

Study Questions and Commentary for Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*

(Includes Crossword Puzzle & Suggested Thesis for Essay)



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Chapter 1

1. What is the background of the Finch family? Are they an "important" family, or not?
2. What is Atticus' attitude towards Maycomb?
3. Why do people make up stories about Boo Radley, and why are they fascinated with him?
4. What do you think this phrase means? "From the day Mr. Radley took Arthur home, people said the house died." What literary term/concept do you think this phrase exemplifies?
5. Note the irony of Jem's "reasonable" description of Boo Radley. How is the narrator ironic to call it "reasonable"?

Chapter 2

1. How does Jem and Scout's relationship change, when she starts school?
2. The narrator says that "Winston County seceded from Alabama" after the state of Alabama had seceded from the Union before the Civil War. This means that Winston County sided with the North in the Civil War.
3. What is Scout's conflict with Miss Caroline? Why doesn't she get along with her?
4. How are the Cunninghams different from other people whom Scout knows?
5. The "Crash" refers to the stock market crash of 1929 which began the Great Depression, a time of great poverty.

Chapter 3

1. Explain how Jem and Scout's opposite reactions to Walter Cunningham reveal their differing levels of maturity and understanding.
2. Why do people let Mr. Ewell trap out of season? What does it tell you about the community?

Chapter 4

1. Why do you think Scout's relationship to Cal has changed?
2. Why do you think so much of this chapter is about the game, "One Man's Family"? Think of specific events for your response.

Query: What do the types of characters we've read about so far tell us about Maycomb and the Southern culture in which this book is set?

Chapter 5

1. Describe Miss Maudie's personality and her relationship to Scout.
2. What do you think a "foot washin' Baptist" is? In other words, how is that kind of person different than other Christians in Maycomb?
3. What does Miss Maudie mean when she says, "[B]ut sometimes the Bible in the hand of one man is worse than a whiskey bottle in the hand of--oh, of your father."

4. Why do you think the story includes the discussion between Scout and Miss Maudie regarding the stories about Boo Radley? How does this conversation develop the plot and/or characters?
5. What does Scout try to tell Jem when they get ready to put the note on the window sill at the Radley's house? Do you think she should have told him? Do you think it's important? Why or why not?
6. What does Dill say his reason is for trying to get Boo to come out is? Do you believe him?
7. Why do you think Atticus gets into a "lawyerly argument" with Jem? There could be several reasons.

Chapter 6

1. Why do you think that Jem has waited to pull a trick on the Radleys?
2. What story do Jem and Dill concoct to explain Jem's missing pants? Why is this story funny and rather ironic?
3. Why is it so important to Jem to go back and get his pants? What does this say about him? Is he successful?

Chapter 7

1. Do you think that any of the adults suspect that the children are the ones who went into the Radley's garden? Defend your answer with facts from the story. This answer is up for grabs, so make your choice and defend it.
2. Be able to discuss the process Jem and Scout go through before they decide the items, such as the twine, are theirs. What do you think the significance of the spelling bee medal is? Finally, how does their finding of the soap figures change our understanding of the hidden items?
3. Why do you think Jem cries when the knot-hole is filled with cement?

Chapter 8

1. Give some examples of *regionalism* in this chapter: what are some specific ways in which we see the culture of the South and Maycomb? Remember that traits of regionalism are

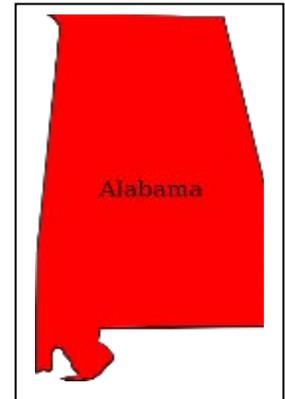
Special customs

Values

Speech patterns/language

Nature and buildings, etc.

2. What does Atticus mean when he tells Jem, "You've committed near libel here in the front yard. We've got to disguise this fellow"?
3. Who puts the blanket on Scout while she and Jem wait in front of the Radley's?



Chapter 9

1. What does Atticus mean when he responds to Scout's question about whether he will win the case? Notice that although the Civil War was over more than 60 years previously, everyone in Maycomb, including Scout, knows about it and is loyal to the "Confederate" or Southern side, which lost the war, of defending Tom Robinson when he says, "Simply because we were licked a hundred years ago is no reason for us not to try to win." After Atticus talks to Scout and explains that "we aren't fighting the Yankees, we're fighting our friends," Scout decides that she will stop fighting Cecil because she doesn't want to let Atticus down. Why do you think she draws this conclusion?
2. What is Maycomb's "usual disease"?
3. Note the new characters we are introduced to at Christmas in this chapter. Note how Lee uses the events of Christmas to move the plot along to a new place and prepare us for the next important events in the novel.

Chapter 10

1. Why is it a sin to kill a mockingbird, and how do you think this phrase relates to the story as a metaphor?
2. Be prepared to discuss what kind of "tone" the following passage expresses. Also, is it an example of regionalism?

"Nothing is more deadly than a deserted waiting street. The trees were still, the mockingbirds were silent, the carpenters at Miss Maudie's house had vanished. I heard Mr. Tate sniff, then blow his nose. I saw him shift his gun to the crook of his arm. I saw Miss Stephanie Crawford's face framed in the glass window of her front door. Miss Maudie appeared and stood beside her. Atticus put his foot on the rung of a chair and rubbed his hand slowly down the side of his thigh."

3. How do Scout and Jem's attitudes towards Atticus change after they learn of his "hidden skill" in this chapter? Why do you think Atticus doesn't tell them of his ability? (This is answered elsewhere.)
4. Why do you think Jem doesn't want Scout to tell anyone about Atticus' recent heroism?

Chapter 11

1. What do you think of the situation with Mrs. Dubose? Do you think that the "punishment" Jem receives is a proper punishment? Would you have sent your child to spend time every week with a morphine addict? Why or why not?
2. What is Atticus' explanation for why he wants Jem to spend this time with Mrs. Dubose?



Ben Shahn, photographer, 1935 New York Public library Digital ID: 1260002

Chapter 12

1. Contrast Calpurnia's church to the white church in as many ways as you can.
2. Why does Cal speak differently when she is with her fellow black people?
3. How had Cal learned to read?

Chapter 13

1. What does Scout/the narrator mean when she says regarding Aunt Alexandra's suitcase, "I heard the suitcase hit the bedroom floor with a thump. The sound had a dull permanence about it."
2. Scout says that Aunt Alexandra "traveled in state." This means that she traveled as if she were important royalty, with attendant servants, etc.
3. Why do you think Aunt Alexandra has come to visit for a while? Do you think Scout is correct that it was Aunt Alexandra's idea, and not Atticus'? Why or why not? (You can argue both sides of this one!)
4. Atticus says that he believes "this summer's going to be a hot one." What do you think he might mean by this statement?
5. What does Jem mean when he says, "Aunty better watch how she talks—scratch most folks in Maycomb and they're kin to us"?
6. Why do you think Aunt Alexandra is so concerned with the heredity of the family?
7. How and why is Maycomb different than many Alabama towns of its size?
8. Scout says that there was a "caste system" in Maycomb. Based on her description of it, what do you think this is?
9. What does Scout mean when she says, "It was a sad thing that my father had neglected to tell me about the Finch Family, or to instill any pride into his children." Do you think that she means this? Explain.
10. Can you explain the result of Atticus' discussion with Scout and Jem? What do you think Atticus means by his remark as he leaves the room? Why is Aunt Alexandra so anxious now to impress the children with their heritage?

Chapter 14

1. Scout says that when she tells Atticus about the visit she and Jem had at Calpurnia's church, Atticus seems to enjoy it, but Aunt Alexandra seems upset by it. Why do you think they have these differing reactions?
2. Why do you think Jem tells Scout not to antagonize Aunty, after they both have heard Atticus have a strong disagreement with Aunt Alexandra about Calpurnia?
3. Why is Scout happy that Jem fights back when she punches him?
4. Do you think all of Dill's story is true? Or part of it? If so, which part or parts?
5. Dill tells Scout that his parents just aren't interested in him. What does Scout realize after thinking for a bit about his comment?
6. When Scout wonders why Boo Radley doesn't run away, what is Dill's response, and what does this tell you about him? Where has Dill been able to run when he has needed help?

Chapter 15

1. "Change of venue" means that the trial would be conducted in a different county, where people would probably not be so emotional and prejudiced. Mr. Tate suggests this as a way to stop the potential violence that may lie ahead.
2. What does Scout mean when she says, "This was Atticus's dangerous question"?
3. What are Atticus's responses to Jem's concerns about a gang or the Klan?
4. Why is Jem afraid? How does this build suspense? What *tone* does this create in the story?
5. Why has Atticus gone to the jail?
6. Why do you think Jem refuses to go home when Atticus orders him to do so?
7. Why do you think Scout's words stop the men from doing what they have intended to do at the jail?

Chapter 16

1. How is Atticus changing, from what Scout notices?
2. What is Atticus' explanation of Mr. Cunningham and the mob?
3. Why do people parade past the Finches the morning of the trial's beginning?
4. What is Jem's explanation for why mixed children are sad?
5. What is the importance of Jem's comment that "around here once you have a drop of Negro blood, that makes you all black"?
6. Scout gives a brief history of the architecture of the courthouse. It was originally built in the classical Greek manner, like our buildings in Washington, D. C. are. Then in the 19th century, after it burned down, it was rebuilt in the Gothic manner. This architecture was overly elaborate and rather heavy and depressing in nature. Scout says that "Greek columns clashed with a big nineteenth-century clock tower housing a rusty unreliable instrument, a view indicating a people determined to preserve every physical scrap of the past." How does this information help us to understand Maycomb? How does it contribute to the tone of the book?

Chapter 18

1. What pattern does Scout begin to see Atticus' questions are building up for the jury?
2. In what way does Mayella seem confused when Atticus asks her about her previous testimony where she has said "he caught me and choked me and took advantage of me"?
3. What does Atticus suggest in his questioning of Mayella?
4. Note the **pathetic fallacy** as Scout notes the high temperature.

Chapter 19

1. What realization comes to Scout about Mayella Ewell as Tom Robinson gives his testimony? How does this show a change in Scout?
2. Why has Mayella sent the children to town? Does Tom understand her reason for this?
3. What does Scout mean when she says that she realizes that Tom's manners as good as Atticus'?
4. Why doesn't the jury like it when Tom Robinson says he felt sorry for Mayella?
5. Why do you think Dill starts to cry?
6. Explain Scout's remark to Dill when she says that Atticus is "the same in the courtroom as he is on the public streets."

Chapter 20

1. Why does Dolphus Raymond tell the children his "secret"? Why does he allow the town to believe he is a drunkard, when he is not?
2. In his closing remarks to the jury, what does Atticus accuse Mayella of doing?
3. Be prepared to discuss Atticus' remarks regarding Tom's testimony about feeling sorry for Mayella, and the view of many whites that "all negroes lie."
4. What is the one way in which we are all equal, according to Atticus?

Chapter 21

1. What do you think Atticus thinks of the children's presence at court? What is Cal's reaction?
2. What is Aunt Alexandra's response, based on her behavior at dinner?
3. Why is Jem so sure that the jury will find Tom innocent?
4. The author sets a particular tone with her description of the courtroom as they wait for the jury's verdict. Be prepared to discuss what you think this tone is.
5. What does this simile do to help set the tone and express Scout's feelings?" What happens after that has a dreamlike quality: "**in a dream I saw the jury return, moving like underwater swimmers,**" and Judge Taylor's voice came from far away and was tiny"?
6. Why do you think the jury has convicted Tom Robinson?

Chapter 22

1. What does Atticus mean when he tells Aunt Alexandra that the events at the courthouse are "just as much Maycomb Count as any missionary teas"?
2. Why is Atticus so moved by the gifts of the black community?
3. Can you explain why Miss Stephanie is so worked up about the children' having been in court in the Colored balcony? What ideas does she imply?
4. What do you think Jem means when he uses this simile: It's like bein' a caterpillar in a cocoon, that's what it is. . . Like somethin' asleep wrapped up in a warm place."
6. What does Miss Maudie say to Jem to try to encourage him? How does he respond?
7. Why do you think Dill wants to be a clown?
8. What danger do you think may be coming?

Chapter 23

1. Why do you think Atticus refuses to fight Bob Ewell? What are the children's reactions?
2. Explain Atticus' explanation of Ewell's behavior to Jem.
3. What is Atticus' explanation for why the jury has convicted Tom?
4. What do you think Atticus means by this statement: "There's nothing more sickening to me than a low-grade white man who'll take advantage of a Negro's ignorance. Don't fool yourselves--it' s all adding up and one of these days we're going to pay the bill for it"?
5. Why do the responsible citizens of Maycomb not serve on juries?
6. Why is Atticus a bit encouraged by the jury's behavior? Who does he believe is responsible for the jury's consideration of Tom's case?
7. Why won't Aunt Alexandra let Scout invite Walter to visit?
8. What is Jem's explanation for how the Finch family is different than the Cunningham's? Is he onto something? What do you think?

Chapter 24

1. What do we learn about Mrs. Merriweather about the response in the black community to Tom's conviction? Contrast her comments to her missionary activities.
2. Are you surprised at Aunt Alexandra's response to Mrs. Merriweather's racist comments? What does it tell you about Aunt Alexandra?
3. In what way or ways has Scout grown up through this chapter?

Chapter 25

1. What do you think Scout means when she says that "Jem was the one who was getting more like a girl every day, not I."
2. Be prepared to discuss the various attitudes of Maycomb residents towards Tom's death, including the attitude of Mr. B. B. Underwood, as reflected in his editorial?

Chapter 26

1. What do you think Scout means when she says she "sometimes felt a twinge of remorse" when passing by the Radley's home? How has her attitude changed?
2. Why do you think the residents of the area have reelected Atticus to the state legislature, when they have been so critical of his support of Tom Robinson?
3. What does Scout notice about Miss Gates that is hypocritical? Why does Jem react so violently when Scout asks him about it?

Chapter 27

1. How does Atticus explain Bob Ewell's threatening actions towards Tom Robinson's widow?
2. The National Recovery Act was a policy established by President Roosevelt during the years of the Great Depression. It had to do with attempting to help businesses succeed but was eventually considered to be a failure. The "nine old men" Atticus refers to are the nine justices of the Supreme Court.
3. The phrase Aunt Alexandra quotes, "Somebody just walked over my grave" means that a person has a premonition that something bad is going to happen.

Chapters 28-29

1. Why have Jem and Scout been attacked? Who has saved them?

Chapter 30

1. Who has killed Mr. Ewell? Be prepared to discuss Sheriff Tate's attitude towards this event and why wishes to spare the killer any publicity.

Chapter 31

1. How do Scout's actions towards Boo show that she has grown past her childhood prejudices?
2. Be prepared to discuss the importance of Atticus' words to Scout at the end of the book when he responds to her comment that Boo is "real nice" by saying, "Most people are, Scout, when you finally see them."



To Kill a Mockingbird Paper Topic & Thesis

Suggested thesis, along with introductory paragraph. Student may use this paragraph as a “map” for writing an essay.

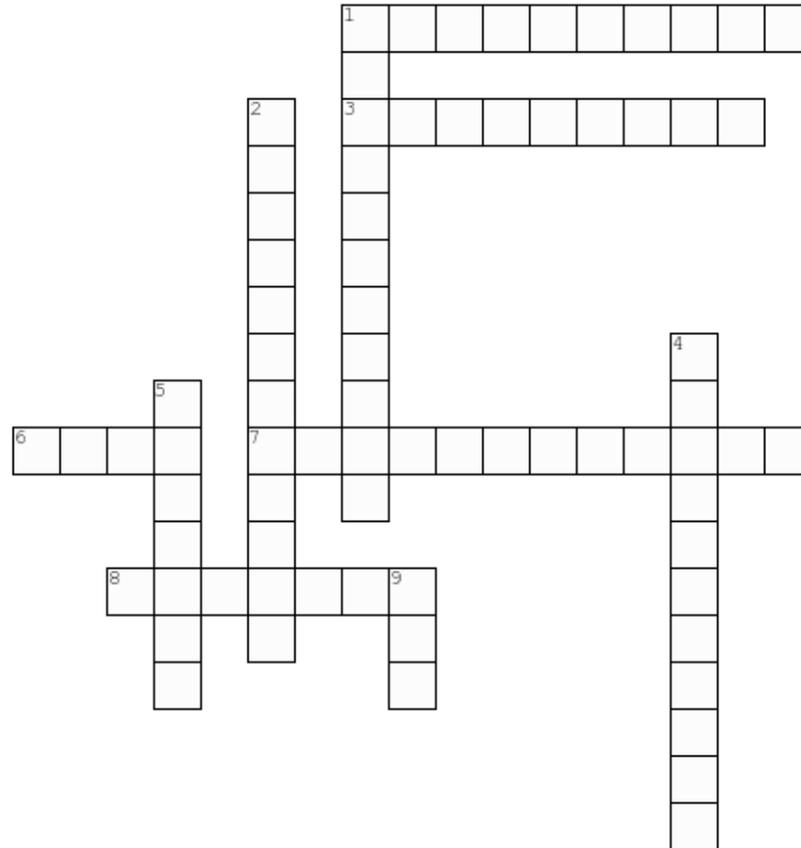
Suggestion: The essay should have 3 middle paragraphs and a conclusion paragraph. Have the student choose three (3) points, one for each middle paragraph, which exemplify the given thesis.

Here is the introductory paragraph:

Most people are too afraid to stand up for what is right when it means going against those around them or endangering themselves and their families. However, in the Southern Gothic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, the lawyer, Atticus Finch, stands up against the injustices in early 20th century Maycomb, Alabama, even though he knows that his family will suffer because of his actions. During the course of the novel, Atticus exemplifies his upright character through his words and actions, standing as an example of a truly virtuous man.

Name: _____

Complete the crossword below



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Across

1. Grumpy neighbor who is dying; Jem reads to her
3. Name of housekeeper who is like a member of the family
6. Friend of Scout and Jem's who visits in the summers
7. Point of view from which the story is told
8. Name of fictional town which is the setting of the story

Down

1. What you must not harm
2. Man who defends Tom at all costs
4. Neighbor of Finches who, like Atticus, sees the problems of Maycomb
5. State in which the story is set
9. Arthur Radley's nickname

