# To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

## Synopsis

*To Kill a Mockingbird* takes place in the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, during the [Great Depression](https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Depression). The [protagonist](https://www.britannica.com/art/protagonist) is Jean Louise (“Scout”) Finch, an intelligent though unconventional girl who ages from six to nine years old during the course of the novel. She is raised with her brother, Jeremy Atticus (“Jem”), by their widowed father, [Atticus Finch](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Atticus-Finch). He notably tells them that it is “a sin to kill a [mockingbird](https://www.britannica.com/animal/mockingbird-bird),” [alluding](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alluding) to the fact that the birds are innocent and harmless.

When Tom Robinson, one of the town’s Black residents, is falsely accused of [raping](https://www.britannica.com/topic/rape-crime) Mayella Ewell, a white woman, Atticus agrees to defend him despite threats from the [community](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community).Although Atticus presents a defense that gives a more plausible interpretation of the evidence—that Mayella was attacked by her father, Bob Ewell—Tom is convicted, and he is later killed while trying to escape custody. A character compares his death to “the senseless slaughter of songbirds,” paralleling Atticus’s saying about the mockingbird.

The children, meanwhile, play out their own miniaturized drama of [prejudice](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prejudice) and [superstition](https://www.britannica.com/topic/superstition) as they become interested in [Arthur (“Boo”) Radley](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Boo-Radley), a reclusive neighbour who is a local [legend](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/legend). They have their own ideas about him and cannot resist the allure of trespassing on the Radley property. Atticus, however, reprimands them and tries to encourage a more sensitive attitude. Boo makes his presence felt indirectly through a series of [benevolent](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/benevolent) acts, finally intervening when Bob Ewell attacks Jem and Scout. Boo kills Ewell, but Heck Tate, the sheriff, believes it is better to say that Ewell’s death occurred when he fell on his own knife, sparing the shy Boo from unwanted attention. Scout agrees, noting that to do otherwise would be “sort of like shootin’ a mockingbird.”

## Discussion questions

1. How do Scout, Jem, and Dill characterize Boo Radley at the beginning of the book? In what way did Boo's past history of violence foreshadow his method of protecting Jem and Scout from Bob Ewell?
2. In Scout's account of her childhood, her father Atticus reigns supreme. How would you characterize his abilities as a single parent? How would you describe his treatment of Calpurnia and Tom Robinson vis a vis his treatment of his white neighbors and colleagues?
3. At the end of the novel, Scout likens the "sin" of naming Boo as Bob Ewell's killer to "shootin' a mockingbird." Do you think that Boo is the only innocent, or mockingbird, in this novel?
4. Scout ages two years-from six to eight-over the course of Lee's novel, which is narrated from her perspective as an adult. Did you find the account her narrator provides believable?
5. To Kill a Mockingbird has been challenged repeatedly by the political left and right, who have sought to remove it from libraries for its portrayal of conflict between children and adults; ungrammatical speech; references to sex, the supernatural, and witchcraft; and unfavorable presentation of blacks. Did you find any of those elements especially troubling, persuasive, or insightful?
6. What elements of this book did you find especially memorable, humorous, or inspiring? Are there individual characters whose beliefs, acts, or motives especially impressed or surprised you?

*Synopsis from https://www.britannica.com/topic/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird
Discussion questions from https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/to-kill-a-mockingbird/guide*