

The Big Read is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest.



Discussion Questions For *To Kill a Mockingbird*

1. How does Boo Radley's past history of violence foreshadow his method of protecting Jem and Scout? Does this aggression make him more, or less, of a sympathetic character?
2. Jem describes to Scout the four "folks" or classes of people in Maycomb County: "our kind of folks don't like the Cunninghams, the Cunninghams don't like the Ewells, and the Ewells hate and despise the colored folks." How do class divisions and family quarrels highlight racial tensions in Maycomb?
3. Atticus believes that to understand life from someone else's perspective, we must "walk in his or her shoes." From what other perspectives does Scout see her fellow townspeople?
4. Atticus' shooting of the rabid dog allows Scout to have a revelation about her father. What did she learn? Were there other revelatory incidents in the novel? Have you had a similar revelatory experience about someone close to you?
5. Adult readers often forget that *To Kill a Mockingbird* is also a coming-of-age story. What does Scout learn, and how does she change in the course of her narrative? Several women-Calpurnia, Miss Maudie, and Aunt Alexandra-function as mother figures to Scout and Jem. Discuss the ways these three women influence Scout's growing understanding of what it means to be a Southern "lady." What kind of influence does Mayella Ewell have on Scout?

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6. Why does Atticus Finch risk his reputation, his friendships, and his career to take Tom Robinson's case? Do you think he risks too much by putting his children in harm's way?

7. What elements of this novel did you find funny, memorable, or inspiring? Are there any characters whose beliefs or actions impressed or surprised you? Did any events lead you to revisit childhood memories or see them in a new light?

8. Think about Atticus' parenting style. Is it typical of the era and the culture? As a child yourself, and possibly as a parent now, what are your observations about how Atticus raised his children?

9. Is *To Kill a Mockingbird* a racist novel? Discuss the author's portrayal of the black community and the characters of Calpurnia and Tom Robinson. Are they realistic or idealized? Why did Harper Lee choose to portray them in this manner? Do you believe that Atticus' quiet dissents from Jim Crow laws represent Harper Lee's values?

10. In the last few lines of *To Kill a Mockingbird* Scout says, "he was real nice..." and Atticus replies, "most people are, Scout, when you finally see them." Do you agree that most people in the novel are nice once you see them? How about in real life? How is Atticus able to see the good side of people despite all he has experienced? Can you?

12. *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. Which elements of the book-if any-do you think touch on controversial issues in our contemporary culture? Our community?