***To Kill a Mockingbird***

***Chapter 11***

***Summary:***

* Now that [**Scout's**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/scout-jean-louise-finch) a grown-up second-grader, tormenting [**Boo Radley**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/boo-radley) seems like little kid stuff. She's setting her sights beyond the neighborhood to the metropolis of downtown Maycomb.
* Getting downtown, however, requires getting past the house of Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose.
* The old woman hurls insults at them every time they pass her house, no matter how nice they are to her.
* But [**Atticus**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/atticus-finch) makes polite conversation with Mrs. Dubose, so Scout think he's incredibly brave.
* The day after Jem turns twelve, he's got a load of birthday cash to spend. They head down to town for him to lighten his pockets.
* On the list of purchases: a toy steam engine for Jem and a baton for Scout.
* As they pass [**Mrs. Dubose**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/mrs-henry-lafayette-dubose), she accuses them of playing hooky, even though it's Saturday.
* [**Jem**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/jem-jeremy-atticus-finch) and Scout can put up with that, but when she attacks their father for defending Tom Robinson, Scout has to drag Jem away.
* They make their purchases and head home, passing by Mrs. Dubose's house again.
* She's not on the front porch, and Jem snaps. He grabs Scout's new baton, and uses it to destroy Mrs. Dubose's camellias, finally breaking the baton over his knee.
* Atticus comes home, and he's not happy.
* He tells his son that no matter what she said, those poor flowers never did anyone any harm, and Jem needs to go apologize—right now.
* Meanwhile, Scout finally speaks her mind. No, her dad says, it's not fair. But things are only going to get worse as the [**Tom Robinson**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/thomas-robinson) case gets closer.
* When they're older, they'll understand why he's doing what he's doing.
* But isn't Atticus wrong, because most of the townspeople think he is?
* Nope, [**Atticus**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/atticus-finch) says. Personal conscience isn't a democracy.
* Finally, Jem's back. He cleaned up the yard and apologized (even though he didn't mean it), and now Mrs. Dubose wants him to come over every day except Sunday to read to her.
* Atticus says he has to do it. There's no point in apologizing unless it's sincere. As a sick old lady Mrs. Dubose can't be held responsible for her actions.
* Atticus is a lot more forgiving then we are.
* Anyway, Jem heads over to Mrs. Dubose's house for his first round of reading. Scout goes with him.
* They find her in bed, and she gets in a few sharp words before Jem starts reading.
* Her face is disgusting—wrinkled, spotty, toothless, and drooling—so Scout tries to find something else to look at.
* After a while, the kids notice that Mrs. Dubose's frequent corrections of his mistakes had dropped off, and she doesn't even notice when he stops mid-sentence.
* Huh. She appears to be in some sort of fit. The kids ask if she's all right, but she doesn't answer.
* Then an alarm clock goes off, and Mrs. Dubose's servant Jessie shoos them out of the house, saying it's time for Mrs. Dubose's medicine.
* Reading to Mrs. Dubose becomes part of their daily schedule.
* One evening Scout asks Atticus what exactly a "n\*\*\*\*-lover" (11.100) is, since that's what Mrs. Dubose frequently calls him, and it's also what Francis said.
* Is that why she jumped Francis? Yes.
* Atticus asks why Scout's asking for a definition if she understood it well enough to make it the reason for a fight, and Scout says that it was the way Francis said it that got on her nerves.
* Atticus tells her that the term doesn't mean anything, but it's something "ignorant, trashy people use […] when they think somebody's favoring N\*\*\*\*es over and above themselves" (11.107), and that even higher-class people use it sometimes when they want to put someone down.
* It's not actually an insult; it just shows you how "poor" (11.109) the person using it is.
* One afternoon while Jem is plugging away at reading aloud to Mrs. Dubose, Atticus surprises them by coming in.
* It turns out he's just left work—Mrs. Dubose has been setting the alarm clock later and later each day, so Jem and Scout have been staying longer and longer without realizing it.
* Mrs. Dubose says that Jem has to come for a week longer, even though the original month is up, and Atticus says he has to do it.
* Finally the last day of reading is over. Hooray! Now Jem can turn to more important things, like college football.
* One evening, Mrs. Dubose dies. Atticus comes home with a box and an explanation: Mrs. Dubose was a morphine addict and wanted to kick the habit before she died as a matter of personal pride.
* Her fits were caused by withdrawal, and the reading helped keep her mind off the cravings till the alarm clock went off and she could have a dose (which also explains why the reading periods got longer and longer).
* By the end of the reading afternoons, she was free of the drug habit.
* The box Atticus brought home is for Jem. When he opens it he finds a camellia.
* Jem is angry at this needling from beyond the grave, but Atticus tells him that he thinks it's a message that everything's all right.
* If Jem hadn't gone on an anti-camellia rampage, Atticus might have made his son go read to Mrs. Dubose anyway, in order "to see what real courage is" (11.153)—not using a gun, but fighting for a cause you believe in even if you know you probably won't win.

***Brief Summary:***

Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose is a nasty woman who harasses [Jem](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Jem) and [Scout](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Scout) every time they walk past her house. Her behavior eventually pushes Jem to his breaking point. When Mrs. Dubose rudely criticizes [Atticus](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Atticus) for defending [Tom Robinson](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Tom_Robinson), Jem returns and destroys her camellia bushes with Scout's baton.

That evening Atticus sends Jem to apologize to Mrs. Dubose for his actions. He promises to come every Saturday to tend the bushes, but Mrs. Dubose insists he come every day for the next month to read to her.

For the next month, accompanied by Scout, Jem treks to Mrs. Dubose's house. Even though Mrs. Dubose continues making snide remarks about Atticus, Jem reads to her until she falls asleep. Shortly after Jem finishes his month-long sentence of reading to her, Mrs. Dubose dies. Atticus reveals that she had been addicted to morphine but had made a commitment to beat her addiction. Her vile behavior and mood swings were a side effect of withdrawal. Atticus wanted Jem and Scout to see the courage of her fight, even if it meant a painful death.

This chapter illustrates the parallel between Mrs. Dubose's fight to beat her addiction, however painful it is, and [Atticus](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Atticus)'s fight for a less racist world. Both Mrs. Dubose and Atticus know they are going to lose their fights yet take them on anyway. [Scout](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Scout) and [Jem](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Jem) are completely baffled as to why Atticus would take on a case he knows he's going to lose, but Atticus explains that losing is not a good enough reason not to try.

***Synopsis- Chapter 9-11:***

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 people he advocates 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.

The fire in which the previous section culminated represents an important turning point in the narrative structure of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Before the fire, the novel centers on Scout’s childhood world, the games that she plays with Jem and Dill, and their childhood superstitions about Boo Radley. After the fire, Boo Radley and childhood pursuits begin to retreat from the story, and the drama of the trial takes over. This shift begins the novel’s gradual dramatization of the loss-of-innocence theme, as adult problems and concerns begin disrupting the happy world of the Finch children.

The occasion for the adult world to intrude on Scout’s life is the trial of Tom Robinson. Because Robinson is a black man accused of raping a white woman, the white residents of Maycomb are furious that Atticus, the town’s best lawyer, would choose to help his cause. The townspeople are unwilling to limit their displays of anger to Atticus himself; Scout and Jem become targets as well. The town of Maycomb, whose inhabitants have been presented thus far in a largely positive light, suddenly turns against the Finches, as the ugly, racist underbelly of Southern life exposes itself. Even members of Atticus’s own family—Alexandra and her obnoxious grandson—condemn his decision to defend Tom Robinson. Chapter 9 marks Alexandra’s first appearance in the story, and her portrayal is mostly negative; only later will she develop into a sympathetic character.

The adversity faced by the family reveals Atticus’s parenting style, his focus on instilling moral values in Jem and Scout. Particularly important to Atticus are justice, restraint, and honesty. He tells his children to avoid getting in fights, even if they are verbally abused, and to practice quiet courage instead. When he gives Jem and Scout air rifles as presents, he advises them that it is a sin to kill a mockingbird. This idea is, of course, the source of the novel’s title, and it reflects the book’s preoccupation with injustices inflicted upon innocents. In different ways, Jem and Scout, Boo Radley, and Tom Robinson are all “mockingbirds.”

The incident with the mad dog demonstrates Atticus’s courage and symbolizes the town’s dependence upon his protection from both the rabid animal and the worst evil within themselves. That Scout, in particular, is so impressed with the masculine prowess with which she associates his marksmanship symbolizes how much she has to learn about courage. For, in Atticus’s mind, true bravery has nothing to do with weapons. The subsequent events surrounding Mrs. Dubose give him an opportunity to show Jem what he considers real courage. Mrs. Dubose, in many ways, represents everything wrong with Maycomb: she is unforgivably racist, raining curses on the children and denigrating Atticus for representing a black man. Yet the darkness in her is balanced by her bravery and determination, and just as Atticus loves Maycomb despite its flaws, he respects Mrs. Dubose for possessing “real courage,” which he explains as “when you know you’re licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what.” This attitude, of course, fittingly describes Atticus’s approach to the Tom Robinson case. Atticus puts into practice every moral idea that he espouses, which is the key to his importance in Maycomb and his heroism in the novel.

The camellia that Mrs. Dubose leaves Jem constitutes a distillation of what Atticus considers her essential goodness. She has sloughed off her mortal persona, one that is racist and irritable, and the flower symbolizes the purity of soul that Atticus attributes to everyone. Jem’s initial rejection of the gift symbolizes his inability to see this goodness. Although Mrs. Dubose’s gesture seems to imply an appreciation of Jem, Jem has not yet matured enough to realize that good and evil can coexist within the same person; he thus remains unwilling to accept that Mrs. Dubose could represent anything good.

***Critical Analysis(Chapter 10-11):***

Jem and Scout lament the fact that "Atticus was feeble: he was nearly fifty." The children believe that Atticus' "advanced" age keeps him from doing the sorts of things other children's fathers do. Their view of their father changes when they see him shoot a mad dog.

As Tom Robinson's trial grows closer, Jem and Scout endure more slurs against their father. When their neighbor Mrs. Dubose, a mean, elderly woman confined to a wheelchair, makes a particularly stinging remark, Jem retaliates by destroying some of her flowers. Of course, Atticus hears what happened and he makes Jem apologize to Mrs. Dubose, letting her decide his punishment. Jem is sentenced to read to Mrs. Dubose after school for one month. Scout chooses to accompany Jem. Shortly after Jem is relieved from duty, Mrs. Dubose dies. Only then does Atticus tell the children that Mrs. Dubose was very sick and fighting an extremely valiant battle against addiction.

The last two chapters of Part 1 complete the background for the trial that is coming in Part 2. Scout and Jem learn some impressive things about their father — things that will ultimately help them understand why Atticus is compelled to defend Tom Robinson. The children also confront ugliness and hostility, only to find that the reason behind the behavior follows the ethical high ground.

The title of *To Kill a Mockingbird*is explained in Chapter 10. When Atticus procures air guns for Scout and Jem, he warns them to "'remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.'" This statement surprises Scout — Atticus doesn't make a habit of saying that things are sinful. Scout takes her confusion to Miss Maudie who explains, "'mockingbirds . . . don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us.'" Boo Radley and Tom Robinson are both mockingbirds in this story, but Scout doesn't realize that fully until the end of the novel.

Beyond the mockingbird image, Lee continues bird symbolism in the case of the bird dog, Tim Johnson. Tim is "the pet of Maycomb," but one day the children discover him acting strangely. Calpurnia confirms that the dog is very sick, and consequently, very dangerous. Although the children recognize that the dog's behavior is odd, he doesn't look mad to them. Mad dogs are supposed to have certain characteristics, as Scout testifies when she says, "Had Tim Johnson behaved thus, I would have been less frightened." Significantly, Scout will learn that the town behaves much like Tim Johnson during Tom's trial. They appear to be the same, but danger lurks beneath. More significant still is that as Tim approaches the neighborhood, even the mockingbirds become still.

Through Tim Johnson, Jem and Scout gain further insight into their father, just as they will through Tom Robinson's trial. To their delight, Jem and Scout discover that Atticus was nicknamed One-Shot Finch as a boy. Jem and Scout can't understand why Atticus doesn't continue to use his innate talent for hunting like other men in Maycomb do. Again, the children take their confusion to Miss Maudie who explains, "'I think maybe he put his gun down when he realized that God had given him an unfair advantage over most living things.'" Atticus is simply unwilling to take advantage of something that can't fight back. In fact, he feels that his talent for shooting demands that he be more careful and thoughtful about those unable to fight. This stance is one of the reasons that Atticus must defend Tom, a black man helpless against the rifles of prejudice carried by many whites in Maycomb.

When Calpurnia tries to warn the Radleys about Tim Johnson's approach, Lee deftly keeps the lower-class status of blacks in the forefront by having Scout comment "'She's supposed to go around in back.'" Calpurnia is the closest thing to a mother that the Finch children have, but at a tender age, Scout recognizes that different rules apply to blacks and whites. The fact that she doesn't question these rules is not a character flaw on her part. In the American South during this time period, segregation was the law. Scout would not have any concept that these rules were demeaning or unfair, as is evidenced by her asking Atticus to define the term "nigger-lover" for her.

Jem and Scout are forced to once again alter their definition of bravery in these chapters, as well. When Atticus cheerily greets Mrs. Dubose, Scout believes him to "be the bravest man who ever lived." Ironically, then, Atticus tells his children that Mrs. Dubose "'was the bravest person I ever knew.'" The fact that someone so foul and mean could be brave is new to Jem and Scout. The children hate her until the moment Atticus explains her bravery to them.

Scout is proud that she has chosen to be a coward at Atticus' behest by no longer fist fighting with children who make disparaging remarks. So Atticus' statement that "'real courage is . . . when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what'" is a revelation to Scout as well as Jem.

This revelation also brings up the role of conscience in the novel, which Lee treats in a fairly overt manner. When Scout questions the sense in defending Tom, Atticus offers, "'Tom Robinson's case, is something that goes to the essence of a man's conscience — Scout, I couldn't go to church and worship God if I didn't try to help that man.'" Although Jem's reaction to Mrs. Dubose's final gift to him seems strong, readers should understand that Jem is actually grappling with his conscience. After all the wicked things he's thought about Mrs. Dubose, he discovers the reasons behind her behavior were understandable, if not acceptable. Not only has Jem learned a new way of defining courage, but he is also forced to look at the motivations for his own actions.

The issues of masculinity and femininity continue to have a role in these chapters. Scout doesn't think it odd that Atticus buys an air rifle for her as well as Jem, although girls traditionally aren't sharpshooters. Jem's admiration for Atticus continues to grow, so much so that Jem begins to consider himself "a gentleman." Ironically, then, when Jem is cautioning Scout about reacting to Mrs. Dubose, instead of telling her to act like a lady, he says, "'Don't pay any attention to her, just hold your head high and be a gentleman.'" Later, Jem is completely shocked to hear Atticus refer to Mrs. Dubose as "a great lady" when both she and her mouth are so vile.

Glossary

**philippic**a bitter verbal attack.

**umbrage**offense or resentment.

**interdict**to prohibit (an action) or prohibit the use of (a thing); forbid with authority.

**Dixie Howell**popular University of Alabama football player in the 1930s.

**palliation**the lessening of pain or severity without actually curing; alleviation.

**reconnaissance**an exploratory survey or examination, as in seeking out information about enemy positions or installations, or as in making a preliminary geological or engineering survey.

**calomel**mercurous chloride, HgCl, a white, tasteless powder that darkens on exposure to light: used in standard electrode cells and in agriculture and medicine to fight skin bacteria.

***Critical Study:***

This chapter focuses on Mrs. Dubose, the cantankerous old woman who sits out on her porch and yells terrible things at the children of Maycomb. She's so mean, in fact, that Cecil Jacobs walks a mile out of his way just to avoid her house. One Saturday, the day after Jem's twelfth birthday, he and Scout walk into town to buy a steam engine and a baton, and on their way there Mrs. Dubose yells at them that Atticus is "no better than the niggers and trash he works for!" This is racist and classist and makes Jem so mad that after he buys their toys, he takes Scout's baton and hacks all the blooms off Mrs. Dubose's camellia bushes. Naturally, this doesn't go over well with Atticus.

Jem's punishment is to read to Mrs. Dubose for two hours every day after school and on Saturday for an entire month. During this process, Mrs. Dubose's health deteriorates to the point where her mouth seems to move of its own volition, allowing great ropes of saliva to pour out of her mouth. After she dies, Atticus reveals that she was a morphine addict and that she'd quit cold turkey around the same time Jem destroyed her camellias. She was sick because she was going through withdrawal while Jem and Scout sat with her. Because of this, Atticus thinks Mrs. Dubose is the bravest person that he has ever met. This is an important lesson about courage for Jem and Scout. Part I ends with Jem thinking about Mrs. Dubose's bravery while staring at a camellia.

Allusions

Ivanhoe by Sir Walter Scott. This is the first book Jem reads to Mrs. Dubose. It's about a young nobleman who is disinherited by his father and winds up going on an adventure, first being wounded in a tournament, and then being captured by his enemies, before finally marrying his true love, Lady Rowena. This story of knights and valor appeals to Jem, and it allows Lee to build on the theme of courage.

Conflict

Jem vs. Mrs. Dubose. Scout's narration makes it seem like Mrs. Dubose has ongoing conflicts with almost every single character in the novel. Of these conflicts, the biggest and most important is between her and Jem. He's so upset over her calling Atticus trash that he destroys her camellias, and as punishment he's forced to read to her six days a week for over a month. During her lifetime, these two are never able to reconcile, but after she dies, Jem begins to understand why she was the way she was.

An example of this would be when Scout and Jem wait for Atticus after Jem destroys all of Mrs. Dubose's camellia bushes. Scout says, "Two geological ages later," Atticus returns, which clearly exaggerates how long it took and builds on the theme of time.

Symbols

Camellias. Mrs. Dubose leaves a single Snow-on-the-Mountain camellia for Jem after she dies. This flower alone symbolizes the end of their conflict, embodying Mrs. Dubose's forgiveness and Jem's worth in her eyes. Collectively, however, the camellias are a symbol of Maycomb's racist heritage, both because they're white and because camellias are the state flower of Alabama, which of course has a long history of racism and segregation.

Themes

Courage. Thus far in the narrative, courage has largely consisted of being willing to touch or just approach the Radley house, but in this chapter courage starts to take on a more serious character, with Mrs. Dubose fighting through a very painful and largely unnecessary withdrawal because she wanted to die "free," without being beholden to anyone or anything. Atticus thinks that she's the bravest person he's ever met because of this, but Jem and Scout have trouble understanding this, at first. Later in the novel, we'll see how this first lesson in courage affects their understanding of Tom's trial and Atticus's actions.

**Time.**Once again, time is most noticeable to Scout when it seems to drag, as when the alarm clock in Mrs. Dubose's house keeps them there a little bit later every day. In this chapter, Scout and Jem lose much of their precious free time on weekday afternoons and consequently begin to feel that their responsibility to Mrs. Dubose, like school, is a tremendous waste of time. Only after Atticus explains to them about her morphine addiction does Jem begin to think that perhaps all this time wasn't completely wasted and that, in the end, he did learn something.

***Significance:***On their way to meet Atticus after work, Scout and Jem have to pass by [Mrs. Dubose](https://www.gradesaver.com/to-kill-a-mockingbird/study-guide/character-list#mrs-dubose)'s house. Mrs. Dubose is a very mean, sick old lady who sits on her front porch and yells insults at Jem and Scout as they pass by. The day after Jem's twelfth birthday, he and Scout go to town to spend some of his birthday money. On the way, Mrs. Dubose yells to Jem that he broke Miss Maudie's grape arbor that morning, which is untrue, and yells at Scout for wearing overalls. Then she starts yelling at them about how Atticus is defending "niggers," and says that Atticus is no better than "the trash he works for." Jem tries to follow Atticus's advice regarding Mrs. Dubose: just hold your head high and be a gentleman. In town, Jem buys himself a model steam engine and buys Scout a sparkly twirling baton she has had her eye on for some time.

On the way home, in a sudden fit of anger, Jem suddenly grabs Scout's baton, cuts off all the tops of Mrs. Dubose's camellia bushes, and then snaps her baton in half. Scout watches, amazed, and begins to scream. They return home and gloomily await Atticus's return, knowing that they will be in trouble. Atticus comes home carrying green camellia buds and Scout's broken baton. He makes Jem go to Mrs. Dubose's house and apologize to her in person. Scout and Atticus discuss the necessity of keeping one's head even when times get hard. Atticus explains that he has to follow his conscience, no matter what anyone else in the town says. Jem returns from Mrs. Dubose's house. Atticus tells him one can't hold a sick old lady responsible for what she says. Jem explains that Mrs. Dubose wants him to read out loud to her every afternoon for a full month.

Scout and Jem go to Mrs. Dubose's house, which is dark, frightening, and full of medical equipment. Mrs. Dubose is lying in bed, and she looks friendly but her face is old and hideous. Jem begins to read Ivanhoe and Mrs. Dubose snaps at him when he pronounces any word incorrectly. As time passes, the old woman stops speaking and her mouth opens and closes while her head sways from side to side. Jem asks her if she is all right, but she doesn't reply. In a few minutes, an alarm clock sounds, and Mrs. Dubose's assistant shoes them out of the room and tells them to go home because it is time for Mrs. Dubose's medicine. This same sequence of events happens every time Scout and Jem go to Mrs. Dubose's house.

Scout asks Atticus what a nigger-lover is, and he says that it's just a meaningless term that "ignorant, trashy people use when they think somebody's favoring Negroes above themselves." He tells her that these words hurt the people who say them more than they hurt him.

The end of the month arrives and Mrs. Dubose asks Scout and Jem to read to her for one more week. Each day, it seems that they stay there a little longer before the alarm sounds. When Mrs. Dubose makes remarks about Atticus's case, Jem responds with detachment and keeps his anger hidden. Weeks after the last day of reading, Atticus receives a phone call and goes to Mrs. Dubose's house for a long time. He comes back to announce that she is dead, and tells the children that she was a morphine addict. Jem and Scout's visits helped break her from her morphine addiction, which the doctors had prescribed for her as a painkiller for her illness. Atticus explained to his children that Mrs. Dubose is an example of true courage. Even though she knew she was going to die, Mrs. Dubose wanted to be free of her addiction. Atticus tells Jem that courage is about more than men with guns. Instead, it is about knowing you're going to lose but sticking to your views and fighting anyway. Mrs. Dubose won, because she died beholden to nothing. Atticus calls her "the bravest woman I ever knew."

***Notes***:

Scout and Jem wonder toward town with Jem's birthday money. He plans to buy a toy train for himself and a baton for Scout. They head home and pass Mrs. Rachel DuBose house. She is a mean spirited woman who calls to them from her front porch. She doesn't approve of the children and says they won't amount to anything. They put up with her comments until she says that Atticus is representing a nigger. Jem loses control and grabs Scout's baton. He races into Miss Rachel's yard and destroys her camellias.

Later that evening when Atticus comes home from work, Miss Rachel tells him what happened. He sends Jem to apologize and Scout fears for this life. She's sure Miss Rachel will use her Civil War pistol and kill him. But, Jem returns home unharmed and tells Atticus that Miss Rachel wants him to read to her each afternoon. He says that he won't do it, but Atticus assures him that he will.

Beginning the following afternoon Jem read to Miss Rachel and Scout went with him. Miss Rachel would insult them and Atticus before she let Jem read. She set an alarm clock to know when to take her medicine and to signal they could go home. Each day the alarm sounds a little later. After the month is over, Miss Rachel says that she wants Jem to read for one more week and Atticus agrees.

Soon after Jem stops reading to her, she dies. Atticus explains that she was a morphine addict. A doctor prescribed it years earlier and she was hooked on it. She could've died an addict, but she was determined to kick it before she died. The alarm rang a little later each afternoon because she was waiting longer and longer between doses. She died brave and "not beholden to nothing and nobody."

Atticus returns from her deathbed with a box for Jem. He opens it and finds a camellia. It upsets him and he flings in to the ground. He asks why she can't leave him alone. Jem begins to cry. Atticus assures Jem that he would have insisted Jem read to her if she hadn't found a reason. That time allowed him to see a truly brave person, who didn't use a gun.

Mrs. Dubose is the embodiment of many of the problems in Maycomb. She is racist, cusses at the children about their father who is trying to help the town. By the end of the chapter, her determined side is revealed. He explains that bravery is "when you know you're licked before you begin anyway and you see the mater through no matter what." This is a motto that also applies to Atticus when he takes Tom Robinson's case. With the racist attitude in Maycomb, there is no chance he will win, but he still does his best for his client.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part***

***Summary Part 1:***

By the time [Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) is in the second grade, tormenting [Boo Radley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/arthur-radley-boo) is a thing of the past and Scout and [Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem)’s games take them further up the street and past [Mrs. Dubose](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/mrs-henry-lafayette-dubose)’s house. Mrs. Dubose lives alone with a black servant named [Jessie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters) and is rumored to carry a concealed pistol. Scout and Jem hate her, as she’s mean and responds viciously to even polite greetings. As time goes on, Jem gets bolder and insists that he and Scout need to run all the way to the post office—past Mrs. Dubose’s house—to meet [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) in the evenings. But most nights, Atticus finds Jem enraged by something Mrs. Dubose said. He encourages Jem to understand that Mrs. Dubose is ill and greets her heartily every evening.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Atticus’s choice to greet Mrs. Dubose politely, even when she insults his own children on a daily basis, adds more evidence to the idea that Atticus believes treating an individual with respect is always the right thing to do, regardless of that person’s behavior. Ignoring Mrs. Dubose or heckling her back would likely make her feel even meaner and less accepted by the community than she already is, whereas treating her kindly could yield positive results even if doing so is difficult. Jem’s willingness to write Mrs. Dubose off comes from his youth, as he’s not mature enough to consider that there might be an underlying reason for her behavior.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) receives money for his 12th birthday, so he decides to buy a miniature train for himself and a twirling baton for [Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout). [Mrs. Dubose](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/mrs-henry-lafayette-dubose) hurls insults at the children, terrifying Scout, but Jem keeps his composure until Mrs. Dubose accuses [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) of defending a black man, insisting that Atticus is no better than the “trash” for whom he works. This is the first time that Scout has heard abuse of this sort coming from an adult. They make their purchases in town and Scout gleefully tosses her baton as they head home. When they reach Mrs. Dubose’s house, she’s not on the porch. Jem snaps. He grabs Scout’s baton, uses it to cut the tops off of Mrs. Dubose’s [camellia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/symbols/geraniums-and-camellias) bushes, and then snaps the baton. He beats up Scout and they head home.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The simple fact that Mrs. Dubose cultivates camellias, just like Miss Maudie, makes it clear that she’s not an entirely evil person—like the delightful and kind Miss Maudie, Mrs. Dubose takes pleasure in the natural world and wants to make it beautiful. This, however, doesn’t excuse her nasty and rude behavior, as the abuse she slings at Scout and Jem here is clearly racist. Keep in mind that it’s likely Atticus knows Mrs. Dubose’s views on black people already, which makes it seem even more courageous that he continues to greet her warmly.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) and [Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) don’t meet [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) that evening. When Atticus arrives home with the broken baton and a [camellia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/symbols/geraniums-and-camellias), Jem confesses, and Atticus icily sends him to apologize to [Mrs. Dubose](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/mrs-henry-lafayette-dubose). Scout is terrified—she believes Mrs. Dubose will shoot Jem—but her anger at Atticus for sending Jem into danger evaporates. She crawls into Atticus’s lap and he encourages her to keep her head, even if nobody at school does so. He says that things will get worse come summer. Scout points out that Atticus might be wrong about needing to defend [Tom](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/tom-robinson), since everyone else thinks he’s wrong. Atticus says he needs to do this to live with himself.

***Analysis Part 3:***

As far as Scout is concerned, what everyone else in Maycomb thinks is probably right—thus far, she’s had little reason to question the status quo and whatever the majority believes since, for the most part, she’s been a part of that majority (due to the fact that she’s white and Atticus is a respected figure in town). This experience starts to show her what it’s like to be on the outs, which will help her develop empathy for other people who are different and disliked.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) returns home. He says that he said he was sorry, but he isn’t, and that [Mrs. Dubose](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/mrs-henry-lafayette-dubose) wants him to read to her every day after school. [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) says that Jem must do this for the whole month that Mrs. Dubose requested. On Monday, [Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) accompanies Jem to Mrs. Dubose’s house. [Jessie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters) lets them in. The house is dark and smells oppressive. Mrs. Dubose lies under many quilts and looks almost friendly, so Scout momentarily feels sorry for her. Mrs. Dubose insults Scout and Jem begins to read Ivanhoe. Scout inspects Mrs. Dubose’s face and thinks of how disgusting she looks. Mrs. Dubose corrects Jem for 20 minutes, but then seems to go into a silent fit. When an alarm clock goes off, Jessie shoos Scout and Jem out so Mrs. Dubose can have her medicine.

***Analysis Part 4:***

It doesn’t seem as though Scout and Jem have much experience spending time with elderly people, which likely explains some of their fear and apprehension about being here—to an active and imaginative child, an elderly person who’s confined to her bed, spews profanity, and seems unwell could be understandably unsettling. That Scout momentarily feels sorry for Mrs. Dubose shows that she certainly has the capacity to feel empathy and compassion for people who are very different from her, even if they’re also scary—an important lesson as she continues to consider Boo.

***Summary Part 5:***

That afternoon, [Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) tells [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) that [Mrs. Dubose](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/mrs-henry-lafayette-dubose) is nasty, drools, and has fits. Atticus reminds him that sick people don’t always look nice. As the week wears on, Scout, Jem, and Mrs. Dubose fall into a routine: Mrs. Dubose corrects Jem’s reading for a while and insults them and [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch), seems to go vacant, and when the alarm clock rings, [Jessie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters) dismisses Scout and Jem. One evening, Scout asks Atticus what a “nigger-lover” is. She explains that Mrs. Dubose calls Atticus that and that [Francis](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters) hurled it at her, but she’s not sure what it means—users’ tones, however, tell her it’s not nice. Atticus says it’s an ugly term like “snot-nosed,” and it reflects more on the ugliness of the person using it than the person receiving it.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Atticus suggests here that when a person uses slurs, it simply shows how cruel and misguided the person is—in Scout’s position of receiving these slurs, it says nothing bad about her. Keep in mind the fact that Scout is hearing this abuse from adults as well as children, which begins to create cracks in the idea that Maycomb is an idyllic place. There’s a clear undercurrent of hate and racism in town that Scout is just beginning to see, even if Atticus implies that it’s been here the entire time—just not on Scout’s radar.

***Summary Part 6:***

A month later, [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) enters as [Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) reads to [Mrs. Dubose](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/mrs-henry-lafayette-dubose). With a smile, Mrs. Dubose tells Atticus that it’s 5:14, and the alarm is set for 5:30. [Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) realizes that they’ve been staying a little longer at Mrs. Dubose’s every day and that today, Mrs. Dubose shows no sign of having a fit. Mrs. Dubose asks if Jem will read to her for another week. On the way home, Atticus insists that Jem must continue reading. The next week, Mrs. Dubose, not the alarm clock, releases Jem. She doesn’t have fits, picking on Jem and Scout instead. On the last day, she releases the children and they race away howling.

***Analysis Part 6:***

Extending the alarm clock every day makes it clear to Scout that there’s more going on here than just reading, even if she’s not yet sure what. This again speaks to her capacity to understand some aspects of the adult world, even if she can’t fully interpret them yet. That Mrs. Dubose’s racist abuse continues even as she improves indicates that this is not just an anomaly due to her illness, but rather a feature of her personality. Her open expression of these sentiments also suggests that this mindset is common among adults in town, and that there are others who are just as racist as Mrs. Dubose.

***Summary Part 8:***

A month or so later, the phone rings and [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) goes to [Mrs. Dubose](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/mrs-henry-lafayette-dubose)’s house. He returns much later with a candy box and explains that Mrs. Dubose died. He says that Mrs. Dubose was a morphine addict, and this is why she had fits. She called him just before [Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) cut down her [camellias](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/symbols/geraniums-and-camellias) to make her will and insisted that she’d die beholden to nothing—she wanted to overcome her addiction, and she did. Atticus assures Jem that Mrs. Dubose died free and told him all sorts of nasty things before she went. He hands Jem the box, which contains a white camellia. Jem throws it and screams. He buries his face in Atticus’s shirt and Atticus says he would’ve made Jem read anyway. He wanted Jem to see that courage is not a man with a gun—it’s doing something even if you know you won’t succeed.

***Analysis Part 7:***

The camellia is a reminder to Jem to remember that for all her faults, Mrs. Dubose was a human being like anyone else—and like everyone else, she deserves kindness, respect, and to be remembered as being courageous and dignified in her own way. Atticus recognizes that this is one of the most important things he can teach his children, as learning this lesson will help them to be empathetic and caring in the future, especially when faced with people who are different.