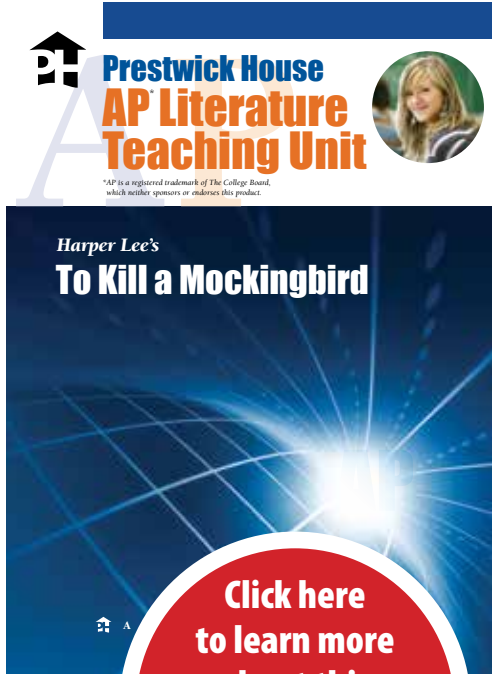




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**Teaching Unit**

**To Kill a Mockingbird**

by Harper Lee

written by Marie Y. Smith



**Prestwick House**

Item No. 302154

# To Kill a Mockingbird

## Objectives

All references come from the Warner Books edition of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, published 1982.

*NOTE: This book contains religious references and potentially controversial elements, including violence, inappropriate language, sexual relationships, and racial bias.*

*By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:*

1. identify the characteristics of the Southern woman in the early twentieth century.
2. analyze the character growth exhibited by both Scout and Jem.
3. discuss the relationship of Atticus with his children.
4. explain Harper Lee's themes of racism, loss of innocence, and deceptive appearances.
5. compare and contrast traditional Southern social attitudes and Atticus' attitude toward other people.
6. discuss Harper Lee's use of first-person narrative and its implication on the reader's understanding of the story.
7. explain the role of Boo Radley as an absent character (one that the reader does not see).
8. analyze Atticus's character as a representation of justice and equality.
9. describe the impact of social class on characters' attitudes and actions.
10. explain Harper Lee's use of humor, suspense, and allusions as literary techniques.
11. identify and define the literary devices that Harper Lee uses, such as similes, metaphors, and idioms.
12. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
13. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

## Lecture Notes

### HARPER LEE AND *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

Many critics say that Harper Lee modeled the character of Scout after herself. Harper Lee was born in Monroeville, Alabama in 1926, so she would have been the same age as Scout when *To Kill a Mockingbird* takes place. Lee's father was a small-town lawyer, just like Atticus Finch, and Harper Lee spent many hours at the local courthouse with her father. Although there is no proof, it is rumored that a mysterious recluse lived in Lee's neighborhood on which the character of Boo Radley is based. In addition, Harper Lee's mother's maiden name was Frances Finch.

In April 1931, in Scottsboro, Alabama, nine African-American men—the youngest being twelve years old—were tried for raping two white women. Medical testimony showed that the two women had not been raped, but the all-white jury convicted the men and sentenced them to death. In six appellate trials, most of the convictions were overturned, and all but one of the men were subsequently freed or paroled. Even though she was only six years old when the first trial took place, it had a significant impact on Harper Lee and served as the basis for the trial in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Harper Lee's close childhood friend was the famous author, Truman Capote. Lee and her brother spent their summers playing with Capote, and her friendship with him continued until his death in 1984. She worked as his research assistant when he went to Kansas to write his award-winning novel, *In Cold Blood*. Many critics believe that Capote was the model for Lee's character Dill in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Capote supported Lee's book by writing the following for the front flap of the first edition's book jacket: "Someone rare has written this very fine first novel: a writer with the liveliest sense of life and the warmest, most authentic humor. A touching book; and so funny, so likeable."

### SOUTHERN SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE EARLY 1900s

Following the end of slavery after the Civil War, the social structure of the South changed. The plantation owners and professionals (doctors, lawyers, etc.) made up the upper class, and because farming was becoming much more commercialized, most land owners became prominent businessmen by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The middle class consisted of owners of small farms and small-town business owners. A new lower class emerged that included African-American farmers and unskilled laborers, such as mill workers.

In the 1930s, the South was immersed in the Great Depression. Poverty and unemployment were rampant, with over 13 million Americans having lost their jobs since 1929. Between 1929 and 1932, farm prices fell by over 50 percent, and the average income in 1929 was about \$750, but annual farm income was only about \$275.

# To Kill a Mockingbird

## Chapter 1

1. What narrative point of view does Harper Lee use to begin the story?

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2. What can the reader expect to learn from this narrative point of view?

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3. What is the setting of the story? How does Harper Lee use this setting to set the tone?

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4. Why does Jem tell Scout (the narrator) not to ask Dill about his father? What can the reader infer about Jem and Scout's relationship from this exchange?

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5. Briefly describe how the Radleys are different from the other people in Maycomb.

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6. Why does Jem take three days to accept Dill's dare and go up to the Radleys' home? What theme is Lee introducing with Jem's response to Dill's dare?

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**Chapter 5**

- 1. What emotion is Scout really displaying in the following passage? What does Lee show about Scout's character through this passage?

...Dill was becoming something of a trial anyway, following Jem about. He had asked me earlier in the summer to marry him, then he promptly forgot about it. He staked me out, marked as his property, said I was the only girl he would ever love, then he neglected me. I beat him up twice but it did no good, he only grew closer to Jem. (p. 41)

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- 2. How does Scout's conversation with Miss Maudie develop the reader's sympathy for Arthur (Boo) Radley?

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- 3. How does Lee use humor to discredit Miss Stephanie's stories about Boo?

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- 4. Why is Atticus angry with Jem, Scout, and Dill?

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**Chapter 9**

- 1. How does Lee use Scout’s innocence as a vehicle to explain Atticus’ attitude toward African-Americans?

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- 2. How does Lee use humor when Atticus talks to Scout about saying “nigger?” (p. 74) What is the effect of this humor?

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- 3. How does the allusion to the Missouri Compromise (p. 76) help explain Maycomb’s attitude toward the Civil War?

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- 4. How might the reader’s impression of Aunt Alexandra be different if Lee had written the story in third person?

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- 5. What does the reader learn about Dill in this chapter? Why does Lee mention this?

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5. Why does Calpurnia speak differently at First Purchase than she does with the children in their home? What is Lee illustrating with this switch and Scout's questions about it?

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6. How does Lee use the children's experience at First Purchase to show the similarities and differences between the African-American and the white religious communities?

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7. What is the significance of Calpurnia's description of learning to read? How does this affect Scout?

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