# *Go Set a Watchman* by Harper Lee

## Synopsis

The title comes from Isaiah 21:6: "For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth", which is quoted in the book's seventh chapter by Mr. Stone, the minister character. It alludes to Jean Louise Finch's view of her father, Atticus Finch, as the moral compass ("watchman") of Maycomb, and has a theme of disillusionment, as she discovers the extent of the bigotry in her home community. *Go Set a Watchman* tackles the racial tensions brewing in the South in the 1950s and delves into the complex relationship between father and daughter. It includes treatments of many of the characters who appear in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

## Discussion questions

1. GO SET A WATCHMAN takes place more than 20 years after TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD begins. When WATCHMAN opens, Jean Louise Finch --- now 26 and living in the North, in New York City --- is returning to her hometown of Maycomb, Alabama. Describe the Maycomb of GO SET A WATCHMAN. If you have read MOCKINGBIRD, has the town changed in the intervening years? If so, how?
2. Maycomb is a town without train service, and its bus service “was erratic and seemed to go nowhere.” How does this lack of connection isolate the citizens of Maycomb, and how does that isolation affect how they see themselves and outsiders? Early in the novel, her longtime friend Henry Clinton tells her “you’re gonna see Maycomb change its face completely in our lifetime.” What does he foresee that Jean Louise cannot --- or perhaps does not want to see?
3. Think about the extended Finch family. What is their status in Maycomb? What is the significance of being a Finch in this small Southern town? Does it afford them privileges --- as well as expectations of them and responsibilities --- that other families do not share? Do the Finches have freedoms that others do not enjoy?
4. Describe the Jean Louise Finch of WATCHMAN. How does this grown-up woman compare to her younger self? How does Jean Louise conform --- or not --- to the ideal of womanhood in the 1950s? What was that ideal? Compare her to her Aunt Alexandra and the women of Maycomb. Does she fit in with these women?
5. Describe the relationship between Jean Louise and Atticus at the beginning of the novel. Does Jean Louise idealize her father too much? How does she react when she discovers that her father is a flawed human being? How does this discovery alter her sense of herself, her family, and her world? By the novel’s end, how do father and daughter accommodate each other?
6. “Integrity, humor, and patience were the three words for Atticus Finch.” After your reading of WATCHMAN, do these three words still hold true? What words would you use to describe him?
7. Late in the novel, Uncle Jack tells his niece, “Every man’s island, Jean Louise, every man’s watchman, is his conscience.” What wisdom is he imparting to her? Uncle Jack also calls Jean Louise a “turnip-sized bigot.” Is she? Why?

(Questions taken from readinggroupguides.com)

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