

To Kill a Mockingbird



BACKGROUND INFO

AUTHOR BIO

Full Name: Nelle Harper Lee

Pen Name: Harper Lee

Date of Birth: 1926

Place of Birth: Monroeville, Alabama

Brief Life Story: 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.

KEY FACTS

Full Title: *To Kill a Mockingbird*

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

Protagonist: Scout

Antagonist: Bob Ewell

Point of View: First person; Scout is looking back at the events of the novel from some unspecified future time.

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

When Written: 1950-1960

Where Written: New York City and Monroeville, Alabama

When Published: 1960

Literary Period: Modernism

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 adventures force them to see the unfairness and brutality of their community and society, particularly in regard to the treatment of blacks.

Related Historical Events: 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.

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 Finch's. 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.



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 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.

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

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.

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 Finch's. 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.

Burrus Ewell – A son of Bob Ewell.

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



THEMES

GOOD, EVIL, AND HUMAN DIGNITY

To Kill a Mockingbird is largely remembered 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 on 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

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

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.



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.



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."



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.



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



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.

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.

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.



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 Cunninghams 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.

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.

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



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.

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



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."

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.



SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

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.

*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.*



Maycomb is a small Southern town suffering through the Great Depression. The Finches 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.

*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.*



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.

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



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

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



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.

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.

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



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.

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



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.

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.

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



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.

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.



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.

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 spansks 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, Mockingbird 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.

Though most of the black congregation welcomes Jem and Scout, Lula shows that racism and prejudice cut both ways.



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.

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.



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.

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



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**.

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



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.

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



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.

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



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.

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.

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 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."

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.

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



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.

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



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.

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.

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



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**.

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 thinks 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.

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



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.

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.

