

“ Cry about the simple hell people give other people - without even thinking. Cry about the hell white people give colored folks, without even stopping to think that they're people, too.”
(Chapter 20)

Historical Context

In the book, Scout is the same age as Harper Lee was in the early 1930's, during the trial of the "Scottsboro Boys." This case and that of Emmett Till both display prevalent Southern attitudes about race during this time period.

Scottsboro

The Scottsboro Boys, by James Haskins
Stories of Scottsboro, by James Goodman

Emmett Till

Death of Innocence by Mamie Till-Mobley & Christopher Benson
The Murder of Emmett Till (on DVD)
Getting Away with Murder: the True Story of the Emmett Till Case, by Chris Crowe
The Lynching of Emmett Till, a Documentary Narrative, ed. by Christopher Metness

More about the time period and Civil Rights:

Alabama: a History, by Virginia Van der Veer Hamilton.
Eyes on the prize : America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965 by Juan Williams

Or browse in nonfiction 323 for more Civil Rights material.

The Movie

The movie *To Kill a Mockingbird* was released just a year after the book came out. Gregory Peck played Atticus Finch and won the Oscar for Best Actor in 1962. Learn more in *Gregory Peck : a charmed life* by Lynn Haney. The film was nominated for Best Picture but lost to *Lawrence of Arabia*, which is also available at the library.



Share the *To Kill A Mockingbird* experience with younger readers with these books which explore similar themes -

In Young Adult Fiction by Author

The \$66 Summer, by John Armistead
Burning Up, by Caroline B. Cooney
Mississippi Trial, 1955, by Chris Crowe
Dangerous Skies, by Suzanne Staples
Let the Circle Be Unbroken, by Mildred Taylor
Sonny's House of Spies, by George Ella Lyon
Spite Fences, by Trudy Krisher

In Juvenile Fiction by Author

Souder, by William Armstrong
From Miss Ida's Porch, by Sandra Belton
The Watsons go to Birmingham, 1963, by C.P. Curtis
Francie, by Karen English
Darby, by Jonathon Scott Fuqua
My Louisiana Sky, by Kimberly Willis Holt
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, by Mildred D. Taylor
Dovey Coe, by Francis O'Rourke Dowell

Literary Allusions

The novel's main character Scout is extremely well-read for a first grader, which causes her teacher much consternation.

- She alludes to Mr. Jingle from *The Pickwick Papers* by Charles Dickens during Mayella Ewell's testimony at the trial and Bulfinch's Mythology.
- Jem, Scout & Dill act out stories from *Tarzan* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, the *Rover Boys* by Victor Appleton, Tom Swift books, and books by Oliver Optic.
- Jem reads *Ivanhoe* to Mrs. DuBose.
- Scout learns to write by copying passages from the *Bible*. And Calpurnia teaches her son Zeebo to read from *Blackstone's Commentaries*.



J-MRL is partnering with the Virginia Foundation Center for the Book in The BIG READ, which is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and Arts Midwest.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Suggestions for
Further Reading

available through the

Jefferson-Madison Regional Library

www.jmrl.org

“ You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.”

(Chapter 3)

Ways to experience the story of *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

- Read it: We have copies of the novel in the Adult and Young Adult fiction sections. We also have the book in Spanish translation.
- Listen to it: We have audio versions on tape and CD.
- Watch it: We have the movie on DVD and video.

For more information on the novel as literature, try *Readings on To Kill a Mockingbird*, edited by Terry O'Neill

What's in a name?

Harper Lee chose the name of Atticus after Titus Pomponius Atticus, a friend of the Roman orator Cicero who was renowned, as Lee said, as "a wise, learned, & humane man." Finch was one of Lee's mother's names. (So was Cunningham!)



About the Author

Nelle Harper Lee was born April 28, 1926 and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1960 for *To Kill a Mockingbird* - her only major work to date. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2007 for her contribution to literature.

Other past winners of the medal of freedom for literature have been Carl Sandburg, Ralph Ellison, John Steinbeck, and Tennessee Williams.

Learn more about Harper Lee in the biography by Charles Shields: *Mockingbird: a portrait of Harper Lee*.

Harper Lee was childhood friends with the writer **Truman Capote** and accompanied him to

Kansas while he researched his book *In Cold Blood*. The character Dill in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is said to have been inspired by Capote as a child, and Lee in turn inspired the character

Idabel in Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. Try also *The Complete Stories of Truman Capote*, some of which are autobiographical, or the fictionalized account of Nelle and Truman's relationship in the novel *Capote in Kansas* by Kim Powers.

What do you think?

Harper Lee loved 19th-century British authors best, and once said that her ambition was to become "the Jane Austen of Southern Alabama."

What do you think of the comparison?



You might also enjoy reading these novels: dealing with Civil Rights & Justice...

Blood on the Leaves, by Jeff Stetson - An African American prosecutor in Jackson, Miss. finds himself prosecuting a civil rights leader accused of killing whites that were acquitted of hate crimes.

Fire in the Rock, by Joe Martin - Set in the South in the 1950s, four friends find their lives changed forever when a carefree summer takes a violent turn.

Justice for None, by Gene Hackman and Daniel Lenihan - On the run from the law after being falsely accused of murder, a troubled WWI veteran joins forces with an African American who has also been wrongly accused.

A Lesson Before Dying, by Ernest Gaines - In 1948 Louisiana, a young teacher, asked to impart his pride and learning to a young black man awaiting execution, comes face to face with his own cynicism and hopelessness.

Your Blues Ain't Like Mine, by Bebe Moore Campbell - A racist beating in a small Mississippi town ripples through generations, changing the lives of everyone involved with the incident.

Wolf Whistle, by Lewis Norton

If Beale Street Could Talk, by James Baldwin

“ The one place where a man ought to get a square deal is in a courtroom, be he any color of the rainbow. ”

(Chapter 23)

Lane Cake

Stephanie Crawford has been after Miss Maudie for her recipe for Lane Cake for thirty years. Lane Cake, a white or yellow layer cake covered with coconut, nuts and dried fruits, is said to have originated in Clayton, Alabama, when its creator, Emma Rylander Lane, won a prize for it in the state fair in the 1890's. For a recipes for this type of cake and other delicacies that the bridge ladies might have enjoyed, look in non-fiction 641.5975 for cookbooks with Southern recipes. Edna Lewis' *Gift of Southern Cooking* has a recipe for Lane Cake.



Or these Novels dealing with Race & Identity in Rural or Small-Town Southern Settings

Clover, by Dori Sanders - Interracial marriage in the rural south of today is seen through the eyes of 10-year-old Clover who is raised by a white stepmom despite protests from relatives.

My Last Days as Roy Rogers, by Pat Cunningham Devoto - Growing up in Alabama in the 1950s, two inseparable 10-year-old girls, one black and one white, discover the theft of money meant for polio victims and expose a racial injustice.

The Secret Life of Bees, by Sue Monk Kidd - After her "stand-in mother" insults the three biggest racists in town, Lily Owens and bold, black Rosaleen escape to Tiburon, South Carolina where they are taken in by bee-keeping sisters.

Meridian, by Alice Walker

Strange Fruit, by Lillian Smith

The Angels of Morgan Hill, by Donna Vanliere

Similar Coming-of-Age Novels

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, by Betty Smith

Annie Dunne, by Sebastian Barry

Montana 1948, by Larry Watson

Wish You Well, by David Baldacci

“ Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird. ”

(Chapter 10)

Did you know?

Thomas Jefferson kept pet mockingbirds while at the White House and at Monticello. One favorite, whom Jefferson named Dick, rode around on his shoulder.

Mockingbirds in the United States are of the species *Mimus polyglottos* and are known for mimicking other birds' songs. If you want to know more, try *Know your Bird Sounds: Songs and Calls of Yard, Garden, and City Birds*, by Lang Elliott Or try field guides to North American birds in nonfiction under 598.2

