



To Kill a Mockingbird

6th Street Playhouse G.K. Hardt Theater

April 26 - May 12, 2019

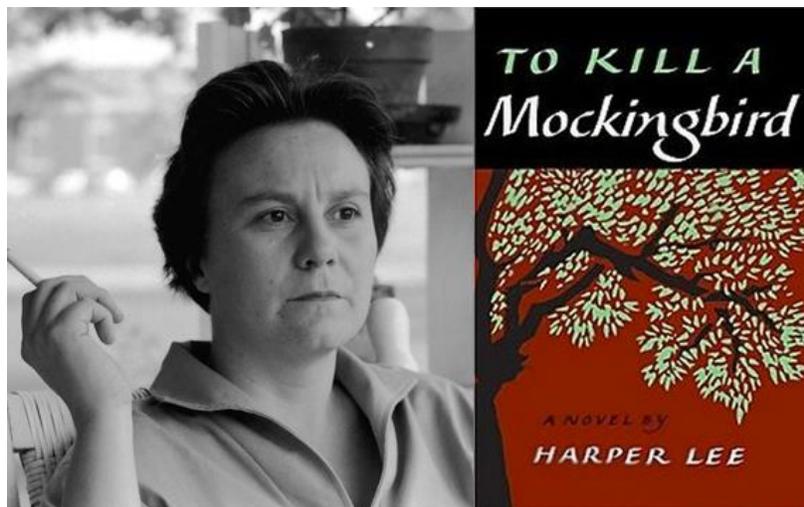
Adapted by Christopher Sergel from the novel by Harper Lee

Study Guide

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I. THE NOVELIST, HARPER LEE

Harper Lee was born Nelle Harper Lee on April 28, 1926 in Monroeville, Alabama. She was the youngest of four children. Her father, a lawyer, newspaper editor, and state senator, is said to be the model for Atticus Finch. In one of his last cases, he defended two black men accused of murdering a white store clerk. Both men were hanged. The character of Dill is modeled on her real friend, the writer Truman Capote. Capote visited Monroeville each summer and stayed with relatives there.

After graduating from high school, Lee attended the University of Alabama, eventually majoring in law. She dropped out before earning a degree. Intent on writing, in 1949 she moved to New York City. By 1957 she had a draft of the novel. She continued to revise it until it was published in 1960. It was an instant success and received the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. In 1962, Gregory Peck starred in the film version.

Lee soon became overwhelmed by her celebrity and refused to grant interviews. She never published another book. (*Go Set a Watchman* was published in 2015 but many consider it to be the first, rough draft of *Mockingbird*.) She did, however, help Capote write his own book, *In Cold Blood*.

Lee died in 2016, just shy of her 90th birthday. *The New Yorker* wrote “The battles of the Old South had been fought on cotton fields, but the battles of the New South took place in courtrooms, and Lee knew that Southern literature needed to reckon with this new setting. She rejected the plantations of Margaret Mitchell...for the worn steel bars of a jail cell and the polished wood of a witness stand.” ¹



II. THE GREAT DEPRESSION

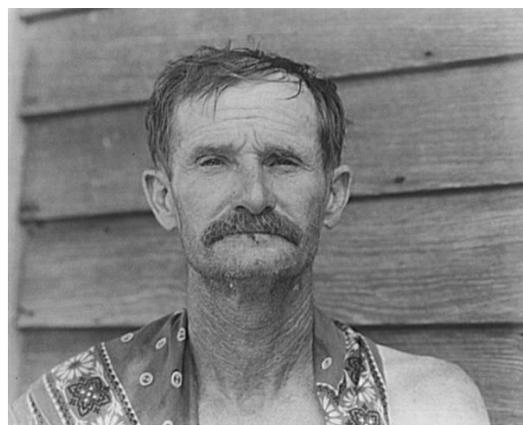
The novel takes place during the Great Depression, a time of economic hardship and poverty. While many people date the start of the Depression to the stock market crash of 1929, Alabama was already suffering economically long before 1929.

“For most cotton farmers the origins of the Great Depression go back to 1920 when the boll weevil and falling cotton prices ruined many farmers and sent the rate of tenancy soaring, after several years of decline. By 1930 Alabama contained 207,000 cotton farms, 70 percent of them worked by white and black tenant farmers.

“Non-farm employment declined by 15 percent between 1930 and 1940, the highest rate for any Southern state. The Birmingham (Alabama) industrial district was particularly hard hit, with employment declining in the city of Birmingham itself from 100,000 to only 15,000 full time employees. Some national observers contended that Birmingham was the major American city most affected by the Great Depression.

“During early stages of the national Depression (1929-1933), both private charity and state relief were overwhelmed by the magnitude of suffering in Alabama. Families were disrupted. During a four-month period in 1933, detectives working for the L&N Railroad expelled more than 27,200 transients illegally riding freight trains within the state's borders. Many transients (between 40 and 45 percent) were teenagers.” ²

“The Depression's impact on Alabama lasted throughout the 1930s and, for some Alabamians, into the early 1940s, which was longer than the nation as a whole. So dire was Alabama's situation during these years that it drew the interest of *Fortune* magazine, which sent author James Agee and photographer Walker Evans to Alabama in 1936. Their work, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, would become the iconic study of Alabamians' experiences during the Depression.



“Many farm families lived on the brink of starvation and bankruptcy during good years, so the Depression forced those on the land to focus on long-term survival. Farmers ate less meat and more filling and inexpensive starches, like beans and corn, and wore clothes made out of burlap feed and fertilizer sacks. Tenants and sharecroppers moved to find better contracts and traveled farther and more often as the Depression worsened. Having less food, fewer clothes, and little money, rural Alabamians ceased going to school, church, and other social functions.” 3

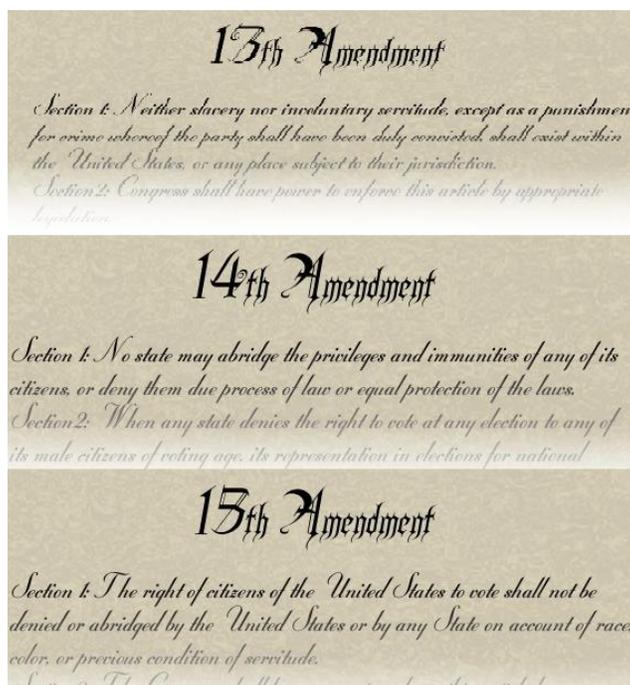


III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1865, when the Civil War ended between the North and South, there were four million enslaved people of African descent.

The 12 years following the war, the period known as Reconstruction, was a time of Constitutional firsts: the abolition of slavery (the 13th Amendment), the guarantee of United States citizenship and civil rights to all persons born or naturalized in the United States (the 14th Amendment), and the right to vote could not be denied because of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude" (15th Amendment).

Reconstruction ended long before blacks enjoyed the same rights and privileges of whites. In 1877, the last federal troops left the South and with their exodus went all Northern influence over the ways Blacks were treated. The Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist terror organization, exerted great influence in the South and had millions of members.





Soon after the exodus of federal troops, the progress of Reconstruction was rolled back. Blacks were no longer guaranteed the vote, and Jim Crow (racial segregation) laws were passed all over the South.

Plessy vs. Ferguson (“separate but equal”) was a Constitutional case that segregated whites and blacks. Segregation became the law of the land in 1896.

IV TIMELINE

1926— Harper Lee born.

1931— The Scottsboro trial of 9 African American teenagers.

1934— The execution of Walter Lett, a black man accused of raping a white woman in Alabama, becomes the inspiration for Tom Robinson.

1949— Lee moves to New York City and begins writing.

1954—The Supreme Court declares the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision favoring segregation unconstitutional. Instead they approve the integration of public schools in the *Brown vs. the Board of Education* case.

1955 — Emmett Till is murdered.

1955—Rosa Parks is arrested on December 1 for violating the bus segregation ordinance in Montgomery, Alabama. Four days later the famous bus boycott begins.

1955-56 —Arthurine Lucy, a black woman, attempts to enroll in the University of Alabama as a student. Following months of litigation, she is forced to withdraw after mobs of whites riot on the campus.

1956—Martin Luther King, Jr.’s house is bombed.

1956—The bus boycott ends on December 21, and buses are integrated.

1957—Martin Luther King, Jr., Charles K. Steele, and Fred Shuttlesworth establish the Southern Christian Leadership Conference which is instrumental in organizing the civil rights movement.

1958—Groups of civil rights activists begin sit-ins at lunch counters to desegregate them.

1960— *To Kill a Mockingbird* published.

1961— Lee wins Pulitzer Prize.

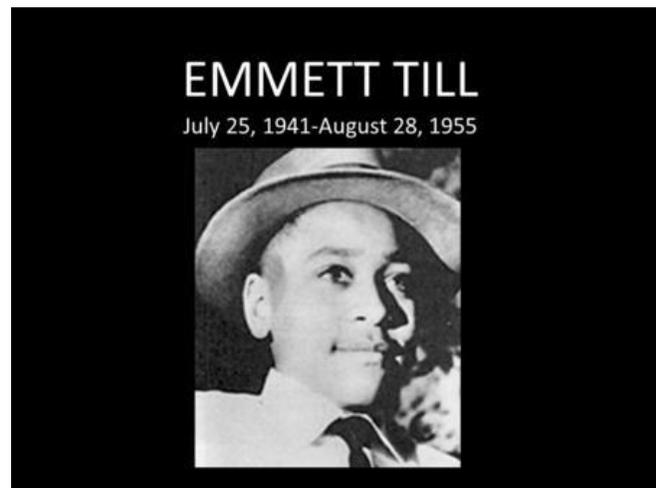
1962— The film version of *Mockingbird* is released.

V SCOTTSBORO AND EMMETT TILL

The Scottsboro Boys were a group of nine African-American teenagers who were accused of raping two white women. Much like in the novel, a mob of white men attempted to lynch the boys while in police custody, and before their trial. Despite there being no evidence against the boys (when the two girls were examined by a physician, there were no signs of rape), they were arrested anyway. In front of all-white juries, the boys were convicted of rape and all, except a single 12-year old, were sentenced to death. The case was appealed for years and became famous all over the country for its revelations of injustice and racism.



In 1955, **Emmett Till** was a 14-year old African-American boy from Chicago. On a trip to Mississippi, he was murdered for offending a 21-year-old white woman (he was accused of flirting with and/or whistling at her). Several days later her husband and his half-brother abducted Till and beat, mutilated, and shot him before sinking him in a river. His body was returned to Chicago for the funeral. His mother chose to have an open casket to reveal to the world the vulnerabilities of black people, the crime of lynching, and the limits of the American justice system. The two men were acquitted by an all-white jury, but later admitted committing the crime. The murder of Emmett Till galvanized the civil rights cause. The Montgomery bus boycott followed a few months later.



VI WHAT IS LYNCHING?

"From 1882 to 1968, an estimated 4,700 people were lynched in the United States, most of whom were black men. It was an extralegal form of execution openly or tacitly supported by local law enforcement. Lynching was a form of popularly supported, community-based violence designed to intimidate black people and keep them in their place. Often staged as public spectacles, the killings galvanized the civic imagination and carried enduring cultural force. School officials sometimes canceled or delayed classes so students could attend the murder, or at least view its final result. The involvement of religious leaders, public officials, and community members was documented by Ida B. Wells, journalist and organizer, who labored relentlessly in the late nineteenth century to mobilize opposition to lynching. Intervention or opposition by authorities was rare. Photographers and editorial cartoonists memorialized lynching; many of the popular images that document the horror were featured on postcards." 4



"Why does a crowd ... pretend to enjoy a lynching? Why does it lift no hand or voice in protest? Only because it would be unpopular to do it, I think; each man is afraid of his neighbor's disapproval--a thing which, to the general run of the race, is more dreaded than wounds and death. When there is to be a lynching the people hitch up and come miles to see it, bringing their wives and children. Really to see it? No--they come only because they are afraid to stay at home, lest it be noticed and offensively commented upon..."

Mark Twain, "The United States of Lyncherdom" 1901

Ida B. Wells was a black journalist, born just before slavery ended. She noted that whites frequently claimed that black men had 'to be killed to avenge their assaults upon women.' White people assumed that any relationship between a white woman and a black man was a result of rape. But, given power relationships, it was much more common for white men to take sexual advantage of poor black women. [Wells] stated, "Nobody in this section of the country believes the old threadbare lie that black men rape white women." Wells connected lynching to sexual violence showing how the myth of the black man's lust for white women led to murder of African American men." 5



VII A JURY OF ONE'S PEERS?



“In late April of 2010 in a courthouse in Madison County, Alabama, a prosecutor was interrogated as to why he had struck 11 of 14 black potential jurors in a capital murder case. The district attorney, Robert Broussard, answered that one had seemed ‘arrogant,’ another was ‘pretty vocal’ and in another he had ‘detected hostility.’ Mr. Broussard also questioned the ‘sophistication’ of a former Army sergeant, a forklift operator with three years of college, a cafeteria manager, an assembly-line worker and a retired Department of Defense program analyst...

“Arguments like these were used for many years to keep blacks off juries in the segregationist South, systematically denying justice to black defendants and victims. But today, the practice of excluding blacks and other minorities from Southern juries remains widespread...according to defense lawyers...and the Equal Justice Initiative.” 6

What Are the Benefits of Having Diversity in a Jury Panel?



“Even in trials that do not directly involve racial issues, defendants benefit from having a diverse jury. In fact, all parties interested in a fair trial benefit from a diverse jury that is representative of the community. First, the public is more likely to accept verdicts rendered by diverse juries as legitimate. For the public to have faith in the justice system, they need to feel that their points of view are represented in the juries that decide cases. Second, diverse

viewpoints enhance the deliberation process. Justice Thurgood Marshall eloquently articulated this explanation, ‘When any large and identifiable segment of the community is excluded from jury service, the effect is to remove from the jury room qualities of human nature and varieties of human experience, the range of which is unknown and perhaps unknowable.’

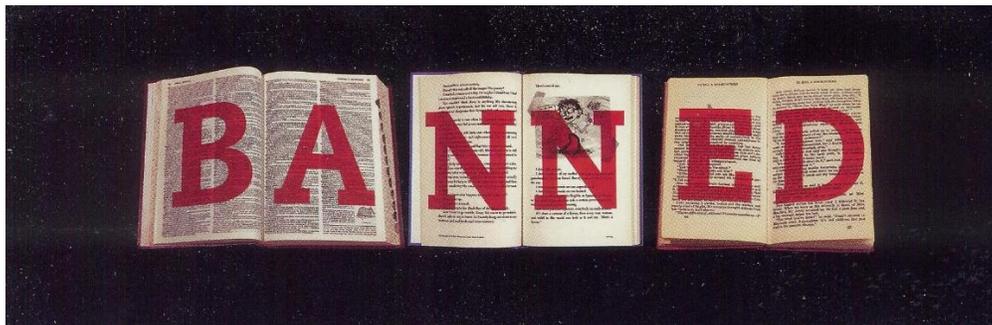
But what is the value of having a range of human experiences in the jury room? Social science research supports Justice Marshall’s observations and has found that diverse juries are more likely to ‘get it right’ than non-diverse juries. Diverse juries promote vigorous debate, which encourages jurors to examine a case’s facts and evidence more carefully. Research also shows that diverse juries have an edge in fact finding, especially when matters involve social norms and judgments... In diverse juries, *all* members of the group take more care to examine the evidence and reflect critically... It appears that a diverse jury encourages its members to examine the support for their own beliefs in preparation to defend their positions and convince others of differing viewpoints. Likewise, in the face of challenges to one’s point of view, members are more likely to abandon positions that cannot be supported by the evidence.

Another explanation is that diverse juries reduce the likelihood of *groupthink* errors.

Groupthink is a psychological phenomenon where members of a group seek concurrence for the sake of promoting harmony and reducing conflict within the group – so much so that they end up making poor or irrational decisions. Groupthink leads to a lack of critical evaluation of alternative viewpoints because members of the group actively suppress dissenting or minority viewpoints.” 7

VIII CENSORSHIP OF THE NOVEL

There has been much made of the liberal use of the N-word in the novel. Many people over the decades have been offended both by the word and the topic of rape, to the point that the book has been banned many times from public libraries, school libraries, and school curricula.



IX MORAL EDUCATION

Fundamentally, this is a book about childhood, how we mature and learn about life, and the choices we make. In the last few pages of the novel, Scout's ideas about many things (including Boo) have shifted. From the Radley porch she writes "I had never seen our neighborhood from this angle."

IT WAS TIMES LIKE
THESE WHEN I THOUGHT
MY FATHER WHO HATED
GUNS AND HAD NEVER
BEEN TO ANY WARS,
WAS THE BRAVEST MAN
WHO EVER LIVED.

HARPER LEE



It is a great honor for To Kill A Mockingbird to be chosen as the first book for Flagler Reads Together. I hope that the event becomes an annual one and that the book so chosen will bring together people of all backgrounds to share their experiences of life. When this happens, cultural barriers begin to come down and people discover that they are not so far apart after all. Good reading to everybody!

Sincerely,

Harper Lee

Harper Lee

X DISCUSSION/QUESTIONS

- A. Imagine that you are in a debate about the merits of including the book in your high school's curriculum. What are the pros and cons? Address the issue of offensive language and subject matter.
- B. When you think back on your childhood, do you recall when you learned something new and compelling about a situation? What was that?
- C. Miss Maudie tells Scout, "The things that happen to people we never really know. What happens in houses behind closed doors, what secrets..." Give some examples of what Scout learns about her community.
- D. "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." Whose skin does Scout climb into and what does she learn?
- E. "'Remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.' That was the only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something, and I asked Miss Maudie about it. 'Your father's right,' she said. 'Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy . . . but sing their hearts out for us.'" Why does Lee use the metaphor of the bird? What does it mean?
- F. Atticus tells Scout, "Mr. Cunningham's basically a good man. He just has his blind spots along with the rest of us." Do you agree? What do you think your blind spots are? Are you able to forgive others' blind spots and still think them good people?
- G. "The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience." Give some examples of people in the book who go against majority rule and live by their own conscience.
- H. Write a scene in the novel from the perspective of someone other than Scout. What is the perspective of Tom, Mayella, Dill, Calpurnia, or Boo?
- I. Give several examples of racial prejudice in the book and several examples of other kinds of prejudice.
- J. Imagine Alabama today. The headlines are about the Senate race between Democrat Doug Jones and Republican Roy Moore. Write a story about the Senate race, from the perspective of a 7-year-old. (As U.S. Attorney, Jones prosecuted two Ku Klux Klan members for the 1963 Birmingham church bombing that killed four African-American girls. Moore, as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama, was removed from his seat for refusing a federal court's order to remove a marble monument of the Ten Commandments that he had placed in the rotunda of the Alabama Judicial Building. During a run for the Senate, allegations were made that he had sexually assaulted girls.)

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