adult world, though, they don't just accept what they see. They question what doesn't make sense to them—prejudice, hatred, and violence. So while *To Kill a Mockingbird* shows three children as they lose their innocence, it also uses their innocence to look freshly at the world of Maycomb and criticize its flaws.

Like every kid growing up, Scout attends school for the first time. But rather than contribute to her education, Scout's school is depicted as rigid to the point of idiocy, with teachers who criticize students who got an early start on reading and hate the Nazis but can't see the racism present in their own town. *To Kill a Mockingbird* does not so much explore standardized school education as condemn it, showing how it emphasizes rote facts and policies designed to create conformist children rather than promote creative critical thinking, sympathy, and mutual understanding across racial and socioeconomic boundaries.



COURAGE

Many people, including Jem and Scout when they're young, mix up courage with strength. They think that courage is the ability and willingness to use strength to get your way. But Atticus defines courage as "when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and see it through no matter what." Courage, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, is not about winning or losing. It's about thinking

long and hard about what's right instead of relying on personal prejudice or gut reaction, and then doing what's right whether you win or lose. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is filled with examples of courage, from Mrs. Dubose's fight against her morphine addiction, to Atticus's determination to face down the racism of the town, to Mr. Underwood's willingness to face down his own racist feelings and support what he knows, in the end, is right.



SMALL TOWN SOUTHERN LIFE

Maycomb is a small town, with all of the characteristics implicit in small town life: everyone knows everyone else's business, which can lead to endless and mostly harmless gossip, but more importantly makes the community extremely intimate and close-knit. The first part of *To Kill a Mockingbird* focuses on this close-knit community, because when they're young Scout and Jem believe that's what Maycomb is.

To an extent, the young Scout and Jem are right: Maycomb is a small, safe, peaceful, intimate community. Yet as Scout and Jem grow up, they come to see another side to their small town. They discover that the town has a fiercely maintained and largely illogical social hierarchy based on wealth, history, and race; ensures its safety through a communal insistence on conformity that subjects anyone who does not conform to dislike and mistrust; and gains its peace by resisting change and ignoring injustice. This is not to say that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a condemnation of small town life in the South. Rather, the novel sees the town in much the same terms it sees individuals: as containing wisdom and blindness, good and evil, and for all of that possessing its own special dignity.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in [blue text](#) throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE MOCKINGBIRD

Atticus tells Jem and Scout that it's a sin to kill a mockingbird because mockingbirds cause no harm to anyone; they just sing. Because of these traits, mockingbirds in *To Kill a Mockingbird* symbolize innocence and beauty. And killing a mockingbird is therefore an act of senseless cruelty. There are a number of characters who can be seen as mockingbirds in the text, most particularly Tom Robinson and Boo Radley.





QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Warner Books edition of *To Kill a Mockingbird* published in 1960.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞☞ Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. . . . There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people: Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself.

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout) (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Scout describes the setting where the rest of the novel will take place, evocatively depicting the small-town life that defined her childhood. However, in some ways this description is deceptive. It suggests that nothing ever happened in Maycomb – that, in a certain way, it was located outside history, its inhabitants leading their lives in sleepy continuity without having to face the problems or changes taking place outside the town's borders.

The rest of the novel will show this not to be the case. However, this doesn't mean that this depiction is a lie: here, Scout focuses on the way she herself experienced the town when she was a child, before she recognized that Maycomb was indeed part of history. Already, the last sentence of this passage suggests a wider context: "nothing to fear but fear itself" recalls a famous line from Franklin D. Roosevelt's inaugural presidential address in 1933 (a reference that also helps to place the novel in a specific time period). Within a broader context of the Great Depression and of the rise of Nazi Germany, the book will focus on courage in the more local milieu of Maycomb, though as the novel will show Roosevelt's suggestion will be just as relevant in Maycomb as in the rest of the world.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☞☞ 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.

Related Characters: Atticus Finch (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Scout has returned home from school upset and indignant that her teacher, Miss Caroline, wants her to stop reading at home. She expects that her father will share her righteous anger, but instead, Atticus takes a different tack. He may believe strongly that reading to Scout is important and healthy – indeed, he doesn't stop doing it merely because Miss Caroline said so – but he is unwilling to conclude that Miss Caroline is evil as a result. Instead, he suggests that neither he nor Scout should judge Miss Caroline's actions or behavior, since they don't know exactly what prompted her to say such a thing, nor where she's coming from in general.

Atticus suggests in this passage that it takes time and effort to understand another person's point of view. He doesn't simply suggest that this effort is necessary in order to be able to justify criticizing someone; he implies that the more one tries to understand another person, the less one will be moved to condemn the other person at all. Atticus, as we see for the first time here, doesn't think that human nature is constant and unchangeable. Rather, he thinks that the way people act often stems from their past, from their environment, and from their opportunities or lack thereof – and therefore that it makes little sense to put strict moral labels on others.

☞☞ "There's some folks who don't eat like us," she whispered fiercely, "but you ain't called on to contradict 'em at the table when they don't. That boy's yo' comp'ny and if he wants to eat up the table cloth you let him, you hear?"

"He ain't company, Cal, he's just a Cunningham-"

"Hush your mouth! Don't matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house's yo' comp'ny, and don't you let me catch you remarkin' on their ways like you was so high and mighty!"

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout), Calpurnia (speaker), Walter Cunningham-

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 32-33

Explanation and Analysis



Jem has invited Walter Cunningham to their house to eat, and Scout is shocked by the way Walter pours molasses all over his food – and she says so. Here, Calpurnia gives Scout a lesson about the way she should treat other people. Scout implicitly has a sense of who counts as "company" and who doesn't – that is, who is worthy of politeness and respect (richer, more prominent members of the community) and who is not (poorer members of the community). It is this implicit belief that Calpurnia rebukes Scout for, saying that "company" is anyone who is invited home, and that Scout should be ashamed of thinking otherwise.

Indeed, Scout is meant to learn through this event that judging Walter at all, much less talking about it, is something to be ashamed of, far more than Walter should be ashamed of his eating habits. Calpurnia and Atticus are clearly on the same page regarding the way they believe one must treat other people, *all* people: with common dignity and without prejudice.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ "There are just some kind of men who—who're so busy worrying about the next world they've never learned to live in this one, and you can look down the street and see the results."

Related Characters: Miss Maudie Atkinson (speaker), Nathan Radley

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Scout is curious about her family's reclusive neighbor, Boo Radley, and here she asks a friend of the family, Miss Maudie, why he never leaves home. As with Walter Cunningham, Scout reveals here how easy prejudice can be: even a young child can be naturally suspicious of people who act differently than she does. Luckily, Scout has a number of adults, from Atticus and Calpurnia to Miss Maudie, who are willing to be patient and teach her to take a step back and consider alternative possibilities to her prejudice.

Here, Miss Maudie humanizes Boo, telling Scout about his strict, very religious father, who was against all pleasure in life. Like Atticus, Miss Maudie doesn't think people are just born a certain way: instead, she believes that a combination of personality and opportunity work to influence how a person is and acts, and that one should seek to understand this process rather than judging from appearances.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ "If you shouldn't be defendin' him, then why are you doin' it?"

"For a number of reasons," said Atticus. "The main one is, if I didn't I couldn't hold up my head in town, I couldn't represent this county in the legislature, I couldn't even tell you or Jem not to do something again."

...

"Atticus, are we going to win it?"

"No, honey."

"Then why-"

"Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win," Atticus said.

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout), Atticus Finch (speaker), Tom Robinson

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 100-101

Explanation and Analysis

Once again, Atticus teaches Scout a difficult lesson about morality – one that goes counter to her own childhood impulses. Scout has heard other children at school criticize Atticus, and when she asks why, he tells her that he has decided to defend in court Tom Robinson, a black man accused of murder, even though he knows there's no chance of winning. Until now, Scout has considered that physically fighting and winning is what it means to be courageous. Now, her father attempts to explain to her that it can show even more courage to strive for something even when one knows that failure is inevitable.

Rather than acting because he will win, Atticus chooses to defend Tom Robinson because he knows that it is the right thing to do. Interestingly, even though many people in town are prejudiced and disagree with Atticus's choice, for Atticus it is the fact that everyone in town knows him and his own beliefs that serves as another motivation for him to act according to his beliefs. He believes that only by standing up for his ideas can he then, in turn, be seen as a representative of the community (even if the community disagrees with some of those beliefs). In order to be morally consistent, Atticus believes, he must act on behalf of human


dignity – and more specifically, this man's dignity – regardless of the end result.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☞☞ "Remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird." That was the only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something, and I asked Miss Maudie about it. "Your father's right," she said. "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout), Atticus Finch, Miss Maudie Atkinson (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

The air rifles that Atticus gives Scout and Jem for Christmas come with a warning: never to kill a mockingbird. Scout rightly notices how rare Atticus's strong language here is. Usually, when she tries to make a judgment or condemn someone or something, Atticus immediately tries to draw her back, to help her to understand where the person is coming from, and to gain a more nuanced view of the situation.

Miss Maudie, who usually has just as subtle an understand of human actions as Atticus, is nonetheless in agreement with him on this exception. The moral world of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is far from simple, but there are rare elements in it that *are*, in fact, purely simple. Miss Maudie is obviously describing real, physical mockingbirds in this passage, but her description also holds for human beings – people who are endlessly generous, who give rather than take, such that they deserve only appreciation and care. It will be Scout's task to attempt to apply the lesson from Miss Maudie and from Atticus to the people around her, as she develops a more advanced understanding of how good and evil interact in the world.

☞☞ After my bout with Cecil Jacobs when I committed myself to a policy of cowardice, word got around that Scout Finch wouldn't fight any more, her daddy wouldn't let her.

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout), Atticus Finch (speaker), Cecil Jacobs

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

Scout has long prided herself on what she has considered to be courage: refusing to back down when others insult her or her family, and fighting as strongly as she can. But she has slowly come to accept Atticus's quite different view of courage. For him, courage does not only mean striving for something when you know that failure is inevitable; it also means having the strength of character to accept what others may say about you without physically fighting back. Instead, he teaches that keeping your head held high, confident of what the right decision really is.

Scout still uses the word "cowardice" to refer to her decision not to fight, but the word is mainly a relic of her instinctive attitude towards courage – she is slowly beginning to accept her father's alternative approach instead.

☞☞ "Atticus, you must be wrong..."

"How's that?"

"Well, most folks seem to think they're right and you're wrong..."

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout) (speaker), Tom Robinson

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

In the small, tight-knit town of Maycomb, what "most folks seem to think" can quickly come to mean what is actually true. Such "group think" and the pressure it puts on individuals to join in it help to preserve and expand all sorts of prejudice. Here we see such logic at work, as Scout questions her father's choices based on what most people in the town think about those choices.

Scout is still struggling to reconcile these two things: it's difficult for her to see how "most folks" can be wrong, since it makes sense that what the majority thinks about something must be right – especially in a town small enough

that it can seem like everyone thinks the same way about something, such as the Tom Robinson case. But the ellipses (three dots after Scout's sentences) seem to suggest that Scout is not at all confident in going against her father: she understands that there are elements at work that she may not have yet understood.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝ It was times like these when I thought my father, who hated guns and had never been to any wars, was the bravest man who ever lived.

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout) (speaker), Atticus Finch

Related Themes: 



Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, it is actually Atticus who is telling Scout and Jem about the courage of another person, Mrs. Dubose, who, with the help of Jem's reading lessons, was battling her morphine addiction before she died. As Atticus explains what makes such an act courageous, Scout is able to connect this story with Atticus's own courage. In school she has learned a limited definition of courage, one that is restricted to war heroes and to those who face violence and physical danger. She is still having to adjust her expectations for what counts as courage as Atticus defines it: adhering to one's ethical principles, regardless of how unpopular those principles may be.

☝ The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience.

Related Characters: Atticus Finch (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 140

Explanation and Analysis

Atticus is attempting to explain to Scout and Jem what it is that made Mrs. Dubose's quiet, persistence fight against morphine so courageous. His reference to "majority rule" reflects his own expertise as a lawyer, deeply schooled in the Constitution and in the laws and history of the country.

In the United States, of course, we live legally by majority rule – a majority elects a president, a majority of politicians vote for our laws, and even in a jury, a majority can convince the minority enough to ensure a unanimous sentence. Usually, this process works well enough, and Atticus obviously isn't calling for a radical dissolution of majority rule.

Still, he shows in his comments here both that there are profound weaknesses to the idea of majority rule, and that there are other, significant elements of human existence – a person's conscience, for instance – that don't abide by this standard. Majority rule, for instance, pays little attention to ideas that may be unpopular, so it can confirm existing prejudices. Atticus suggests, however, that a person's conscience always knows, deep down, what is good and evil, what is right and wrong. On an individual level, then, one must fight against what on a social level is accepted and widespread.

☝ It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do.

Related Characters: Atticus Finch (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

As in the rest of his lesson to Jem and Scout, here Atticus emphasizes what to him is the true definition of courage, a definition that, he is aware, could easily seem counterintuitive to them. He is focusing on the concrete example of Mrs. Dubose, a woman who may certainly be prejudiced, but in other ways is courageous (and so his willingness to recognize her courage is also part of Atticus's nuanced, complex understanding of the meaning of good and evil).

Here, Atticus expresses a bit more optimism than he does elsewhere. Courage means persisting, seeing something through even if – perhaps especially when – you know that you are most likely to fail. But Atticus also suggests that such a process is not *absolutely* condemned to failure. Indeed, holding out hope that you may win can be a powerful way to motivate yourself, even while remaining realistic and committed despite overwhelming odds.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ Lula stopped, but she said, "You ain't got no business bringin' white chillun here—they got their church, we got our'n. It is our church, ain't it, Miss Cal?"

... When I looked down the pathway again, Lula was gone. In her place was a solid mass of colored people.

One of them stepped from the crowd. It was Zeebo, the garbage collector. "Mister Jem," he said, "we're mighty glad to have you all here. Don't pay no 'tention to Lula, she's contentious because Reverend Sykes threatened to church her. She's a troublemaker from way back, got fancy ideas an' haughty ways—we're mighty glad to have you all."

Related Characters: Lula (speaker), Jean Louise Finch (Scout), Jeremy Atticus Finch (Jem), Calpurnia, Reverend Sykes

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 158-159

Explanation and Analysis

Calpurnia has invited Jem and Scout to her all-black church while Atticus is away at the state legislature. This passage pins one woman, Lula, who is suspicious of the white children's presence, against the rest of the congregation, which welcomes them. Lula is portrayed as being just as prejudiced as the white people in town, just as susceptible to judging people on the basis of their skin color rather than of their character. In this sense, the rest of the congregation is shown to surmount this small-mindedness and embrace the inherent human dignity in welcoming guests into their home or place of worship.

Nonetheless, another way to interpret this passage would involve making a distinction between the kind of "prejudice" Lula shows and the kind shown by the white members of the town. The black people in Maycomb are discriminated against and restricted in almost every facet of their lives – their church is among the only places where they can feel secure and at home. It is understandable, therefore, for Lula to express suspicion at white children interrupting this small sanctuary in a town that seems to have little room or desire for people like her. As children, of course, Jem and Scout haven't played any kind of active role in creating this double standard, but Lula's reaction only underlines how deep and structural are the inequalities that persist in the town. The novel itself does not seem to recognize this latter view of Lula's position, but that might be taken as a criticism of the novel rather than a defense of it.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ 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.

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout) (speaker), Aunt Alexandra

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

Aunt Alexandra has moved into the Finch home because she believes that Scout needs more of a "feminine" influence. In addition, she begins to try to inculcate Scout with some of her own social values, values that stress class and family history over character and behavior. The Finches have, indeed, lived in Maycomb for a long time, and Alexandra believes that this means they are inherently superior to other people who have not been around for so long in the town. The way Scout describes this belief – "squatting on one patch of land" – makes clear through its tone just how skeptical she is of Alexandra's ideas.

In other situations, Scout's childhood innocence is shown to revert back to easy prejudice, such that her father must teach her a better, more nuanced, and less prejudiced way of thinking. Here, however, her innocence makes her see *more* clearly, making it obvious to the reader as well just how silly the idea of moral superiority based on land ownership or family history really is.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝☝ Dill's eyes flickered at Jem, and Jem looked at the floor. Then he rose and broke the remaining code of our childhood. He went out of the room and down the hall. "Atticus," his voice was distant, "can you come here a minute, sir?"



Beneath its sweat-streaked dirt Dill's face went white. I felt sick.

...

Jem was standing in a corner of the room, looking like the traitor he was. "Dill, I had to tell him," he said. "You can't run three hundred miles off without your mother knowin'!"

We left him without a word.

Related Characters: Jeremy Atticus Finch (Jem) (speaker), Jean Louise Finch (Scout), Atticus Finch, Charles Baker Harris (Dill)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 187-188

Explanation and Analysis

Dill has run away from his own house in a town that is quite some distance away, and has snuck into the Finch's home, where Jem has found him hiding under the bed. As Scout watches, Jem calls to their father in order to tell him that Dill is here. Immediately, a line is drawn between Jem, on the one hand, and Scout and Dill, on the other.

Scout takes it for granted that one must never tell on another child – that there are secrets that can't be shared with adults. Jem, however, no longer adheres to this assumption: instead, he acts based on the knowledge that Dill's parents will be worried about him, and that it's the right thing to do to tell Atticus that Dill is here. From Scout's perspective, Jem is a traitor, but this is because she is still a child, while he has begun to grow up. The book doesn't necessarily paint adulthood as always better and more advanced than childhood, but it does suggest that moving into adulthood is an important step, one that Scout isn't yet ready to take.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☝ "Well how do you know we ain't Negroes?"

"Uncle Jack Finch says we really don't know. He says as far as he can trace back the Finches we ain't, but for all he knows we mighta come straight out of Ethiopia durin' the Old Testament."

"Well if we came out durin' the Old Testament it's too long ago to matter."

"That's what I thought," said Jem, "but around here once you have a drop of Negro blood, that makes you all black."

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout) (speaker), Jeremy Atticus Finch (Jem)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

Amid the excitement around the trial that's about to start, Jem and Scout talk about their own family history. In Scout's childhood innocence, once again, it becomes clear just how silly it is to seek to draw hard-and-fast borders between races, and to proclaim moral differences based on something so fragile. After all, every human being, ultimately, originated from Africa, and not only can one can never with any certitude trace one's own family history back in order to prove racial "purity" – the very idea of racial purity, as this passage shows, is simply absurd.

Jem, slightly older than Scout, is aware both of how senseless the idea of racial purity is, as well as how entrenched an idea it is in this small town anyway. The idea that even one small "drop" of blackness makes you black – that is, according to the town's logic, morally inferior – gives the townspeople a black-and-white way to look at racial relations, and a pseudo-scientific definition to bolster their own prejudice.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☝ "The way that man called him 'boy' all the time an' sneered at him, an' looked around at the jury every time he answered – ... It ain't right, somehow it ain't right to do 'em that way. Hasn't anybody got any business talkin' like that – it just makes me sick."

Related Characters: Charles Baker Harris (Dill) (speaker), Tom Robinson, Mr. Gilmer

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 266

Explanation and Analysis

Dill has begun to cry in the courtroom during the trial of Tom Robinson, so Scout takes him outside. They had been listening to the prosecutor Mr. Gilmer's cross-examination of Tom Robinson. Gilmer – making little attempt to introduce hard evidence with which to convict the defendant – has been essentially trying to bait the jury into succumbing to racism in order to convict him. Dill cannot stand to hear the way Mr. Gilmer is talking to Tom Robinson: for him, the lawyer is essentially treating Tom as a different, inferior species.

An advantage of having a child narrate *To Kill A Mockingbird*, and in having other children populate the novel, is that we as readers can look with fresh eyes at appalling prejudices in American society. We may be in

danger of growing accustomed to these prejudices, of assuming that they are simply the way the world works. Part of Dill's distraught feelings stem from the dawning realization, as he and Scout grow up, that this *is* the way the world works: but the way in which he rebels against what is given reminds us of the danger of becoming complacent, and forgetting just how shocking such prejudices really are.

☝ "If you had a clear conscience, why were you scared?"

"Like I says before, it weren't safe for any nigger to be in a—fix like that."

"But you weren't in a fix—you testified that you were resisting Miss Ewell. Were you so scared that she'd hurt you, you ran, a big buck like you?"

"No suh, I's scared I'd be in court, just like I am now."

"Scared of arrest, scared you'd have to face up to what you did?"

"No suh, scared I'd hafta face up to what I didn't do."

Related Characters: Tom Robinson (speaker), Mayella Ewell, Mr. Gilmer

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 265

Explanation and Analysis

As Mr. Gilmer cross-examines Tom, he is trying to make the jury give in to its racist prejudices and assume that Tom must be guilty, even in the absence of any proof. One way he does this is by suggesting that Tom must have run away because he was guilty. Here, though, Tom reminds Mr. Gilmer and the rest of the audience that for black people in the South, any uncertain situation would almost certainly be blamed on them.

As he and Mr. Gilmer go back and forth, it becomes ever clearer that Gilmer is, purposely or not, misunderstanding Tom. Tom is attempting to refer to the societal assumption that all black men must be guilty – and, indeed, that that is why he finds himself in court now. Mr. Gilmer, for his part, stubbornly clings to this very assumption of guilt whose prejudiced bases Tom is referencing, and so Gilmer takes everything Tom says as an indication that Tom is guilty.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☝ They've done it before and they did it tonight and they'll do it again and when they do it—seems that only children weep.

Related Characters: Atticus Finch (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 285

Explanation and Analysis

Jem tells Atticus that he can't understand how the jury could have convicted Tom Robinson based on the evidence and based on the arguments from Atticus and from Mr. Gilmer. Here, Atticus implicitly returns to what he told his children at the very beginning, and has repeated again and again: that good will won't necessarily conquer evil, and that sometimes prejudice will win out over both evidence and human dignity.

While Atticus has done his best to educate Jem and Scout so that they lose some of the weaknesses and errors of childhood, here he shows himself to be convinced that childhood holds some major moral advantages over adulthood. Children are still innocent enough – they still have been little enough affected by the world – to be able to notice and be devastated when something unjust happens. Unlike adults, they have not yet learned to grow bitter or even just used to the way things are. This state of shock and anger, Atticus implies, is a powerful reminder for adults not to become complacent.

Chapter 24 Quotes

☝ "Oh child, those poor Mrunas," she said, and was off. Few other questions would be necessary.

Mrs. Merriweather's large brown eyes always filled with tears when she considered the oppressed. "Living in that jungle with nobody but J. Grimes Everett," she said. "Not a white person'll go near 'em but that saintly J. Grimes Everett."

Related Characters: Mrs. Grace Merriweather (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 308

Explanation and Analysis

Aunt Alexandra has invited company to the house, and Scout is helping with serving the guests. Here, Mrs. Grace Merriweather is beginning to talk about the "oppressed"

people of Africa, whom she has such pity and compassion for. However, this passage and the ones that follow make clear that Mrs. Merriweather's so-called compassion is nothing else but another form of prejudice.

On the one hand, Mrs. Merriweather speaks with tears in her eyes about the plight of African people, even while she snaps at the African-American servants and cares little about the fate of Tom Robinson. On the other hand, even her attitude towards Africans is condescending and ultimately rests on her conviction in her own superiority, and on the superiority of white people in general. Scout is, little by little, equipped with the tools to understand this prejudice and to distance herself from it.

Chapter 25 Quotes

●● Atticus had used every tool available to free men to save Tom Robinson, but in the secret courts of men's hearts Atticus had no case. Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed.

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout) (speaker), Atticus Finch, Tom Robinson, Mayella Ewell

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 323

Explanation and Analysis

As Scout reads Mr. Underwood's editorial, which compares Tom Robinson to a mockingbird, she thinks about how prejudiced and wrong the blasé attitude of the rest of Maycomb is. Maycomb residents think Mr. Underwood is just trying to be "poetic," but here Scout summarizes what she really believes to be the lesson of the piece. Atticus's battle against prejudice had lost, not because he wasn't a good enough lawyer, and not because he didn't provide sufficient evidence to make the case for Tom's innocence, but because prejudice was so ingrained in the hearts of Maycomb people that they would never be able to be convinced that Tom wasn't guilty. In this context, any time black people are accused of anything, guilt will be the presumption – a danger that Scout is only beginning, soberly, to recognize.


●● [Jem] was certainly never cruel to animals, but I had never known his charity to embrace the insect world.

"Why couldn't I mash him?" I asked.

"Because they don't bother you," Jem answered in the darkness. He had turned out his reading light.

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout), Jeremy Atticus Finch (Jem) (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 320

Explanation and Analysis

Scout has been poking at a roly-poly bug, preparing to smash it, but Jem has stopped her. She pays attention to him because he's her older brother, but she's also confused as to why he has forbidden her this game. However, by the end of the passage Scout (as well as we readers) should recognize the parallel that Jem is making. He is expanding the definition of "mockingbird" to include any living creature that cannot defend itself, that should be protected rather than destroyed. By only applying the lesson of the mockingbird to some things – people rather than animals, for instance – the significance and power of this attitude is lost.

Once again, as Jem and Scout both grow up over the course of the story, in some ways Jem leads Scout. Several years older than her, he must grapple with the lessons about good, evil, and how to treat other people on his own, even as his sister slowly comes to understand what he does as well.

Chapter 31 Quotes

☞ A boy trudged down the sidewalk dragging a fishing pole behind him. A man stood waiting with his hands on his hips. Summertime, and his children played in the front yard with their friend, enacting a strange little drama of their own invention. It was fall, and his children fought on the sidewalk in front of Mrs. Dubose's. . . . Fall, and his children trotted to and fro around the corner, the day's woes and triumphs on their faces. They stopped at an oak tree, delighted, puzzled, apprehensive. Winter, and his children shivered at the front gate, silhouetted against a blazing house. Winter, and a man walked into the street, dropped his glasses, and shot a dog. Summer, and he watched his children's heart break. Autumn again, and Boo's children needed him. Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough.

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout) (speaker), Jeremy Atticus Finch (Jem), Atticus Finch, Arthur Radley (Boo), Charles Baker Harris (Dill), Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 374

Explanation and Analysis

After Bob Ewell's attack on the Scout and Jem was thwarted by Boo Radley, Scout accompanies Boo Radley back to his house. She pauses on the Radley porch and looks out at the street. Briefly, we relive the entire trajectory of the novel, from the most significant highlights to the descriptions of everyday life in Maycomb, but through Boo Radley's eyes from within his house. Atticus's lesson, which Scout has remembered from long ago, was that you shouldn't judge someone based on first impressions: instead, you should try to see things from his or her perspective, try to really understand the person behind the appearance. Now she tries to do so, seeing herself and Jem as if they were someone else's children, viewed by a sympathetic stranger.

Of course, Scout has not really pierced Boo Radley's character – she hasn't really gotten to know him – merely by standing on his porch. But her revision of the events of the last year or so are a child's earnest attempt to try. She sees

how Boo Radley could have developed a close emotional connection to her and her family even without ever speaking with them. The goodness and empathy that he shows is not on the surface, in the way he talks or looks, but in fact is far more profound.

☞ When they finally saw him, why he hadn't done any of those things . . . Atticus, he was real nice. . . ." His hands were under my chin, pulling up the cover, tucking it around me. "Most people are, Scout, when you finally see them." He turned out the light and went into Jem's room. He would be there all night, and he would be there when Jem waked up in the morning.

Related Characters: Jean Louise Finch (Scout), Atticus Finch (speaker), Jeremy Atticus Finch (Jem), Arthur Radley (Boo)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 376

Explanation and Analysis

Back at the family home, Scout tries to explain to Atticus what she has realized about Boo Radley: that all the suspicious rumors and prejudice against him actually have no basis in fact. Atticus is not shocked by this revelation. Indeed, he has told the children not to judge people before they stand in their shoes not so that they wait to judge *until* they understand better, but rather so that they learn that they have little right to judge at all. Atticus believes deeply that most people are good at heart, but are led astray by prejudice and by temptation. He is not naive – he does recognize the existence of evil in the world that must be fought against – but for him this evil is not located permanently in specific people but rather moves around, always able to insert itself in a given situation, but always able to be challenged as well.

Scout and Jem have, through the events of the novel, learned to take such a subtle approach to good and evil as well. They have lost much of their childhood innocence as a result. Still, having gained these difficult lessons, they are still in a transition period between childhood and adulthood. Atticus's great gift to them is to accompany them through this transition, watching over them as they make it.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The narrator, Jean Louise Finch, who goes by the nickname Scout, begins to tell the story of how her brother Jem broke his arm. She starts with her family history: Simon Finch fled England to escape religious persecution. In America, he bought some slaves and built a plantation called Finch's Landing on the banks of the Alabama River. Finch's Landing passed from son to son until the present generation, when Scout's father, Atticus, became a lawyer in Maycomb, Alabama. Her Uncle Jack is a doctor in Boston, while her Aunt Alexandra runs Finch's Landing.

Maycomb is a small Southern town suffering through the Great Depression. The Finch's aren't rich, but they are comfortable enough. A black woman named Calpurnia cooks and helps Atticus with the children during the day. Atticus's wife died when Scout was two.

One year when Scout is six and Jem is nine, a small and imaginative seven-year-old named Charles "Dill" Baker Harris comes to spend the summer with Miss Rachel Haverford, his aunt and the Finch's neighbor. The children become friends.

Soon, Dill becomes fascinated with the nearby Radley house, and more particularly with the legendary Boo Radley who lives inside. As Maycomb legend tells it, Boo got into trouble with the law as a youth and was shut up in his house by his father. Fifteen years later Boo stabbed his father in the leg with a pair of scissors, but his father refused to send Boo to an asylum. No one had seen Boo since, but he supposedly comes out at night and eats cats and things like that. After Boo's father died, his brother, Nathan Radley, came to run the house.

Dill tries to think of ways to get Boo to come out, but settles on a dare: he'll give Jem a *Gray Ghost* comic book touches the Radley house. Jem does it. Scout thinks she sees someone watching them from behind a curtain inside the house.

Through the story of Simon Finch, the opening of Mockingbird touches on the hypocrisy, racial prejudice, and the evil men do to each other that in general and in Maycomb. Finch's religion made him a persecuted man in England, but rather than shun persecution in all its forms, as soon as he came to America he bought slaves in order to make himself rich.



Description of the main characters of the story and their place in Maycomb. Also note how young Jem and Scout are: Part One of Mockingbird is about youth and growing up.



With his small stature and intense imagination Dill is both a character and a symbol for childhood.



Because they're kids, Scout, Jem, and Dill accept town legends as truth and have a simple (and simplistic) idea of good and evil: Boo is evil; their other neighbors are good. The town legend about Boo also shows a glimpse of Maycomb life, where everyone knows each other's business and history and gossips about it as entertainment. It also shows how Maycomb treats those who are different.



Scout's sighting of movement in the Radley house is her first connection to Boo. Also, note the comic book. It will make a second appearance in Mockingbird, providing a link back to this innocent time.



CHAPTER 2

When summer ends, Dill returns to Mississippi. Scout starts her first year of school. She hates it from the first day. Her teacher, a newcomer to the town named Miss Caroline, actually criticizes Scout for knowing how to read.

Just before lunch, Miss Caroline discovers that one boy, Walter Cunningham, has brought no food and does not go home to eat. Miss Caroline offers to lend Walter a quarter, but he refuses. Scout tries to explain that the Cunningham's are so poor they couldn't pay Miss Caroline back, and that Miss Caroline is "shaming" Walter by trying to force the quarter on him. Miss Caroline gets annoyed and "whips" Scout by tapping her palm with a ruler.

Mockingbird depicts standardized education as rigid to the point of absurdity. Miss Caroline's criticism of Scout's reading ability is a case in point.



This episode establishes that there are economic differences between families in Maycomb. At this point, Scout simply accepts such differences as the way things are; she feels neither sympathy nor prejudice toward Walter. Miss Caroline's "whipping" of Scout for explaining about Walter shows how out of touch Miss Caroline is.



CHAPTER 3

Outside, Scout beats Walter up because helping him got her into trouble. Jem stops her, and invites Walter to come eat at their house.

During lunch, Walter talks with Atticus about farm work like a grown up. He says he can't pass first grade because he has to help his father in the fields.

As he eats, Walter pours molasses all over his food. Scout is disgusted and says so. Calpurnia pulls her from the table and scolds her, saying Scout should never comment on someone's "ways like you was so high and mighty."

Back at school, Miss Caroline screams when she sees a louse in the hair of a filthy boy named Burris Ewell. She tries to send him home to wash his hair, but Burris says he's "done his time for the year." A kid in the class explains that all the Ewell's come to school one day a year to keep the truant officer off their backs, then never come back.

That night, when Scout says that Miss Caroline wants her to stop reading at home, Atticus counsels that instead of getting angry, Scout should try standing in Miss Caroline's skin to see things from her point of view. He also says he'll keep reading with Scout if she keeps quiet about it.

As an older child, Jem is less inclined than Scout to settle things with his fists.



Scout's prejudice that poor people are dumb is shown to be wrong. Poor people are just poor.



Scout is quick to judge anything different from her way of doing things. Calpurnia, though, insists that Walter, and by extension all people who are different, deserve respect.



*The nasty, brutish, and dirty Burris Ewell serves as the introduction to the Ewell clan, who will play a much bigger role in the second half of *Mockingbird*.*



Scout's first exposure to Atticus's belief in trying to understand and respect other peoples' point of view. Atticus's willingness to keep reading with her, though, shows he doesn't just bow down to authority.



CHAPTER 4

One day, while running past the Radley house on her way home from school, Scout notices some gum in the knothole of a tree overhanging the Radley's fence. And on the last day of school, Scout and Jem find two old pennies in the same knothole. Jem stares at the Radley place, deep in thought.

The three-year age difference makes Jem more perceptive than Scout. Scout doesn't know who's leaving the presents, while Jem's long look at the Radley House indicates he senses Boo is trying to connect with them.



Dill arrives for the summer. After an accident rolling a tire that leaves Scout lying on the pavement right next to the Radley's house, Jem comes up with a new game: they're going to act out Boo Radley's story. Atticus catches them playing. Jem lies and says they weren't impersonating the Radley's.

In the children's blissful world, Boo Radley continues to be their obsession. Jem's lie to Atticus shows that though he thinks of himself as an adult, he is still selfish and irresponsible like a child.



CHAPTER 5

Jem and Dill start excluding Scout, who begins to spend more time with Miss Maudie Atkinson, a neighbor who grew up with Atticus. One evening, Scout asks Miss Maudie why Boo Radley never comes out. Miss Maudie says it's because Boo doesn't want to. She says Boo was always polite as a boy, and that Boo's father was a Baptist so religious he thought all pleasure was a sin.

Miss Maudie, like Atticus, helps teach the children to question prejudice and treat people with respect. Here she provides details that start to transform Boo from a one-dimensional monster to a human being damaged by his father's intolerance and lack of love and joy.



The next day, Dill and Jem get Scout to help them try to slip a note through a window of the Radley house with a fishing rod. Atticus catches them and tells them to stop bothering Boo Radley just because he seems peculiar.

Atticus warns the children not to mistreat people because they're different. Instead, he implies, respect them.



CHAPTER 6

On Dill's last night in Maycomb, he and Jem decide to peek into the Radley house. Scout, terrified, tags along. They sneak behind the Radley house, but see the shape of a man on the back porch and run. A shotgun fires behind them. As they duck under the Radley fence, Jem's pants get caught. He leaves his pants behind.

Despite all these lessons, the kids continue to be kids.



The shotgun blast—Nathan Radley had shot into the air—wakes the neighborhood. Jem's missing pants cause suspicion, but the kids says Jem lost them playing strip poker with matches. Late that night, Jem sneaks out and retrieves his pants, and returns home unharmed.

Once again, the kids lie to protect themselves from punishment. Note, though, that even though their lie is feeble, Atticus takes them at their word. Atticus practices what he preaches: respect.



CHAPTER 7

Scout starts second grade, which is as bad as first grade. One day as they walk home from school, Jem tells Scout that when he went back to get his pants, they had been mended and folded.

Scout and Jem continue to find things in the knothole of the tree: twine, soap carved to look like them, gum, and a broken watch on a chain. Jem proposes they write a letter and leave it in the knothole.

But the next day Nathan Radley cements the knothole. He says the tree was dying, but Atticus tells Jem it wasn't. Jem stares at the Radley house for a long time. Scout thinks he might be crying, but can't understand why.

The folded and mended pants teach Jem that Boo is not some monster. Jem never again torments Boo.



Jem understands Boo is communicating through the gifts and wants to communicate back, to give thanks.



Jem is starting to grow up: he understands the tragedy of Boo's efforts at communication being blocked. Scout, though, still doesn't realize who's leaving them gifts.



CHAPTER 8

That winter it snows in Maycomb for the first time since 1885. Scout and Jem use dirt covered with snow to make a snowman that looks remarkably like Mr. Avery, an unfriendly neighbor. Atticus is impressed, but then sees the resemblance and kindly asks them to disguise the snowman a little bit better.

The snow makes it cold, and everyone keeps their fires blazing. That night Miss Maudie's house catches fire. Everyone in the neighborhood pitches in to save what they can, but the house burns to the ground. Miss Maudie says the house was too big anyway.

Scout and Jem watch the fire from in front of the Radley house down the street. When they come inside, Scout discovers that someone has draped a blanket over her shoulders. Jem says it must have been Boo Radley who gave her the blanket.

This is another instance of Atticus protecting the dignity of another person.



Here's Maycomb at its best: neighbors helping each other. But the fire also marks the end of innocence. The rest of Mockingbird is dominated by the trial of Tom Robinson.



Jem has grown out of seeing Boo as a monster; he can imagine Boo being kind. Boo's protection of Scout foreshadows future protective action.



CHAPTER 9

Students at school start saying that Atticus "defends niggers." When Scout asks why, Atticus says he's defending a black man named Tom Robinson. Atticus says he won't win the case, but has to take it in order to keep his integrity. He cautions Scout that people, even their friends, might say dirty things to her, and tells her to keep her head up and avoid fighting. Scout does. It's the first time she's ever walked away from a fight.

Scout and Jem begin to see the prejudice that is as much a part of Maycomb as the kindness they've long known. Atticus teaches both tolerance and courage: he never stops thinking of those who disagree with him as friends, but also refuses to let them stop him from fighting for what's right.



Every Christmas, Uncle Jack comes down to Maycomb from Boston and all the Finch's gather at Finch's landing to spend the holidays with Scout's dreaded Aunt Alexandra and her awful grandson Francis. At Finch's landing, Francis calls Atticus a "nigger-lover." Scout punches him, and Francis claims she hit him for no reason and also cursed at him. Uncle Jack spans her.

The prejudice against blacks in Maycomb is so strong that even family members blame Atticus for defending Tom.



Back in Maycomb, Scout tells Uncle Jack why she hit Francis, but makes him promise not to say anything because Atticus said she shouldn't fight anyone over the Tom Robinson case. Later that night, Scout overhears Jack telling Atticus he doesn't understand children. Atticus says you have to be honest with them.

Jack learns the same lessons about human dignity and respect that Scout is learning. Jack punished Scout without first "stepping into her skin," so he didn't know she'd acted for good reason.



Then Atticus says the trial will be bad, since "reasonable people go mad when anything involving" a black person comes up. He says the trial will be particularly tough on Jem and Scout.

Atticus understands how prejudice can warp people.



CHAPTER 10

Atticus is older than other kids' parents, and Scout and Jem are sometimes embarrassed by their father's bookishness. When he gave Jem and Scout the air rifles they wanted for Christmas he didn't teach them how to shoot, instead only telling them not to shoot at mockingbirds, since it's a sin to kill a mockingbird. Miss Atkinson explains: all [mockingbirds](#) do is sing and create beauty and pleasure, so it's a sin to hurt them.

In a complicated world of good and evil, mockingbirds are one of the few things that are entirely good. The mockingbird, which gives the novel its title, is therefore a symbol of innocence and purity. Anyone in the novel who is purely innocent is a kind of mockingbird.



One day a rabid dog appears on the Finch's street. It's still far off, and Heck Tate, the sheriff of Maycomb, says only Atticus is marksmen enough to hit the dog from such a distance. Atticus kills the dog in one shot. Scout and Jem, astonished, learn that when Atticus was young he was the best shot in the county. Scout wants to brag at school, but Jem says not to: if Atticus was proud of it he would have told them.

Jem is growing up much more quickly now than Scout. He understands that honor and courage are about humility and service, not pride. Scout, meanwhile, just wants to brag.



CHAPTER 11

One day, Mrs. Dubose, an old woman who harasses Scout and Jem whenever they walk past her house, condemns Atticus for defending Tom Robinson. Jem, enraged, rips the flowers off her camellia bushes.

Though Jem is growing up, he isn't an adult yet: he can't control his emotions.



As punishment, Atticus makes Jem go and read to Mrs. Dubose each afternoon. Scout goes with him. At first, each reading session is cut short by Mrs. Dubose's strange fits, but over the month the sessions get longer and the fits slowly disappear. Soon after the reading sessions end, Mrs. Dubose dies. She leaves Jem a single white camellia flower. Jem is horrified, but Atticus explains that Mrs. Dubose was addicted to morphine and the reading sessions helped her kick the habit before she died. Even though Mrs. Dubose ridiculed Atticus for defending Tom Robinson, he calls her the most courageous person he ever knew, a person who knew she was beaten and still fought no matter what.

Mrs. Dubose and her battle with her morphine addiction allow Atticus to teach Jem and Scout a lesson about both courage and human dignity. Yes, Atticus admits, Mrs. Dubose is prejudiced. But she is also courageous; fighting a battle against morphine she knows is both right and probably a lost cause. Atticus wants his kids to realize that courage isn't strength or skill with a gun, it's standing up for what's right no matter what.



CHAPTER 12

Summer finally comes, but Scout is crushed when Dill doesn't arrive because his mother got remarried. To make matters worse, Atticus has to leave for two weeks to serve in the state legislature.

By keeping Dill, a symbol of childhood innocence, away from Maycomb, Lee signals that innocence is ending.



Calpurnia, who's in charge when Atticus is away, invites Scout and Jem to attend her church that Sunday. The all-black congregation gladly welcomes the Finch kids, except for one woman Lula, who gets angry that Calpurnia brought white kids to their church.

Lee presents Lula's anger at Calpurnia and the children as wholly wrong—as just another form of prejudice. This stance that "prejudice is bad and wrong no matter what" is an attractive and simple one, but in the context of American society (particularly in the South) it can be overly simplistic. Given the treatment of blacks in Maycomb, Lula has good reason to be mistrustful of whites, and to be angry that white people have entered a place of black safety and solidarity. Since one side (the white side) has all the power, the argument that "everyone should just get along" also functions as an argument to maintain the status quo—that which keeps whites powerful and blacks powerless.



During the service, the congregation gathers money to support Helen, Tom Robinson's wife. Scout realizes Tom Robinson is the man Atticus is defending, and asks what he did. Calpurnia tells her: Tom has been accused by Bob Ewell of raping his daughter. Scout doesn't know what "rape" means, but can't believe anyone would trust the Ewells.

As a child and Atticus's daughter, Scout's view of the world hasn't been warped by racism. Her shock that anyone could trust the Ewells indicts the white people who trust Bob Ewell over Tom simply because Ewell is white.



CHAPTER 13

Scout, Jem, and Calpurnia return from church to discover that Aunt Alexandra has moved into the Finch's house to provide "feminine influence" for Scout.

Alexandra has decided Scout is not enough of a girl, a kind of gender prejudice.



Alexandra is proud of the Finch family's social status in Maycomb, and immediately begins to socialize in Maycomb. Scout thinks good people are defined by doing the best they can with what they have, but Alexandra seems to believe that the older a family's history, the better the family is. Alexandra even forces Atticus to teach Scout and Jem about their family history. But this strange change in Atticus makes Scout cry, and with relief he gives up.

Scout's inability to understand the logic behind Alexandra's insistence on the value of social class reveals that there actually isn't any logic. Instead, this worldview is just another form of prejudice, this time economic and social..



CHAPTER 14

As the summer progresses, Scout and Jem notice grownups in Maycomb talking about them. Scout hears the word "rape" again, and asks Atticus what it is. He tells her.

Most adults would duck Scout's question. But Atticus is true to his beliefs: he's honest with children.



Scout's question leads to the story of going to Calpurnia's church. Aunt Alexandra is horrified. She and Atticus have an argument about Calpurnia. Alexandria thinks Calpurnia is no longer necessary. Atticus says she's part of the family.

Another instance of Alexandra's social and racial prejudice.



That night, Jem tells Scout not to antagonize Aunt Alexandra, but Scout objects to him telling her what to do. They fight. Atticus sends them both to bed. Scout steps on something while climbing into bed, and, with Jem, discovers Dill hiding under her bed. Though Dill wants to keep his presence secret, Jem tells Atticus.

Jem's decision to tell Atticus that Dill is hiding under Scout's bed marks a break with childhood. Jem used to lie to hide his and the other kid's antics from Atticus. No longer.



Atticus tells Miss Rachel Haverford where Dill is, but lets Dill spend the night. Dill sleeps in Scout's room, and tells her he ran away from home because his recently married parents aren't much interested in him and wanted him to do things on his own.

In other words, Dill's parents want him to grow up. Dill has run away from home to avoid growing up.



CHAPTER 15

A week later, Heck Tate comes to the Finch's front lawn with a group of men to talk to Atticus. Tom Robinson is to be moved to the Maycomb jail and Heck says there might be trouble.

As the trial comes closer, prejudice increases until it threatens to become violence.



Jem gets scared someone might try to hurt Atticus. When Atticus drives into town the next night, Jem, Scout, and Dill sneak out after him. They finally spot Atticus sitting alone, reading, outside the jail. Just then, four cars drive up and a group of men surrounds Atticus. Scout, unsure what's happening, runs over to Atticus, followed by Jem and Dill. The men tell Atticus he has fifteen seconds to send his kids away. Jem refuses to budge. Scout spots Mr. Cunningham and asks him to say hi to Walter for her. Mr. Cunningham stares at her for a second, then bends down. He says he'll say hi to Walter, then tells the men to clear out.

Once the men have left, Tom Robinson asks from his cell if the men are gone. Mr. Underwood, the publisher and writer of the Maycomb newspaper, leans out his office window holding a double-barreled shotgun and calls out that he had Atticus covered.

CHAPTER 16

At breakfast the next morning, the day of the trial, Atticus says that Mr. Underwood never liked black people, which makes his behavior of the previous night seem odd to Scout.

Jem declares Mr Cunningham would have killed Atticus the previous night. But Atticus says Mr. Cunningham just has his blind spots like everyone else, and is still a friend.

People from all over Maycomb head for the courthouse, including some Baptists who quote the bible condemning Miss Maudie Atkinson for keeping a garden. She quotes a bible verse right back at them which proves her garden is actually beautiful in God's eyes.

Though Atticus tells Jem, Scout, and Dill that they shouldn't attend the trial, they sneak in. They arrive late, and can only find seats in the balcony where the black people have to sit. Judge Taylor is presiding, and Heck Tate is already on the stand.

In her childish misunderstanding of what's going on, Scout reminds Mr. Cunningham of his own human dignity by asking him questions about his son, Walter. To put it another way, Scout gets lucky. Jem, on the other hand, has no illusions about what's going on: he refuses Atticus's command to leave because he wants to help protect both Atticus and Tom. Jem's action is the courageous action of an adult facing a conflict.



Mr. Underwood shows that in Maycomb there are people in addition to Atticus who can see past racism.



Underwood did what's right even though he's a racist. Like Mrs. Dubose, Underwood fought against himself and won.



Atticus respects the dignity of people who meant to harm him.



The baptists condemn Miss Maudie just for enjoying flowers! Intolerance is made to look ridiculous.



The black people welcome Jem, Scout, and Dill, though the white people are not welcoming of blacks and segregate them in the balcony.



CHAPTER 17

Mr. Gilmer, the prosecutor, questions Tate, who recalls Bob Ewell saying that Tom Robinson had raped Mayella Ewell. Atticus cross-examines: Tate says the right side of Mayella's face was heavily bruised. Next, Bob Ewell is called to the stand. He is arrogant and unpleasant, and gets reprimanded by Judge Taylor. Chastened, he tells Mr. Gilmer about finding Tom Robinson raping his daughter. Atticus cross-examines: he tricks Ewell into writing his name, which reveals that Ewell is left-handed. Ewell is furious. Jem says: "We got 'em," because a left-handed man is more likely to bruise the right side of someone's face.

Though Jem is growing up, he still has childish beliefs. For instance, he thinks that mere evidence will be enough to exonerate Tom. Of course, in a perfect world Jem's innocent belief would be accurate: evidence would be enough to save Tom. Jem's childish innocence therefore functions as a condemnation of the racist adult society of Maycomb.



CHAPTER 18

Mayella Ewell is called to the stand. She testifies that she asked Tom Robinson to chop up a dresser in return for a quarter, and that when she turned around Tom attacked and raped her. In cross-examination, Atticus shows that Mayella is terribly lonely. When Atticus asks Mayella to identify Tom, and Tom stands up, it becomes clear that Tom's left arm is useless: it was destroyed in an accident. If Tom can't use his left arm, then how could he have beaten and raped Mayella? Atticus asks Mayella wasn't Bob Ewell the person who beat her? Mayella refuses to answer.

Now the evidence is definitive: with just one arm, and that arm his right arm, it is physically impossible for Tom to have battered the left side of Mayella's face. If the jury convicts Tom now, the only possible explanation is that racism either consciously or unconsciously affected the views of the jury-members.



CHAPTER 19

Atticus calls Tom Robinson to the stand. Tom says he often helped Mayella with chores. On this occasion, he says, Mayella threw herself at him. He tried to leave, but was scared to push her out of the way. Suddenly, Bob Ewell showed up and yelled at Mayella, "You goddamn whore, I'll kill ya." Tom ran.

In Tom's portrayal of her, Mayella comes to seem less like a cruel criminal and more like another victim. Tom relates to her as another human, and on those grounds feels sorry for her.



Link Deas, stands up in the crowd and says that Tom is a good man. Judge Taylor expels Deas from the courthouse.

Link Deas is also unaffected by racism, perhaps because he knows Tom personally.



Mr. Gilmer cross-examines. He calls Tom "boy" in a nasty tone, and tricks Tom into saying he felt sorry for Mayella, which causes a murmur of anger and disgust in the courtroom. Mr. Gilmer asks why Tom ran if he was innocent. Tom says that a black man has to run in any bad situation.

The evidence is in Tom's favor, so Gilmer bases his entire case on racism. He twists Tom's words to make it seem that Tom feels superior to Mayella, something racists can't abide.



Dill starts to cry and Scout takes him outside. Dill says he can't stand the way Gilmer was talking to Tom.

As a child, Dill can't accept and condemns the way adults treat each other without dignity.



CHAPTER 20

Outside the courthouse, Mr. Dolphus Raymond sympathizes with Dill about the way white people treat black people without even stopping to think that blacks are people too. Raymond is an eccentric rich white man. He gets little respect from the white people in the town because he's always drunk and lives with a black woman and has fathered interracial children. But Dill and Scout learn that Raymond isn't actually a drunk: he only drinks Coca-cola. Mr. Raymond explains that he fakes being a drunk so people won't bother him for living the way he wants.

Atticus is making his closing remarks when Dill and Scout get back to their seats. Atticus notes the prosecution's lack of evidence, then says the courtroom is the one place in America where every man is equal, and asks the jury to "do its duty."

Mr. Raymond is another man who sees the evil of racism. But rather than confront it, like Atticus, he hides from the confrontation behind lies.



Atticus, in effect, is saying that courts are the only place where a person is granted his dignity and prejudice can be combatted.



CHAPTER 21

Calpurnia enters the courtroom. She tells Atticus that Jem, Scout, and Dill are missing. Mr. Underwood says they're sitting in the balcony. Atticus tells them to go home and eat lunch, but relents and says they can come back for the verdict if it hasn't already been delivered.

An hour later, Scout, Jem, and Dill get back to the silent, tense courtroom. The jury is still deliberating. Jem is confident of victory because all the evidence is in Tom's favor.

Heck Tate calls the court to order. The jury comes back and does not look at Tom. Scout knows this means the verdict is guilty. It is.

Atticus wanted to protect Jem and Scout from the anger and racism of the trial. But now he sees they can't be protected, and so he lets them return.



Jem continues to naively believe in the impartiality of the court.



Racism triumphs over evidence.



CHAPTER 22

Jem cries. He can't understand how the jury could convict Tom. Atticus says they've done it before and they'll do it again and only the children will weep.

The next morning, the Finches wake to discover that the black community of Maycomb has brought them baskets of food in thanks for Atticus's defense of Tom.

Weeping innocent children is a condemnation of the wickedness and weakness of adults.



Though Atticus lost the case, the black community understands the risk he took standing up to racism.



That afternoon, Jem tells Miss Maudie he used to think the people of Maycomb were the best people in the world, but no longer does. Miss Maudie says the trial was a step in the right direction, and that there are good people in Maycomb. For instance, it's no coincidence Judge Taylor appointed Atticus to take Tom's case.

It's not just people who deserve their dignity. Maycomb does as well. Most of Maycomb's citizens prefer safety to confronting moral inequality, but some fight the good fight, and the town is slowly changing. It's good and bad.



Suddenly Miss Stephanie Crawford runs up with gossip: Bob Ewell just threatened Atticus and spit in his face.

Everyday small-town gossip returns, though with a dark edge.



CHAPTER 23

Jem and Scout are terrified Ewell will attack Atticus. Atticus, thinks Ewell has already gotten the need for revenge out of his system, though Aunt Alexandra isn't so sure.

Atticus grants even Ewell the respect of trying to understand his position.



Meanwhile, Tom Robinson is in prison. Atticus thinks he has a good shot of winning on appeal. If he loses, though, Tom will be executed. When Jem expresses disdain for the jury that convicted Tom, Atticus says that one man on the jury, a Cunningham, almost voted for acquittal. This news inspires Scout to declare she's going to invite Walter Cunningham to dinner, but Aunt Alexandra forbids it. She says the Finches are too good for the Cunninghams.

Though Miss Maudie's point that Maycomb is changing is persuasive, that change is slow. Even after the obvious lessons the trial taught about the idiocy and danger of racist prejudice, Aunt Alexandra continues to hold onto her prejudices about class difference.



Later that night, Scout and Jem try to figure out why people are prejudiced. They come up with all sorts of reasons but none seems sufficient. Jem realizes Boo Radley stays in his house because he wants to.

Again, the kids' inability to understand prejudice proves prejudice makes no sense. The adult world is corrupt and senseless, and that's why Boo wants nothing to do with it.



CHAPTER 24

One Saturday, Aunt Alexandra invites company, and tells Scout to help Calpurnia serve. At the event, Mrs. Grace Merriweather talks about helping the poor oppressed people of Africa, then turns around and blames "some people" for her maid's "sulkiness" since the Tom Robinson trial. Miss Maudie shames the woman for talking badly about Atticus while enjoying his hospitality.

Mrs. Merriweather exemplifies the hypocrisy of Maycomb. She talks about "helping" the people of Africa, but she'd never treat them as equals, as indicated by her condescending attitude toward the black people of Maycomb.



Just then, Atticus comes home and tells Calpurnia, Aunt Alexandra, Miss Maudie, and Scout that Tom tried to escape from prison and was killed. Calpurnia leaves with him. Aunt Alexandra, Miss Maudie, and Scout return to the party and act as if nothing has happened.

Scout had thought courage was only a part of male life. But there is something courageous in denying Mrs. Merriweather the pleasure of hearing what's happened to Tom.



CHAPTER 25

A few nights later, Scout spots a roly-poly bug. Jem won't let her squash it because it didn't do anything to her. Scout remembers that Jem was present when Atticus told Helen Robinson that Tom had died, and Helen collapsed in grief.

The events of the trial have forced Jem to grow up. He no longer tolerates casual cruelty and respects all life, even insects.



That Thursday, Mr. Underwood publishes an editorial in his newspaper comparing Tom's death to the "senseless slaughter of songbirds."

Tom is implicitly compared to a mockingbird.



When he hears Tom has died, Bob Ewell is overheard saying "one down and about two more to go." The rest of the white people in Maycomb think it's just like a black man to try and escape even though he has an appeal pending, and soon moves on to other things.

Maycomb still hides behind racism. Tom ran because he'd lost hope in the justice system, and for good reason. But the people of Maycomb just think of him as a black man who has no sense.



CHAPTER 26

School starts. As a third grader, Scout is no longer frightened of Boo Radley. She is confused, however, when the town, which was so set against Atticus defending Tom, reelects him to the state legislature that year.

Even though Maycomb reviled Atticus for defending Tom, it seems to recognize that he's necessary. He's the town's courage and conscience.



In school, Scout's class discusses Nazi Germany. Scout asks Jem why her teacher, Miss Gates, would say persecuting the Jews is awful when she seemed so happy after Tom Robinson got convicted. Jem shouts at Scout never to talk about the trial again.

Maycomb's blindness is once again made visible. The people criticize the Nazis' murderous prejudice, but don't even recognize their own.



CHAPTER 27

Over the next few weeks: Bob Ewell gets a job and gets fired for laziness within days; Judge Taylor hears a scratching at his back door and sees a shadow running off; Ewell follows and curses at Helen Robinson until Link Deas threatens him to stop or else.

The novel builds suspense as Ewell becomes consumed by hate. He's lost his dignity...



Aunt Alexandra thinks Ewell has a grudge against everyone involved in the trial. But Atticus says Ewell will calm down when the weather cools. For Halloween that year, there's a pageant at Scout's school. Scout is to be a giant ham—her costume is made of wire and cloth. Atticus and Aunt Alexandra are too tired to attend the pageant, though, so Jem takes her.

*...but Atticus doesn't realize it and continues to trust that Ewell will act rationally. This is the one time in all of *Mockingbird* when Atticus is wrong.*



CHAPTER 28

The night is dark. On the way to the pageant Cecil Jacobs jumps from behind a bush and scares Scout and Jem. Then Scout falls asleep and misses her cue to go onstage and is so embarrassed she doesn't want to leave when people are around.

As Jem and Scout walk home alone (Scout still in her costume) they hear a noise, and then are attacked. Jem fights back, but is thrown and screams. The assailant squeezes Scout, but then suddenly she's somehow free. Scout feels for Jem, but touches a strange unshaven face that smells like whiskey. In the distance, she can see a man she doesn't recognize carrying Jem toward her house, and Atticus running out to meet him. Atticus calls for Dr. Reynolds and Heck Tate. Dr. Reynolds examines Jem and says he has a broken arm but will be okay. Heck Tate arrives with news that Bob Ewell is dead.

Cecil's joking attack foreshadows Ewell's later attack. What a child knows to do only as a joke, an adult does seriously.



Bob Ewell attacks Scout and Jem to get back at Atticus. Hate and prejudice consumed him entirely until he attempted perhaps the most heinous and cowardly act known to man: murdering a child.



CHAPTER 29

Scout tells Heck Tate everything that happened, and as she does realizes that the pale man standing in the corner of the room is the person who saved her. Then she realizes that he's Boo Radley, and says "Hey, Boo."

Scout is growing up. Her casual greeting of Boo shows that this man she once thought was a monster she now accepts as a person.



CHAPTER 30

Atticus is sure Jem killed Bob Ewell and doesn't want it covered up. But Tate says that Jem didn't kill Ewell. Boo Radley did. As sheriff, Tate decides that Boo was saving other people's lives and doesn't need more attention. Atticus asks Scout if she understands. Scout says she does: bringing attention to Boo would be like shooting a mockingbird.

Scout realizes that Boo stays in his house because he's an innocent, unable to deal with the messiness and sadness of the outside world. Like the mockingbird, he left this house only to help others, and therefore deserves no pain or torment.



CHAPTER 31

A little later, Scout escorts Boo back to the Radley House. After Boo has gone inside, she looks out at the street from his porch, and sees the street as Boo must have been watching it for so many years.

For an instant, Scout literally stands in Boo's skin and feels his dignity. She has learned Atticus's lesson.



When she gets back, Atticus is reading in Jem's room. Scout asks Atticus to read to her and rests her head against his knee. He picks up at random one of Jem's comic books, the *Gray Ghost*, the book Dill gave Jem years earlier. Atticus reads until she falls sleep, knowing full well that Atticus will sit there until Jem wakes up the next morning.

The novel ends as it began, in innocence. But this innocence is earned. Scout and Jem now understand the world's good and evil, and so, for a moment, they can retreat into the love of their family before facing the world again tomorrow.



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