



To Kill a Mockingbird *Study Guide*

by Andrew Clausen

For the novel
by Harper Lee



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To Kill A Mockingbird Study Guide
A Progeny Press Study Guide
by Andrew Clausen
with Michael Gilleland

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Synopsis

In the sleepy southern town of Maycomb, Alabama, Scout Finch and her brother Jem revel in the glory days of childhood, trading stories and superstitions with Dill Harris, the imaginative nephew of their neighbor. Dill is especially fascinated with the legends surrounding the mysterious Boo Radley, who stays in his house all day, but, it is rumored, comes out at night to dine on squirrels and cats and peek in windows. Their summer days are spent adding to the Boo Radley legends or devising ways to make Boo come out.

Scout becomes increasingly uneasy about playing games that revolve around Boo Radley. Guided by the wisdom of her father, Atticus, and Calpurnia, their cook, Scout is learning the ways and unwritten rules of southern society and how to get along in it.

Atticus is a lawyer with an extremely difficult case on his hands. Tom Robinson, a black man, has been accused of raping a white girl. With deep-seated prejudice working against him, Atticus must prove his client innocent. Scout and Jem watch while their otherwise civilized neighbors show subtle disapproval or outright distaste for Atticus's defense of a black man.

While Atticus struggles to do the right thing, Scout struggles with her Aunt Alexandra, Atticus's sister, who comes to live with them. Aunt Alexandra is set on making Scout into a refined southern lady by instilling in her the rules of social decorum. Atticus is more concerned that his children simply do what is right.

And meanwhile, the trial of Tom Robinson reaches its conclusion, but not before Atticus challenges the very structure of southern society.

Chapters 17–21

Vocabulary:

For each of the sentences below, select the word from the word box that comes closest in meaning to the underlined word or words. Write that word in the space after the sentence.

Word Box

acrimonious

dogged

strenuous

mollified

stealthy

impudent

temerity

unmitigated

brash

browbeat

1. The executive's resignation speech was filled with bitter remarks directed toward his successor. _____
2. Convinced of his superior knowledge and abilities, the student made a hasty and unthinking response to the questions asked by his professor.

3. Tired though she was, the runner completed the marathon with stubborn determination. _____
4. The new employee was rude and disrespectful to his co-worker, not realizing that the man was his supervisor. _____
5. His amorous advances were without moderation and without thought toward her feelings. _____
6. The outrage of the king was calmed only by the antics of his court jester.

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7. The climber ascended the dangerous cliff with foolish boldness.

8. The man did not realize that rock climbing is an activity requiring great effort and skill. _____
9. Keeping herself hidden behind the hedge, the girl made a secretive approach to the boys' clubhouse, holding tightly to the water balloon.

10. The crusty professor made every effort to intimidate new students with questions they could not answer. _____

Questions:

1. An *extended metaphor* is a metaphorical comparison that is continued at length, and the comparison is shown in several ways. Read the following description of Bob Ewell:

In answer to the clerk's booming voice, a little bantam cock of a man rose and strutted to the stand, the back of his neck reddening at the sound of his name. When he turned around to take the oath, we saw his face was as red as his neck. . . . A shock of wispy new-washed hair stood up from his forehead; his nose was thin, pointed, and shiny; he had no chin to speak of—it seemed to be part of his crepey neck.

“—so help me God,” he crowed.

What is the general comparison that Harper Lee is drawing in this passage? List five ways this comparison is drawn.

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2. A *foil* is someone or something that, by a striking contrast, reveals the characteristics of someone or something else. In Chapter 17 Scout provides a description of the Ewell's house and yard. What objects act as a foil to the junk strewn around the Ewell's yard? What might the presence of these objects reveal about the character of Mayella Ewell?

3. When Bob Ewell refers to Mayella he uses language like "screamin' like a stuck hog," "ruttin' on my Mayella," and "lyin' on the floor squallin'." What does the use of language like this reveal about Bob Ewell's character? About his feelings toward Mayella?

4. There is a terrible *irony* in the fact that Bob Ewell considers himself better than his black neighbors. List two ways the author shows this irony.

5. Mayella Ewell takes offense to Atticus's politeness toward her. What might this indicate about Mayella?

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6. Tom Robinson tells Mr. Gilmer that he helped Mayella Ewell because he felt sorry for her. Mr. Gilmer repeats this with apparent incredulity: “*You* felt sorry for *her*, you felt *sorry* for her?” Scout says,

The witness realized his mistake and shifted uncomfortably in the chair. But the damage was done. Below us, nobody liked Tom Robinson’s answer.

What was the “mistake” that Tom Robinson made?

7. Dill becomes increasingly upset at the way the prosecutor treats Tom Robinson until Jem makes Scout take Dill outside. When Dill tells Scout how he feels, Scout says, “Well, Dill, after all he’s just a Negro.” In spite of all the wisdom given her by Atticus, what has Scout failed to understand regarding racial differences?

8. Mr. Dolphus Raymond says,

Things haven’t caught up with [Dill’s] instinct yet. Let him get a little older and he won’t get sick and cry. Maybe things’ll strike him as being—not quite right, say, but he won’t cry, not when he gets a few years on him.

What does he mean by making this statement?

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9. The children discover that Mr. Dolphus Raymond only *pretends* to be half-drunk all the time. Mr. Raymond admits his deception isn't honest, but it is "mighty helpful to folks." How is it helpful? What is your opinion of Mr. Raymond's deception?

10. In Atticus's final appeal to the court he suggests that Mayella Ewell has "broken a rigid and time-honored code of our society." What was that code? What was Mayella's reaction to breaking that code?

11. In his own way, Mr. Raymond also broke the code. What was his reaction?

12. What "generally accepted truths" does Atticus challenge in his final appeal?

13. When the jury returns with the verdict, Scout says, "it was like watching Atticus walk into the street, raise a rifle to his shoulder and pull the trigger, but watching all the time knowing that the gun was empty." Why does Scout refer to this event once again? What is the significance of the empty gun? By bringing this image to mind, what is the author saying about Atticus and his actions in general?

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14. Is the verdict surprising? Why or why not? What clues were given earlier in the story that the case would probably turn out as it did?

15. Why do all the black people in the balconies stand as Atticus leaves the courtroom?

Dig Deeper:

16. What evidence did Atticus show that proved Tom Robinson's innocence? The jury's verdict was obviously not based on hard evidence. On what was the jury's verdict based?

Read Leviticus 19:34, Romans 13:8–10, Galatians 3:26–29, Colossians 3:11, and James 2:8, 9. Why is any kind of class or racial discrimination wrong?

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Dig Deeper:

12. Answers will vary.

13. Answers will vary. Things such as personal biases, historical prejudices, bad experiences, etc., would interfere with the reasoning process.

14. Alexandra sees a difference between being friendly, polite, and gracious to someone and having that person in your home. It seems contradictory that one can be “friendly and polite” to a person but not allow that person in one’s home. If you can’t let that person in your home, are you really being “gracious”? These verses indicate that love is shown in action, not simply word. Jesus says that it’s better to invite to your home those who cannot repay you, or in terms of modern society, those of a lower class.

15. The public had already decided that Tom was guilty, regardless of the evidence. The prejudice against black people is something that is deep-seated in the hearts of these men. Regardless of what they outwardly profess to be right and just, people are ruled by what they believe inside.

Chapters 27–31

Questions:

1. Bob Ewell acquired and lost a job in a matter of days, and he openly accused Atticus of “getting his job.” Someone tried to break into Judge Taylor’s house while he was home. Bob Ewell began harassing Helen Robinson when she walked to work.

2. He gave Helen Robinson a job even though he didn’t really need her. He threatened to have Bob Ewell locked up if he ever harassed Helen Robinson again. These incidents show Link Deas to be concerned with the welfare of others.

3. Bob Ewell hoped to be seen as a hero after winning the trial, but he was still regarded as trash by the citizens of Maycomb. He realized he was made to look foolish on the witness stand.

4. Answers will vary. Scout may be referring symbolically to the passage from childhood to maturity.

5. Jem’s and Scout’s ideas about “haints” and “Hot Steams” have vanished, and they laugh about having once believed in these things.

6. Aunt Alexandra is suddenly apprehensive about something before the pageant. Scout and Jem comment on how dark it is. Cecil Jacobs jumps out at them and scares them both. Someone offers Jem and Scout a ride home. When they decline the voice says, “Be careful of haints.”

7. Answers will vary slightly. Scout lost her balance and Bob Ewell grabbed her, crushing the chicken wire around her. At this point he probably tried to stab her. She fell to the ground and rolled away as far as possible. Jem and Bob Ewell began fighting and Jem was thrown to the ground near Scout. Jem grabbed Scout, pulled her up and began running with her. Bob Ewell grabbed Jem from behind throwing him to the ground again. There was more fighting and Jem’s arm was broken. Scout ran to Jem and crashed into Bob Ewell who grabbed her and tried to squeeze the life out of her. At this point Boo Radley grabbed Bob Ewell and threw him to the ground, stabbing him with a kitchen knife. Boo then carries Jem home and Scout follows.

8. Atticus thinks Jem has killed Bob Ewell. Sheriff Tate realizes that Boo Radley has killed Bob Ewell. He tells Atticus that Boo Radley has “done you and this town a great service.” The sheriff is not willing to have Boo Radley placed in the limelight “with his shy ways,” and insists that Bob Ewell fell on his own knife.

9. The sheriff is signalling an end to the whole conflict. Tom Robinson is dead. Bob Ewell, who is responsible for it, is dead. It’s time for things to settle down to normal again. Jesus was saying that things need to be left behind if we mean to follow him. This phrase is used to communicate the idea of leaving things in the past and carrying on.

10. Earlier Miss Maudie mentions that it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird because they don’t bring any harm to anyone, but simply sing their hearts out. Scout means that to drag Boo Radley into the limelight would bring harm to him, and since Boo Radley never meant anyone any harm, he should not be harmed.

11. At the beginning of the novel Atticus asked Scout to try to see things from someone else’s point of view. With this scene Scout is, in a physical way, recalling how things might have looked from Boo Radley’s point of view. She revealed earlier that Boo had been watching them at play. Now she imagines what it must have looked like to him. In this way the author shows how Scout has learned to follow Atticus’s advice.

12. Like the Gray Ghost in the story, Boo Radley, when they finally meet him, turns out to be “real nice.” Another “Gray Ghost” in the novel might be Mrs. Dubose, for whom Jem is able to muster some respect when he finally finds out about her morphine addiction. Yet another might be Aunt Alexandra who begins as a caricature of a refined