

# To kill a mockingbird chapter summaries

## Chapter 1

The story is narrated by a young girl named Jean Louise Finch, who is almost always called by her nickname, Scout. Scout starts to explain the circumstances that led to the broken arm that her older brother, Jem, sustained many years earlier; she begins by recounting her family history. The first of her ancestors to come to America was a fur-trader and apothecary named Simon Finch, who fled England to escape religious persecution and established a successful farm on the banks of the Alabama River. The farm, called Finch's Landing, supported the family for many years. The first Finches to make a living away from the farm were Scout's father, Atticus Finch, who became a lawyer in the nearby town of Maycomb, and his brother, Jack Finch, who went to medical school in Boston. Their sister, Alexandra Finch, stayed to run the Landing.

A successful lawyer, Atticus makes a solid living in Maycomb, a tired, poor, old town in the grips of the Great Depression. He lives with Jem and Scout on Maycomb's main residential street. Their cook, an old black woman named Calpurnia, helps to raise the children and keep the house. Atticus's wife died when Scout was two, so she does not remember her mother well. But Jem, four years older than Scout, has memories of their mother that sometimes make him unhappy. In the summer of 1933, when Jem is nearly ten and Scout almost six, a peculiar boy named Charles Baker Harris moves in next door. The boy, who calls himself Dill, stays for the summer with his aunt, Miss Rachel Haverford, who owns the house next to the Finches'. Dill doesn't like to discuss his father's absence from his life, but he is otherwise a talkative and extremely intelligent boy who quickly becomes the Finch children's chief playmate. All summer, the three act out various stories that they have read. When they grow bored of this activity, Dill suggests that they attempt to lure Boo Radley, a mysterious neighbor, out of his house.

Arthur "Boo" Radley lives in the run-down Radley Place, and no one has seen him outside it in years. Scout recounts how, as a boy, Boo got in trouble with the law and his father

imprisoned him in the house as punishment. He was not heard from until fifteen years later, when he stabbed his father with a pair of scissors. Although people suggested that Boo was crazy, old Mr. Radley refused to have his son committed to an asylum. When the old man died, Boo's brother, Nathan, came to live in the house with Boo. Nevertheless, Boo continued to stay inside.

Dill is fascinated by Boo and tries to convince the Finch children to help him lure this phantom of Maycomb outside. Eventually, he dares Jem to run over and touch the house. Jem does so, sprinting back hastily; there is no sign of movement at the Radley Place, although Scout thinks that she sees a shutter move slightly, as if someone were peeking out.

## **Chapter 2**

September arrives, and Dill leaves Maycomb to return to the town of Meridian. Scout, meanwhile, prepares to go to school for the first time, an event that she has been eagerly anticipating. Once she is finally at school, however, she finds that her teacher, Miss Caroline Fisher, deals poorly with children. When Miss Caroline concludes that Atticus must have taught Scout to read, she becomes very displeased and makes Scout feel guilty for being educated. At recess, Scout complains to Jem, but Jem says that Miss Caroline is just trying out a new method of teaching.

Miss Caroline and Scout get along badly in the afternoon as well. Walter Cunningham, a boy in Scout's class, has not brought a lunch. Miss Caroline offers him a quarter to buy lunch, telling him that he can pay her back tomorrow. Walter's family is large and poor—so poor that they pay Atticus with hickory nuts, turnip greens, or other goods when they need legal help—and Walter will never be able to pay the teacher back or bring a lunch to school. When Scout attempts to explain these circumstances, however, Miss Caroline fails to understand and grows so frustrated that she slaps Scout's hand with a ruler.

## Chapter 3

At lunch, Scout rubs Walter's nose in the dirt for getting her in trouble, but Jem intervenes and invites Walter to lunch (in the novel, as in certain regions of the country, the midday meal is called "dinner"). At the Finch house, Walter and Atticus discuss farm conditions "like two men," and Walter puts molasses all over his meat and vegetables, to Scout's horror. When she criticizes Walter, however, Calpurnia calls her into the kitchen to scold her and slaps her as she returns to the dining room, telling her to be a better hostess. Back at school, Miss Caroline becomes terrified when a tiny bug, or "cootie," crawls out of a boy's hair. The boy is Burris Ewell, a member of the Ewell clan, which is even poorer and less respectable than the Cunningham clan. In fact, Burris only comes to school the first day of every school year, making a token appearance to avoid trouble with the law. He leaves the classroom, making enough vicious remarks to cause the teacher to cry.

At home, Atticus follows Scout outside to ask her if something is wrong, to which she responds that she is not feeling well. She tells him that she does not think she will go to school anymore and suggests that he could teach her himself. Atticus replies that the law demands that she go to school, but he promises to keep reading to her, as long as she does not tell her teacher about it.

*You never really understand a person until you . . . climb into his skin and walk around in it.*

## Chapter 4

The rest of the school year passes grimly for Scout, who endures a curriculum that moves too slowly and leaves her constantly frustrated in class. After school one day, she passes the Radley Place and sees some tinfoil sticking out of a knothole in one of the Radleys' oak trees. Scout reaches into the knothole and discovers two pieces of chewing gum. She chews both pieces and tells Jem about it. He panics and makes her spit it out. On the last

day of school, however, they find two old “Indian-head” pennies hidden in the same knothole where Scout found the gum and decide to keep them.

Summer comes at last, school ends, and Dill returns to Maycomb. He, Scout, and Jem begin their games again. One of the first things they do is roll one another inside an old tire. On Scout’s turn, she rolls in front of the Radley steps, and Jem and Scout panic. However, this incident gives Jem the idea for their next game: they will play “Boo Radley.” As the summer passes, their game becomes more complicated, until they are acting out an entire Radley family melodrama. Eventually, however, Atticus catches them and asks if their game has anything to do with the Radleys. Jem lies, and Atticus goes back into the house. The kids wonder if it’s safe to play their game anymore.

## **Chapter 5**

Jem and Dill grow closer, and Scout begins to feel left out of their friendship. As a result, she starts spending much of her time with one of their neighbors: Miss Maudie Atkinson, a widow with a talent for gardening and cake baking who was a childhood friend of Atticus’s brother, Jack. She tells Scout that Boo Radley is still alive and it is her theory Boo is the victim of a harsh father (now deceased), a “foot-washing” Baptist who believed that most people are going to hell. Miss Maudie adds that Boo was always polite and friendly as a child. She says that most of the rumors about him are false, but that if he wasn’t crazy as a boy, he probably is by now.

Meanwhile, Jem and Dill plan to give a note to Boo inviting him out to get ice cream with them. They try to stick the note in a window of the Radley Place with a fishing pole, but Atticus catches them and orders them to “stop tormenting that man” with either notes or the “Boo Radley” game.

## **Chapter 6**

Jem and Dill obey Atticus until Dill’s last day in Maycomb, when he and Jem plan to sneak over to the Radley Place and peek in through a loose shutter. Scout accompanies them, and they creep around the house, peering in through various windows. Suddenly, they see

the shadow of a man with a hat on and flee, hearing a shotgun go off behind them. They escape under the fence by the schoolyard, but Jem's pants get caught on the fence, and he has to kick them off in order to free himself.

The children return home, where they encounter a collection of neighborhood adults, including Atticus, Miss Maudie, and Miss Stephanie Crawford, the neighborhood gossip. Miss Maudie informs them that Mr. Nathan Radley shot at "a Negro" in his yard. Miss Stephanie adds that Mr. Radley is waiting outside with his gun so he can shoot at the next sound he hears. When Atticus asks Jem where his pants are, Dill interjects that he won Jem's pants in a game of strip poker. Alarmed, Atticus asks them if they were playing cards. Jem responds that they were just playing with matches. Late that night, Jem sneaks out to the Radley Place, and retrieves his pants.

## **Chapter 7**

A few days later, after school has begun for the year, Jem tells Scout that he found the pants mysteriously mended and hung neatly over the fence. When they come home from school that day, they find another present hidden in the knothole: a ball of gray twine. They leave it there for a few days, but no one takes it, so they claim it for their own.

Unsurprisingly, Scout is as unhappy in second grade as she was in first, but Jem promises her that school gets better the farther along one goes. Late that fall, another present appears in the knothole—two figures carved in soap to resemble Scout and Jem. The figures are followed in turn by chewing gum, a spelling bee medal, and an old pocket watch. The next day, Jem and Scout find that the knothole has been filled with cement. When Jem asks Mr. Radley (Nathan Radley, Boo's brother) about the knothole the following day, Mr. Radley replies that he plugged the knothole because the tree is dying.

## **Chapter 8**

For the first time in years, Maycomb endures a real winter. There is even light snowfall, an event rare enough for school to be closed. Jem and Scout haul as much snow as they could from Miss Maudie's yard to their own. Since there is not enough snow to make a real

snowman, they build a small figure out of dirt and cover it with snow. They make it look like Mr. Avery, an unpleasant man who lives down the street. The figure's likeness to Mr. Avery is so strong that Atticus demands that they disguise it. Jem places Miss Maudie's sunhat on its head and sticks her hedge clippers in its hands, much to her chagrin.

That night, Atticus wakes Scout and helps her put on her bathrobe and coat and goes outside with her and Jem. Miss Maudie's house is on fire. The neighbors help her save her furniture, and the fire truck arrives in time to stop the fire from spreading to other houses, but Miss Maudie's house burns to the ground. In the confusion, someone drapes a blanket over Scout. When Atticus later asks her about it, she has no idea who put it over her. Jem realizes that Boo Radley put it on her, and he reveals the whole story of the knothole, the presents, and the mended pants to Atticus. Atticus tells them to keep it to themselves, and Scout, realizing that Boo was just behind her, nearly throws up.

Despite having lost her house, Miss Maudie is cheerful the next day. She tells the children how much she hated her old home and that she is already planning to build a smaller house and plant a larger garden. She says that she wishes she had been there when Boo put the blanket on Scout to catch him in the act.

## **Chapter 9**

At school, Scout nearly starts a fight with a classmate named Cecil Jacobs after Cecil declares that "Scout Finch's daddy defends niggers." Atticus has been asked to defend Tom Robinson, a black man accused of raping a white woman. It is a case he cannot hope to win, but he tells Scout that he must argue it to uphold his sense of justice and self-respect.

At Christmastime, Atticus's brother, Jack, comes to stay with Atticus for a week during the holidays. Scout generally gets along well with Uncle Jack, but when he arrives in Maycomb, she begins cursing in front of him (a habit that she has recently picked up). After supper, Jack has Scout sit on his lap and he warns her not to curse in his presence. On Christmas Day, Atticus takes his children and Jack to Finch's Landing, a rambling old

house in the country where Atticus's sister, Alexandra, and her husband live. There, Scout endures Francis, Alexandra's grandson, who had been dropped off at Finch's Landing for the holiday. Scout thinks Francis is the most "boring" child she has ever met. She also has to put up with the prim and proper Alexandra, who insists that Scout dress like a lady instead of wearing pants.

One night, Francis tells Scout that Dill is a runt and then calls Atticus a "nigger-lover." Scout curses him and beats him up. Francis tells Alexandra and Uncle Jack that Scout hit him, and Uncle Jack spanks her without hearing her side of the story. After they return to Maycomb, Scout tells Jack what Francis said and Jack becomes furious. Scout makes him promise not to tell Atticus, however, because Atticus had asked her not to fight anyone over what is said about him. Jack promises and keeps his word. Later, Scout overhears Atticus telling Jack that Tom Robinson is innocent but doomed, since it's inconceivable that an all-white jury would ever acquit him.

## Chapter 10

*"Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy . . . but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."*

Atticus, Scout says, is somewhat older than most of the other fathers in Maycomb. His relatively advanced age often embarrasses his children—he wears glasses and reads, for instance, instead of hunting and fishing like the other men in town. One day, however, a mad dog appears, wandering down the main street toward the Finches' house. Calpurnia calls Atticus, who returns home with Heck Tate, the sheriff of Maycomb. Heck brings a rifle and asks Atticus to shoot the animal. To Jem and Scout's amazement, Atticus does so, hitting the dog with his first shot despite his considerable distance from the dog. Later, Miss Maudie tells Jem and Scout that, as a young man, Atticus was the best shot in the county—"One-shot Finch." Scout is eager to brag about this, but Jem tells her to keep it a secret, because if Atticus wanted them to know, he would have told them.

## Chapter 11

On the way to the business district in Maycomb is the house of Mrs. Dubose, a cantankerous old lady who always shouts at Jem and Scout as they pass by. Atticus warns Jem to be a gentleman to her, because she is old and sick, but one day she tells the children that Atticus is not any better than the “niggers and trash he works for,” and Jem loses his temper. Jem takes a baton from Scout and destroys all of Mrs. Dubose’s camellia bushes. As punishment, Jem must go to her house every day for a month and read to her. Scout accompanies him and they endure Mrs. Dubose’s abuse and peculiar fits, which occur at the end of every reading session. Each session is longer than the one before. Mrs. Dubose dies a little more than a month after Jem’s punishment ends. Atticus reveals to Jem that she was addicted to morphine and that the reading was part of her successful effort to combat this addiction. Atticus gives Jem a box that Mrs. Dubose had given her maid for Jem; in it lies a single white camellia.

## Chapter 12

By this time, Jem has reached the age of twelve, and he begins to demand that Scout “stop pestering him” and act more like a girl. Scout becomes upset and looks forward desperately to Dill’s arrival in the summer. To Scout’s disappointment, however, Dill does not come to Maycomb this year. He sends a letter saying that he has a new father (presumably, his mother has remarried) and will stay with his family in Meridian. To make matters worse, the state legislature, of which Atticus is a member, is called into session, forcing Atticus to travel to the state capital every day for two weeks.

Calpurnia decides to take the children to her church, a “colored” church, that Sunday. Maycomb’s black church is an old building, called First Purchase because it was bought with the first earnings of freed slaves. One woman, Lula, criticizes Calpurnia for bringing white children to church, but the congregation is generally friendly, and Reverend Sykes welcomes them, saying that everyone knows their father. The church has no money for hymnals, and few of the parishioners can read, so they sing by echoing the words that



Zeebo, Calpurnia's eldest son and the town garbage collector, reads from their only hymnal. During the service, Reverend Sykes takes up a collection for Tom Robinson's wife, Helen, who cannot find work now that her husband has been accused of rape. After the service, Scout learns that Tom Robinson has been accused by Bob Ewell and cannot understand why anyone would believe the Ewells' word. When the children return home, they find Aunt Alexandra waiting for them.

## **Chapter 13**

Aunt Alexandra explains that she should stay with the children for a while, to give them a "feminine influence." Maycomb gives her a fine welcome: various ladies in the town bake her cakes and have her over for coffee, and she soon becomes an integral part of the town's social life. Alexandra is extremely proud of the Finches and spends much of her time discussing the characteristics of the various families in Maycomb. This "family consciousness" is an integral part of life in Maycomb, an old town where the same families have lived for generations, where every family has its quirks and eccentricities. However, Jem and Scout lack the pride that Aunt Alexandra considers commensurate with being a Finch. She orders Atticus to lecture them on the subject of their ancestry. He makes a valiant attempt but succeeds only in making Scout cry.

## **Chapter 14**

The impending trial of Tom Robinson and Atticus's role as his defense lawyer make Jem and Scout the objects of whispers and glances whenever they go to town. One day, Scout tries to ask Atticus what "rape" is, and the subject of the children's trip to Calpurnia's church comes up. Aunt Alexandra tells Scout she cannot go back the next Sunday. Later, she tries to convince Atticus to get rid of Calpurnia, saying that they no longer need her. Atticus refuses. That night, Jem tells Scout not to antagonize Alexandra. Scout gets angry at being lectured and attacks Jem. Atticus breaks up the fight and sends them to bed. Scout discovers something under her bed. She calls Jem in and they discover Dill hiding

there. Dill has run away from home because his mother and new father did not pay enough attention to him. He took a train from Meridian to Maycomb Junction, fourteen miles away, and covered the remaining distance on foot and on the back of a cotton wagon. Jem goes down the hall and tells Atticus. Atticus asks Scout to get more food than a pan of cold corn bread for Dill, before going next door to tell Dill's aunt, Miss Rachel, of his whereabouts. Dill eats, then gets into Jem's bed to sleep, but soon climbs over to Scout's bed to talk things over.

## Chapter 15

A week after Dill's arrival, a group of men led by the sheriff, Heck Tate, come to Atticus's house in the evening. As his trial is nearing, Tom Robinson is to be moved to the Maycomb jail, and concerns about the possibility of a lynch mob have arisen. Later, Jem tells Scout that Alexandra and Atticus have been arguing about the trial; she nearly accused him of bringing disgrace on the family. The following evening, Atticus takes the car into town. At about ten o'clock, Jem, accompanied by Scout and Dill, sneaks out of the house and follows his father to the town center. From a distance, they see Atticus sitting in front of the Maycomb jail, reading a newspaper. Jem suggests that they not disturb Atticus and return home.

At that moment, four cars drive into Maycomb and park near the jail. A group of men gets out, and one demands that Atticus move away from the jailhouse door. Atticus refuses, and Scout suddenly comes racing out of her hiding place next door, only to realize that this group of men differs from the group that came to their house the previous night. Jem and Dill follow her, and Atticus orders Jem to go home. Jem refuses, and one of the men tells Atticus that he has fifteen seconds to get his children to leave.

Meanwhile, Scout looks around the group and recognizes Mr. Cunningham, the father of her classmate Walter Cunningham. She starts talking to him about his legal entailments and his son, and asks him to tell his son "hey." All of the men stare at her. Mr.

Cunningham, suddenly ashamed, squats down and tells Scout that he will tell his son “hey” for her, and then tells his companions to clear out. They depart, and Mr. Underwood, the owner of the newspaper, speaks from a nearby window where he is positioned with a double-barreled shotgun: “Had you covered all the time, Atticus.” Atticus and Mr. Underwood talk for a while, and then Atticus takes the children home.

## **Chapter 16**

The trial begins the next day. People from all over the county flood the town. Everyone makes an appearance in the courtroom, from Miss Stephanie Crawford to Mr. Dolphus Raymond, a wealthy eccentric who owns land on a river bank, lives near the county line, is involved with a black woman, and has mulatto children. Only Miss Maudie refuses to go, saying that watching someone on trial for his life is like attending a Roman carnival.

The vast crowd camps in the town square to eat lunch. Afterward, Jem, Scout, and Dill wait for most of the crowd to enter the courthouse so that they can slip in at the back and thus prevent Atticus from noticing them. However, because they wait too long, they succeed in getting seats only when Reverend Sykes lets them sit in the balcony where black people are required to sit in order to watch the trial. From these seats, they can see the whole courtroom. Judge Taylor, a white-haired old man with a reputation for running his court in an informal fashion, presides over the case.

## **Chapter 17**

The prosecutor, Mr. Gilmer, questions Heck Tate, who recounts how, on the night of November 21, Bob Ewell urged him to go to the Ewell house and told him that his daughter Mayella had been raped. When Tate got there, he found Mayella bruised and beaten, and she told him that Tom Robinson had raped her. Atticus cross-examines the witness, who admits that no doctor was summoned, and tells Atticus that Mayella’s bruises were concentrated on the right side of her face. Tate leaves the stand, and Bob Ewell is called.

Bob Ewell and his children live behind the town garbage dump in a tin-roofed cabin with a yard full of trash. No one is sure how many children Ewell has, and the only orderly corner of the yard is planted with well-tended geraniums rumored to belong to Mayella. An extremely rude little man, Ewell testifies that on the evening in question he was coming out of the woods with a load of kindling when he heard his daughter yelling. When he reached the house, he looked in the window and saw Tom Robinson raping her. Robinson fled, and Ewell went into the house, saw that his daughter was all right, and ran for the sheriff. Atticus's cross-examination is brief: he asks Mr. Ewell why no doctor was called (it was too expensive and there was no need), and then has the witness write his name. Bob Ewell, the jury sees, is left-handed—and a left-handed man would be more likely to leave bruises on the right side of a girl's face.

## Chapter 18

The trial continues, with the whole town glued to the proceedings. Mayella, who testifies next, is a reasonably clean—by the Ewells' standards—and obviously terrified nineteen-year-old girl. She says that she called Tom Robinson inside the fence that evening and offered him a nickel to break up a dresser for her, and that once he got inside the house he grabbed her and took advantage of her. In Atticus's cross-examination, Mayella reveals that her life consists of seven unhelpful siblings, a drunken father, and no friends.

Atticus then examines her testimony and asks why she didn't put up a better fight, why her screams didn't bring the other children running, and, most important, how Tom Robinson managed the crime: how he bruised the right side of her face with his useless left hand, which was torn apart by a cotton gin when he was a boy. Atticus pleads with Mayella to admit that there was no rape, that her father beat her. She shouts at him and yells that the courtroom would have to be a bunch of cowards not to convict Tom Robinson; she then bursts into tears, refusing to answer any more questions. In the recess that follows, Mr. Underwood notices the children up in the balcony, but Jem tells Scout that the newspaper editor won't tell Atticus about their being there—although he might include it in the social

section of the newspaper. The prosecution rests, and Atticus calls only one witness—Tom Robinson.

## Chapter 19

Tom testifies that he always passed the Ewell house on the way to work and that Mayella often asked him to do chores for her. On the evening in question, he recounts, she asked him to come inside the house and fix a door. When he got inside, there was nothing wrong with the door, and he noticed that the other children were gone. Mayella told him she had saved her money and sent them all to buy ice cream. Then she asked him to lift a box down from a dresser. When Tom climbed on a chair, she grabbed his legs, scaring him so much that he jumped down. She then hugged him around the waist and asked him to kiss her. As she struggled, her father appeared at the window, calling Mayella a whore and threatening to kill her. Tom fled.

Link Deas, Tom's white employer, stands up and declares that in eight years of work, he has never had any trouble from Tom. Judge Taylor furiously expels Deas from the courtroom for interrupting. Mr. Gilmer gets up and cross-examines Tom. The prosecutor points out that the defendant was once arrested for disorderly conduct and gets Tom to admit that he has the strength, even with one hand, to choke the breath out of a woman and sling her to the floor. He begins to badger the witness, asking about his motives for always helping Mayella with her chores, until Tom declares that he felt sorry for her. This statement puts the courtroom ill at ease—in Maycomb, black people aren't supposed to feel sorry for a white person. Mr. Gilmer reviews Mayella's testimony, accusing Tom of lying about everything. Dill begins to cry, and Scout takes him out of the courtroom. Outside the courtroom, Dill complains to Scout about Mr. Gilmer's rude treatment of Tom Robinson during the questioning. As they walk, Scout and Dill encounter Mr. Dolphus Raymond, the rich white man with the colored mistress and mulatto children.

## Chapter 20

Mr. Dolphus Raymond reveals that he is drinking from a paper sack. He commiserates with Dill and offers him a drink in a paper bag. Dill slurps up some of the liquid and Scout warns him not to take much, but Dill reveals to her that the drink isn't alcoholic—it's only Coca-Cola. Mr. Raymond tells the children that he pretends to be a drunk to provide the other white people with an explanation for his lifestyle, when, in fact, he simply prefers black people to whites.

When Dill and Scout return to the courtroom, Atticus is making his closing remarks. He has finished going over the evidence and now makes a personal appeal to the jury. He points out that the prosecution has produced no medical evidence of the crime and has presented only the shaky testimony of two unreliable witnesses; moreover, the physical evidence suggests that Bob Ewell, not Tom Robinson, beat Mayella. He then offers his own version of events, describing how Mayella, lonely and unhappy, committed the unmentionable act of lusting after a black man and then concealed her shame by accusing him of rape after being caught. Atticus begs the jury to avoid the state's assumption that all black people are criminals and to deliver justice by freeing Tom Robinson. As soon as Atticus finishes, Calpurnia comes into the courtroom

## Chapter 21

Calpurnia hands Atticus a note telling him that his children have not been home since noon. Mr. Underwood says that Jem and Scout are in the colored balcony and have been there since just after one in the afternoon. Atticus tells them to go home and have supper. They beg to be allowed to hear the verdict; Atticus says that they can return after supper, though he knows that the jury will likely have returned before then.

Calpurnia marches Jem, Scout, and Dill home. They eat quickly and return to find the jury still out, the courtroom still full. Evening comes, night falls, and the jury continues to deliberate. Jem is confident of victory, while Dill has fallen asleep. Finally, after eleven that night, the jury enters. Scout remembers that a jury never looks at a man it has convicted,

and she notices that the twelve men do not look at Tom Robinson as they file in and deliver a guilty verdict. The courtroom begins to empty, and as Atticus goes out, everyone in the colored balcony rises in a gesture of respect.

## **Chapter 22**

That night, Jem cries, railing against the injustice of the verdict. The next day, Maycomb's black population delivers an avalanche of food to the Finch household. Outside, Miss Stephanie Crawford is gossiping with Mr. Avery and Miss Maudie, and she tries to question Jem and Scout about the trial. Miss Maudie rescues the children by inviting them in for some cake. Jem complains that his illusions about Maycomb have been shattered: he thought that these people were the best in the world, but, having seen the trial, he doesn't think so anymore. Miss Maudie points out that there were people who tried to help, like Judge Taylor, who appointed Atticus to the case instead of the regular public defender. She adds that the jury's staying out so long constitutes a sign of progress in race relations. As the children leave Miss Maudie's house, Miss Stephanie runs over to tell them that Bob Ewell accosted their father that morning, spat on him, and swore revenge.

## **Chapter 23**

Bob Ewell's threats are worrisome to everyone except Atticus. Atticus tells Jem and Scout that because he made Ewell look like a fool, Ewell needed to get revenge. Now that Ewell has gotten that vengefulness out of his system, Atticus expects no more trouble. Aunt Alexandra and the children remain worried. Meanwhile, Tom Robinson has been sent to another prison seventy miles away while his appeal winds through the court system. Atticus feels that his client has a good chance of being pardoned. When Scout asks what will happen if Tom loses, Atticus replies that Tom will go to the electric chair, as rape is a capital offense in Alabama.

Jem and Atticus discuss the justice of executing men for rape. The subject then turns to jury trials and to how all twelve men could have convicted Tom. Atticus tells Jem that in an

Alabama court of law, a white man's word always beats a black man's, and that they were lucky to have the jury out so long. In fact, one man on the jury wanted to acquit—amazingly, it was one of the Cunninghams. Upon hearing this revelation, Scout announces that she wants to invite young Walter Cunningham to dinner, but Aunt Alexandra expressly forbids it, telling her that the Finches do not associate with trash. Scout grows furious, and Jem hastily takes her out of the room. In his bedroom, Jem reveals his minimal growth of chest hair and tells Scout that he is going to try out for the football team in the fall. They discuss the class system—why their aunt despises the Cunninghams, why the Cunninghams look down on the Ewells, who hate black people, and other such matters. After being unable to figure out why people go out of their way to despise each other, Jem suggests Boo Radley does not come out of his house because he does not want to leave it.

## **Chapter 24**

One day in August, Aunt Alexandra invites her missionary circle to tea. Scout, wearing a dress, helps Calpurnia bring in the tea, and Alexandra invites Scout to stay with the ladies. Scout listens to the missionary circle first discuss the plight of the poor Mrunas, a benighted African tribe being converted to Christianity, and then talk about how their own black servants have behaved badly ever since Tom Robinson's trial. Miss Maudie shuts up their prattle with icy remarks. Suddenly, Atticus appears and calls Alexandra to the kitchen. There he tells her, Scout, Calpurnia, and Miss Maudie that Tom Robinson attempted to escape and was shot seventeen times. He takes Calpurnia with him to tell the Robinson family of Tom's death. Alexandra asks Miss Maudie how the town can allow Atticus to wreck himself in pursuit of justice. Maudie replies that the town trusts him to do right. They return with Scout to the missionary circle, managing to act as if nothing is wrong.



## Chapter 25

September has begun and Jem and Scout are on the back porch when Scout notices a roly-poly bug. She is about to mash it with her hand when Jem tells her not to. She dutifully places the bug outside. When she asks Jem why she shouldn't have mashed it, he replies that the bug didn't do anything to harm her. Scout observes that it is Jem, not she, who is becoming more and more like a girl. Her thoughts turn to Dill, and she remembers him telling her that he and Jem ran into Atticus as they started home from swimming during the last two days of August. Jem had convinced Atticus to let them accompany him to Helen Robinson's house, where they saw her collapse even before Atticus could say that her husband, Tom, was dead. Meanwhile, the news occupies Maycomb's attention for about two days, and everyone agrees that it is typical for a black man to do something irrational like try to escape. Mr. Underwood writes a long editorial condemning Tom's death as the murder of an innocent man. The only other significant reaction comes when Bob Ewell is overheard saying that Tom's death makes "one down and about two more to go." Summer ends and Dill leaves.

## Chapter 26

School starts, and Jem and Scout again begin to pass by the Radley Place every day. They are now too old to be frightened by the house, but Scout still wistfully wishes to see Boo Radley just once. Meanwhile, the shadow of the trial still hangs over her. One day in school, her third-grade teacher, Miss Gates, lectures the class on the wickedness of Hitler's persecution of the Jews and on the virtues of equality and democracy. Scout listens and later asks Jem how Miss Gates can preach about equality when she came out of the courthouse after the trial and told Miss Stephanie Crawford that it was about time that someone taught the blacks in town a lesson. Jem becomes furious and tells Scout never to mention the trial to him again. Scout, upset, goes to Atticus for comfort.

## Chapter 27

By the middle of October, Bob Ewell gets a job with the WPA, one of the Depression job programs, and loses it a few days later. He blames Atticus for “getting” his job. Also in the middle of October, Judge Taylor is home alone and hears someone prowling around; when he goes to investigate, he finds his screen door open and sees a shadow creeping away. Bob Ewell then begins to follow Helen Robinson to work, keeping his distance but whispering obscenities at her. Deas sees Ewell and threatens to have him arrested if he doesn’t leave Helen alone; he gives her no further trouble. But these events worry Aunt Alexandra, who points out that Ewell seems to have a grudge against everyone connected with the case. That Halloween, the town sponsors a party and play at the school. This plan constitutes an attempt to avoid the unsupervised mischief of the previous Halloween, when someone burglarized the house of two elderly sisters and hid all of their furniture in their basement. The play is an “agricultural pageant” in which every child portrays a food: Scout wears a wire mesh shaped to look like ham. Both Atticus and Aunt Alexandra are too tired to attend the festivities, so Jem takes Scout to the school.

## Chapter 28

It is dark on the way to the school, and Cecil Jacobs jumps out and frightens Jem and Scout. Scout and Cecil wander around the crowded school, visiting the haunted house in a seventh-grade classroom and buying homemade candy. The pageant nears its start and all of the children go backstage. Scout, however, has fallen asleep and consequently misses her entrance. She runs onstage at the end, prompting Judge Taylor and many others to burst out laughing. The woman in charge of the pageant accuses Scout of ruining it. Scout is so ashamed that she and Jem wait backstage until the crowd is gone before they make their way home.

On the walk back home, Jem hears noises behind him and Scout. They think it must be Cecil Jacobs trying to frighten them again, but when they call out to him, they hear no reply. They have almost reached the road when their pursuer begins running after them.

Jem screams for Scout to run, but in the dark, hampered by her costume, she loses her balance and falls. Something tears at the metal mesh, and she hears struggling behind her. Jem then breaks free and drags Scout almost all the way to the road before their assailant pulls him back. Scout hears a crunching sound and Jem screams; she runs toward him and is grabbed and squeezed. Suddenly, her attacker is pulled away. Once the noise of struggling has ceased, Scout feels on the ground for Jem, finding only the prone figure of an unshaven man smelling of whiskey. She stumbles toward home, and sees, in the light of the streetlamp, a man carrying Jem toward her house.

Scout reaches home, and Aunt Alexandra goes to call Dr. Reynolds. Atticus calls Heck Tate, telling him that someone has attacked his children. Alexandra removes Scout's costume, and tells her that Jem is only unconscious, not dead. Dr. Reynolds then arrives and goes into Jem's room. When he emerges, he informs Scout that Jem has a broken arm and a bump on his head, but that he will be all right. Scout goes in to see Jem. The man who carried him home is in the room, but she does not recognize him. Heck Tate appears and tells Atticus that Bob Ewell is lying under a tree, dead, with a knife stuck under his ribs.

## **Chapter 29**

As Scout tells everyone what she heard and saw, Heck Tate shows her costume with a mark on it where a knife slashed and was stopped by the wire. When Scout gets to the point in the story where Jem was picked up and carried home, she turns to the man in the corner and really looks at him for the first time. He is pale, with torn clothes and a thin, pinched face and colorless eyes. She realizes that it is Boo Radley.

## **Chapter 30**

Scout takes Boo—"Mr. Arthur"—down to the porch, and they sit in shadow listening to Atticus and Heck Tate argue. Heck insists on calling the death an accident, but Atticus, thinking that Jem killed Bob Ewell, doesn't want his son protected from the law. Heck corrects him—Ewell fell on his knife; Jem didn't kill him. Although he knows that Boo is the one who stabbed Ewell, Heck wants to hush up the whole affair, saying that Boo doesn't

need the attention of the neighborhood brought to his door. Tom Robinson died for no reason, he says, and now the man responsible is dead: "Let the dead bury the dead."

## Chapter 31

*Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough.*

Scout takes Boo upstairs to say goodnight to Jem and then walks him home. He goes inside his house, and she never sees him again. But, for just a moment, she imagines the world from his perspective. She returns home and finds Atticus sitting in Jem's room. He reads one of Jem's books to her until she falls asleep.

*Lee fills the night of the pageant with elements of foreshadowing, from the sense of foreboding that grips Aunt Alexandra just before Jem and Scout leave the house, to the ominous, pitch-dark night to Cecil Jacobs's attempt to scare them. The pageant itself is an amusing depiction of small-town pride, as the lady in charge spends thirty minutes describing the exploits of Colonel Maycomb, the town's founder, to the audience. Additionally, the reader can visualize the comical parade of meats and vegetables crossing the stage, with Scout, just awake, hurrying after them as the audience roars with laughter. In this way, as with the early snowfall, the fire, and the mad dog, the night of the pageant incorporates both the Gothic motif of the novel and the motif of small-town life that counterbalances it.*

*A mood of mounting suspense marks Jem and Scout's walk home. They hear the noise of their pursuer and assume it to be Cecil Jacobs, only to realize relatively quickly that they are in mortal danger. The attack is all the more terrifying because Jem and Scout are vulnerable: they are very near their home, in an area that they assume to be safe, and Scout, in her awkward costume, has no idea what is happening. Though Lee has spent a great deal of time foreshadowing Ewell's impending attack on the Finches, she manages to make the scene of the attack surprising. All of the clues in the novel to this point have suggested that Ewell would attack Atticus, not the children. But, as we realize in this scene, the cowardly Ewell would never have the courage to attack the best shot*

*in Maycomb County; his insidious, malicious attack on the children reveals how loathsome a man he is. In this way, Lee's diversionary technique of leading the reader to suspect that Atticus would be Ewell's victim makes this scene simultaneously startling for the reader and revealing of character.*

*Boo Radley's entrance takes place in the thick of the scuffle, and Scout does not realize that her reclusive neighbor has saved them until she has reached home; even then, she assumes him to be "some countryman." This failure of recognition symbolizes the inability of Scout and the other children, throughout the novel, to see Boo as a human being, treating him instead as merely a source of childhood ghost stories. As his name suggests, Boo is a sort of ghost, but this condition has less to do with his appearance out of nowhere on Halloween than with Scout's hollow understanding of him. When Scout finally realizes who has saved her, however, Boo the childhood phantom becomes Boo the human being: "His lips parted into a timid smile, and our neighbor's image blurred with my sudden tears. 'Hey, Boo,' I said." With this sentence, Scout takes the first of two large steps in this section toward completing the development of her character and assuming the grown-up moral perspective that Atticus has shown her throughout the book.*

*Heck Tate's decision to spare Boo the horror of publicity by saying that Bob Ewell fell on his knife invokes the title of the book and its central theme one last time, as Scout says that exposing Boo to the public eye would be "sort of like shootin' a mockingbird." She has appropriated not only Atticus's words but also his outlook, as she suddenly sees the world through Boo's eyes. In this moment of understanding and sympathy, Scout takes her second great step toward a grown-up moral perspective. The reader gets the sense that all of Scout's previous experiences have led her to this enriching moment and that Scout will be able to grow up without having her experience of evil destroy her faith in goodness. Not only has Boo become a real person to her, but in saving the children's lives he has also provided concrete proof that goodness exists in powerful and unexpected forms, just as evil does.*

*Despite Scout's obvious maturation in Chapter 31, the novel closes with her falling asleep as Atticus reads to her. This enduring image of her as Atticus's baby child is fitting—while she has grown up quite a bit over the course of the novel, she is still, after all, only eight years old. Just as her ham costume, a symbol of the silly and carefree nature of childhood, prevents Bob Ewell's knife from injuring her, so does the timely intervention of Boo, another part of Scout's childhood, thwart the total intrusion into her life of the often hate-filled adult world that Ewell represents. Interestingly, the book makes no return to the adult Scout for closing narration, and Lee offers the reader no details of Scout's future except that she never sees Boo again. Rather, she leaves Scout and the reader with a powerful feeling of cautious optimism—an acknowledgment that the existence of evil is balanced by faith in the essential goodness of humankind.*