

To Kill a Mockingbird ~~~~~Discussion Questions

Chapter 1

- What do you learn in this chapter about Maycomb, Atticus Finch and his family?
- What do you learn about Dill's character?
- What do you notice about the narrative voice and viewpoint in the novel?

Chapter 2

- Why is Scout so looking forward to starting school?
- Why does Jem not want anything to do with Scout at school? Is his behavior typical of an older child?
- What do you think of Miss Caroline Fisher as a teacher? Can you find qualities that would make her good or not so good at her job?

Chapter 3

- What is Walter Cunningham like? What does his behaviour during lunch suggest about his home life?
- What do you think of the way Atticus treats Walter?
- Does Scout learn anything from Walter's visit? What do you think this is?
- Atticus says that you never really understand a person “until you climb into his skin and walk around in it”. What does this mean? Is it an easy thing for Scout to learn? (In the last chapter of the novel, Scout repeats this, but she changes “skin” to “shoes” - this is probably not a mistake: Harper Lee suggests that Scout cannot clearly recall exactly what Atticus said and when, but the reader can check this!)

Chapter 4

- Why do the children make Boo's story into a game?
- What do they do in this game? Do you think the game is an accurate version of what happens in the Radleys' home?
- What might be the cause of the laughter from inside the house?

Chapter 5

- Describe Miss Maudie Atkinson? How typical is she of Maycomb's women? What do the children think of her?
- What does Miss Maudie tell Scout about Boo? How does this compare with what Scout already believes?
- Scout claims that “Dill could tell the biggest ones ” (lies) she ever heard. Why might Dill have told such lies?
- What reasons does Atticus give for the children not to play the Boo Radley game? Do you think he is right? Why?

Chapter 6

- Why does Scout disapprove of Jem's and Dill's plan of looking in at one of the Radleys' windows?
- What does Mr. Nathan Radley know about the intruders in his garden?

Chapters 7-9

- Can you find any evidence that Jem is beginning to understand more than Scout about Boo Radley? What do you think this is?
- Does Jem still fear the gifts in the tree? Give reasons for your answer
- Why does Scout quiz Atticus about his visit to the Radley house? How much does Atticus tell her?
- How well does Atticus feel he should defend Tom Robinson? Is it usual for (white) lawyers to do their best for black clients in Alabama at this time?
- Read the final sentence of this chapter. Explain in your own words what it means and why it might be important in the story.

Chapters 10-12

Scout says that “Atticus was feeble”. Do you think that this is her view as she tells the story or her view when she was younger? Does she still think this after the events recorded in this chapter?

- Jem and Scout have different views about telling people at school how well Atticus can shoot. Explain this difference. Which view is closer to your own?
- Atticus says that Mrs. Dubose is a model of real courage rather than “a man with a gun in his hand”. What does he mean? Do you think he is right?
- Chapters ten and eleven are the last two chapters in the first part of the book. Explain why Harper Lee chooses to end the first part here.
- Comment on Jem's and Scout's visit to First Purchase church.

Ch 13-15

- Read the first two things Alexandra says when she comes to the Finch house. Are these typical of her or not?
- Alexandra thinks Scout is “dull” (not clever). Why does she think this, and is she right? Are all adults good at knowing how clever young people are?
- Why does Alexandra think Atticus should dismiss Calpurnia? How does Atticus respond to the suggestion?
- What do we learn from Dill's account of his running away?
- Aunt Alexandra involve herself in Maycomb's social life?
- How does Jem react when Atticus tells him to go home, and why?
- What persuades the lynching-party to give up their attempt on Tom's life?
- Comment on the way Scout affects events without realizing it at the time.

Ch 16-18

- What sort of person is Dolphus Raymond?
- How does Reverend Sykes help the children see and hear the trial? Is he right to do?
- Comment on Judge Taylor's attitude to his job. Does he take the trial seriously or not?
- What are the main points in Heck Tate's evidence? What does Atticus show in his cross-examination of Sheriff Tate?
- What do we learn indirectly of the home life of the Ewell family in this chapter?
- What do you learn from Bob Ewell's evidence?
- Why does Atticus ask Bob Ewell to write out his name? What does the jury see when he does this?

Ch 19-21

- Why does Scout think that Mayella Ewell was “the loneliest person in the world”?
- In your own words explain Mayella's relationship with her father.
- How does Dill react to this part of the trial? Why is this, in your opinion?
- In most states of the USA people who drink alcohol in public places are required to hide their bottle in a paper bag. Why does Dolphus Raymond hide Coca-Cola in a bag?
- What, according to Atticus, is the thing that Mayella has done wrong?
- Explain, in your own words, Atticus's views on people's being equal.
- What does Jem expect the verdict to be? Does Atticus think the same?
- What is unusual about how long it takes the jury to reach a verdict? Is the verdict predictable or not?
- As Scout waits for the verdict, she thinks of earlier events. What are these and how do they remind us of the novel's central themes?

- Is Mayella like her father or different from him? In what ways?
- What might be the reason for Mayella's crying in the court?
- How does Mayella react to Atticus's politeness? Is she used to people being polite?
- How well does Mr. Gilmer prove Tom's guilt in the eyes of the reader (you) and in the eyes of the jury? Can you suggest why these might be different?

Ch 22-24

- This story is set in the 1930s but was published in 1960. Have attitudes to racism remained the same or have there been any changes (for the better or worse) since then, in your view?
- Why does Bob Ewell feel so angry with Atticus? Do you think his threat is a real one, and how might he try to “get” Atticus?
- What do you think of Atticus's reaction to Bob Ewell's challenge? Should he have ignored Bob, retaliated or done something else?
- Why does Aunt Alexandra accept that the Cunninghams may be good but are not “our kind of folks”? Do you think that people should mix only with others of the same social class? Are class-divisions good or bad for societies?
- At the end of this chapter, Jem forms a new theory about why Boo Radley has never left his house in years. What is this? How likely is it to be true, in your opinion?
- Explain briefly how Tom was killed. What is Atticus's explanation for Tom's attempted escape. Do you think agree with Atticus?

Ch 25-27

- How does Maycomb react to the news of Tom's death?
- Comment on the idea that Tom's death was "typical"?
- In her lesson on Hitler, Miss Gates says that "we (American people) don't believe in persecuting anyone". What seems odd to the reader about this claim?
- Why, according to Atticus, does Bob Ewell bear a grudge? Which people does Ewell see as his enemies, and why?

Ch 28-31

- Why does Jem say that Boo Radley must not be at home? What is ironic about this? (Is it true? Does he really mean it? Why might it be important for him and Scout that Boo should not be at home?)
- What explanation does Atticus give for Bob Ewell's attack?
- What does Heck Tate give as the reason for the attack?
- Do you think the sheriff's explanation or Atticus's is the more likely to be true?
- Is Heck Tate right to spare Boo then publicity of an inquest? Give reasons for your answer.
- How does the writer handle the appearance, at the end of the story, of Boo Radley?
- How do the events of the final chapters explain the first sentence in the whole novel?
- Comment on the way the writer summarizes earlier events to show their significance.