

To Kill a Mockingbird

Written by Harper Lee

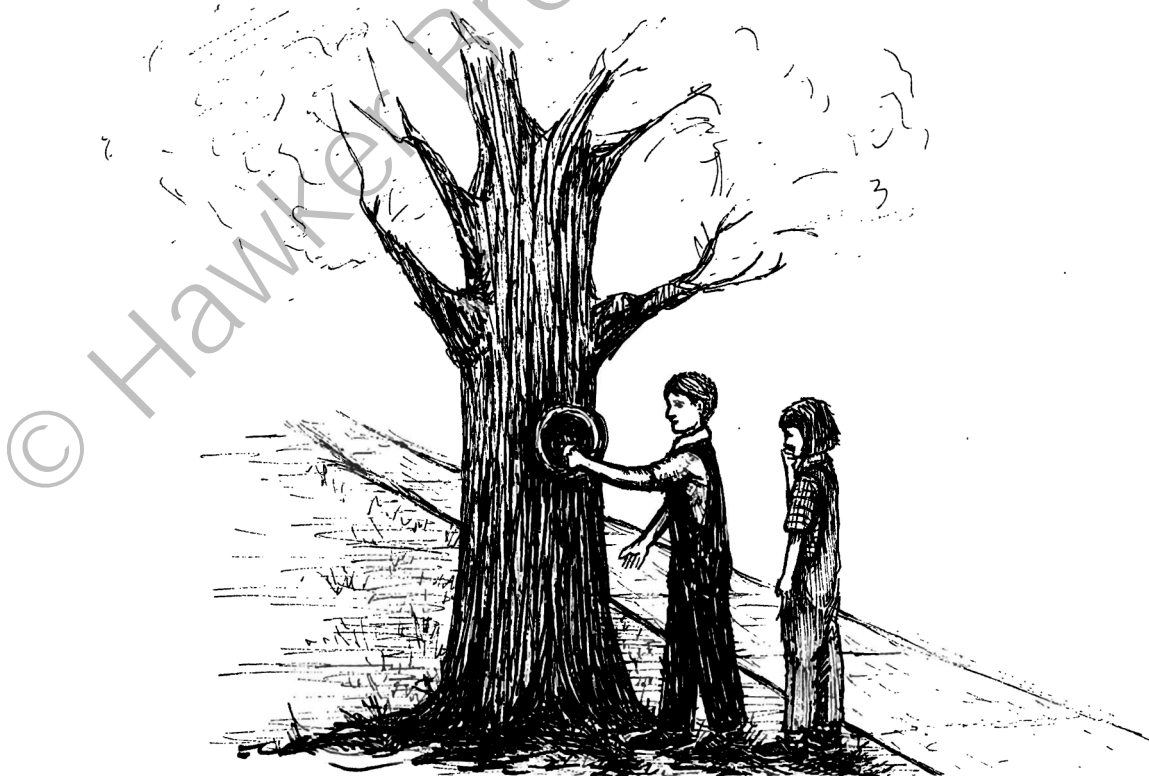
STORY SUMMARY

This story is set in Alabama in the USA from 1933 to 1935. It is told in retrospect by Jean Louise (Scout) Finch, beginning with events that occurred when she was six years old and her brother Jem was ten.

There are two main plots. The first revolves around Arthur (Boo) Radley, a neighbourhood recluse. Rumours about him abound, and Scout, Jem and their friend Dill are involved in several games and pranks centring around him and their desire to get him out of his house. As the story progresses, the children begin to form their own opinions about Boo, who appears to be the source of several acts of kindness. They also come to realise that their earlier actions were insensitive and even cruel.

The second plot revolves around Scout and Jem's father, Atticus. Atticus is a lawyer defending Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of raping a white girl. Scout and Jem become aware of the prejudices and racism that exist. The miscarriage of justice that results from that racism has a great impact upon them both.

When the girl's drunken father, Bob Ewell, seeks revenge upon Atticus for defending Tom Robinson, the two plots come together. Bob Ewell attacks the children on their way home from a Halloween pageant. Arthur Radley kills Mr Ewell and rescues the children. The sheriff, realising that Arthur killed only in order to save the children and knowing that the ordeal of a trial would be too much for him, decides to report that Mr Ewell fell on his own knife. By the time the story ends, both Scout and Jem have matured greatly!



Meet the Author

Harper Lee



Harper Lee, the youngest of three siblings, was born on 28 April 1926, in Monroeville, Alabama in the United States. Her parents were Amasa and Francis Finch Lee. From the time she was a young child, Harper loved to read. She attended local schools until 1944, when she enrolled in Huntington College in Montgomery. She attended Oxford University in England for a year as a Fulbright scholar. From 1945 to 1949 Harper studied law at the University of Alabama, but she withdrew before attaining her law degree.

In 1950 Ms Lee moved to New York City. There she worked as an airline reservation clerk—first for Eastern Airlines and then for British Overseas Air Corporation, where she stayed for several years. Finally, she quit her job to devote all of her time to writing.

To Kill a Mockingbird was originally meant to be a series of short stories; however, Ms Lee's agent persuaded her to expand the work into a complete novel. When she submitted it to J.B. Lippincott in 1957, the publisher thought it was still too much like a series of short stories. She rewrote it again! In 1960, the book was finally published. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1961. In 1962 it was released as an Oscar-winning movie starring Gregory Peck.

Harper Lee drew on her childhood experiences in writing *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Her father, Frances Finch Lee, was a lawyer. She modelled the character Atticus Finch after him. Many of the other characters, too, were based upon her recollections of people she had known growing up. Maycomb, the fictional town where the story was set, greatly resembled Harper Lee's home town of Monroeville.

Although *To Kill a Mockingbird* was her only published novel, Harper Lee will always be remembered as a great American novelist. Indeed, her book has become a classic work of literature! It's studied in classrooms the world over, including right here in Australia.

Pre-Reading Information

Legal Terms

In this book you will come across many legal terms. Fill in the blanks with the appropriate terms from the box to complete these definitions. You may need to use your dictionary.

acquittal appeal contempt convict cross-examine
defendant evidence jury litigant prosecute
solicitor subpoena testify testimony verdict venue

1. The locality from which a jury is called and in which a trial is held is the _____.
2. A(n) _____ is a legal writ requiring one's appearance in court.
3. A(n) _____ is a body of persons sworn to hear a case and hand down a verdict.
4. The chief law officer in a city, town or government department is a(n) _____.
5. One who is engaged in a lawsuit is a(n) _____.
6. To _____ is to bear witness under oath.
7. One against whom an action is brought is a(n) _____.
8. _____ is a declaration of fact given before a court.
9. To question a witness already examined by the opposing side is to _____.
10. Open disrespect toward the authority of a court of law is _____.
11. _____ is statements, documents and objects admissible as testimony.
12. To initiate legal or court action against someone is to _____.
13. The decision reached by a jury is the _____.
14. A(n) _____ is the judgment of a jury or judge that a person is not guilty.
15. To _____ is to request a transfer of a case to a higher court for a new trial.
16. To _____ is to find guilty by verdict of a court.

Chapter Twenty-Six:

1. Scout showed evidence of her growing maturity when she felt a “twinge of remorse” when passing by the Radley Place. Explain.

2. What was ironic about Miss Gate’s harsh censure of Hitler’s persecution of the Jews?

3. Analyse Jem’s inability to discuss anything to do with the court house.

Chapter Twenty-Seven:

1. What three things happened to further frustrate Bob Ewell?

2. NRA is an acronym for the National Recovery Act. To whom did Atticus refer when he said that “nine old men” killed the NRA? You may need to research this American term.

3. There was a feeling of apprehension at the end of this chapter. What elements helped create this mood?

ANSWERS

Pre-Reading Activity

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|-------------|--------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| 1. venue | 4. solicitor | 7. defendant | 10. contempt | 13. verdict | 16. convict |
| 2. subpoena | 5. litigant | 8. testimony | 11. evidence | 14. acquittal | |
| 3. jury | 6. testify | 9. cross-examine | 12. prosecute | 15. appeal | |

Chapters One, Two and Three: Vocabulary

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|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. D | 3. N | 5. P | 7. L | 9. Q | 11. O | 13. H | 15. I | 17. K |
| 2. G | 4. J | 6. R | 8. A | 10. E | 12. B | 14. C | 16. F | 18. M |

Chapter One: Comprehension and Discussion Questions (Answers may vary.)

1. The author used Scout Finch as first-person narrator. Scout tells the story in retrospect, beginning with events that occurred when she was six years old. In telling the story, Scout uses a great deal of realistic dialogue. This dialogue is in the present tense and gives readers the feeling that the story is unfolding before them. From the start, there is a sense of foreboding, for she begins by telling us that Jem was badly injured. We know that the events she is about to relate will lead to that injury!
2. The story takes place in the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama. It begins in 1933. Although we are not actually told the year, there is a clue regarding President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1933 inaugural address: "Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself."
3. It was the Depression. "There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with." Readers are told that tradition was very important in the South of that era. The short family history, so important in Southern tradition, was a source of shame to some members of the Finch family. Also, [here have been several breaks with tradition: Atticus Finch had broken with tradition by leaving Finch's Landing. There is the sense that he might again break with tradition. Also breaking with tradition were the Radleys. A sense of mystery and foreboding was established with the description of the Radley home and the malevolent phantom! Readers are introduced to the prejudices that existed. "The sheriff hadn't the heart to put him [Boo] in jail alongside Negroes." Another tradition of prejudice existed: the stereotyping of families. "But they were Haverfords, in Maycomb County a name synonymous with jackass."
4. The three role-played different characters from novels. When they got bored with that, Dill got the idea to try to get the recluse Boo Radley to come out of his house.

Chapter Two Comprehension and Discussion Questions (Answers may vary.)

1. Satire is the use of wit, irony or sarcasm to expose or ridicule a vice or folly. The author satirised education—specifically, the preoccupation with the processes of proper education. Miss Caroline was annoyed that Scout had learned to read and write before entering school. Also, she satirised a system that imposes values upon the students. As shown by her choice of story, the teacher did not relate to her students' culture.
2. Scout tried to explain to Miss Caroline why Walter couldn't accept her quarter. The Cunninghams were very proud. Although they couldn't pay for services with cash, they always paid back with goods. For example, Mr Cunningham partially paid Atticus for his legal services with a load of stovewood.
3. Answers will vary, but she probably felt overwhelmed. She was trying her best to implement what she had been taught; however, she was in a new environment amongst people whose culture she did not understand.

Chapter Three: Comprehension and Discussion Questions (Answers may vary.)

1. Scout had a temper. She was quick to blame Walter for her problem in school and was ready to fight. Jem was more mature. He treated Walter kindly and with respect. Scout wasn't too tactful when she commented on Walter's eating habits. She said, "He's just a Cunningham." She was quick to label families.
2. In the first chapter, Scout said in regard to the events leading to Jem's injury, "I maintain that the Ewells started it all." In this chapter Little Chuck explained, "Ain't got no mother and their paw's right contentious."
3. Answers will vary.
4. Answers will vary, but the following should be included: She seemed intelligent. She taught Scout to write. She was well spoken, except when flustered. She was polite and treated others with respect and kindness. She was a strict disciplinarian and reprimanded Scout when Scout was rude to others. She seemed to be a big help to Atticus in raising the children. She had a great deal of affection for the children.
5. If Scout agreed that it was necessary to go to school, Atticus would continue to read with her every night.

Chapters Four, Five and Six: Vocabulary

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|----------------|----------------|------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. ramshackle | 4. asinine | 7. evasion | 10. quibble | 13. inquisitive |
| 2. edification | 5. pestilence | 8. tacit | 11. probate | 14. auspicious |
| 3. arbitrated | 6. scuppernogs | 9. parcel | 12. contradicted | 15. offended |

Chapter Four: Comprehension and Discussion Questions (Answers may vary.)

1. Many will probably guess that Boo had been putting the gifts in the tree. Jem, too, probably suspected Boo. "He looked for a long time at the Radley Place. He seemed to be thinking again."
2. They were role-playing the Radleys. "It was a melancholy little drama, woven from bits and scraps of gossip and neighbourhood legend." Jem probably knew that Atticus would object to their game. In Chapter One we learned that Atticus had told Jem to "mind his own business and let the Radleys mind theirs".
3. Scout had been anxious all along because she was afraid Boo would get them. She believed that Atticus knew what they had been doing. Also, she had heard laughing coming from the Radley house.

Chapter Five: Comprehension and Discussion Questions (Answers may vary)

1. Jem and Dill had grown closer and were excluding Scout from many of their activities. A chameleon is a lizard capable of changing its colour to blend with its environment. During the day Miss Maudie dressed in overalls and an old straw hat to work in her garden. In the evening she was transformed into a beautiful lady.