***To Kill a Mockingbird***

***Chapter 3***

***Brief Summary:***

Scout and Walter get into a fight in the schoolyard. Jem catches them and makes Scout explain. She tells him about her first morning in school. When she tells Jem who the boy is, he invites Walter to have dinner (which is actually eaten during the middle of the day) with them at their house. Walter eagerly accepts the invitation and when at the house, quickly gives himself a healthy portion of food.

He uses a lot of molasses on his food, and when Scout questions him, Calpurnia takes her into the kitchen to encourage Scout to be polite. Scout tries to convince Atticus to fire Calpurnia and he is insistent that Calpurnia stay with them.

Later, the children return to school and one of the Ewell boys is responsible for the afternoon disturbance. Miss Fisher passes his desk and a cootie jumps from his head onto her. She finally calms down and insists that he go home and take a bath. He is not to return until he is clean and has gotten rid of the cooties. The Ewell boy tells Miss Fisher that he was ready to leave for the year anyway. It is common practice for the Ewell children to attend the first day of school and then skip the remainder. Most teachers know to just mark them absent.

Scout cannot walk home from school with Jem because the fourth grade stays a half hour longer. On the way home from school she decides that she won't go back to school. After dinner she explains this to Atticus who tells her that she will go back to school. He explains that she needs to be more understanding. Atticus tells her that she will never understand "until you consider things from his point of view – until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

She isn't happy that she must go to school, but is pleased when Atticus agrees that they can continue to read each evening. They will keep it between themselves and not tell Miss Fisher.

Scout tries to be helpful and garners harsh words from her teacher. This is a first glimpse into a more grown up environment. When we are introduced to Walter, this gives us some insights into the vastly different classes of people in Maycomb. Miss Fisher's behavior to ward Scout also shows her inflexibility. She knows one way to teach and finds it impossible to adjust that to accommodate the real life experience with her students. From the details in this chapter, Scout is not the only student who would require alterations in the lesson plans.

***Brief Analysis:***

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](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/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.

Scout’s unpleasant first day of school has a threefold purpose: it locates the reader’s sympathies firmly with the narrator; it offers a further introduction to Maycomb’s tortured social ladder; and it provides sharp social commentary on the theme of children and education, one of the book’s most important themes. In her interactions with Miss Caroline, Scout is victimized by her teacher’s inexperience; Scout means well but receives only punishment in return. The rigid, impersonal protocols demanded by the law and by Miss Caroline’s method of teaching are shown to be insufficient and irrational—Burris Ewell can keep the law happy by coming to school only one day a year, while Scout incurs her teacher’s wrath simply by learning to read at an early age. This topsy-turvy educational outlook fails catastrophically to meet the needs of either student. Scout, who is commonsensical enough to perceive this failure immediately, is frustrated by her inability to understand why her teacher acts as she does, and why she, Scout, continually incurs disfavor for well-intentioned actions.

Throughout these chapters, Scout’s well-meaning missteps (telling the teacher about Walter’s poverty, criticizing Walter for putting molasses on his meat and vegetables) earn harsh rebukes from the adult world, emphasizing the contrast between the comfortable, imaginative childhood world that Scout occupies in Chapter 1 and the more grown-up world she is now expected to occupy. This interaction sets a pattern for the book and for the basic development of Scout as a character: whether dealing with adults or with other children, Scout always means well, and her nature is essentially good. Her mistakes are honest mistakes, and while there is evil all around her in the novel, it does not infect her, nor does injustice disillusion her, as it does Jem. At the end of Chapter 2, Scout, acting on her best intentions (as always), tries to explain the Cunninghams to Miss Caroline.

Young Walter Cunningham is the first glimpse we get of the Cunningham clan, part of the large population of poor farmers in the land around Maycomb. Walter’s poverty introduces the very adult theme of social class into the novel. Scout notes in Chapter 1 that Maycomb was a run-down town caught up in the Great Depression, but so far, we have seen only the upper-class side of town, represented by relatively successful and comfortable characters such as Atticus. Now, however, we begin to see the rest of Maycomb, represented by the struggling Cunninghams and the dirt-poor Ewells. Jem later divides Maycomb into four social classes, placing the Cunninghams a level beneath the other families in the town (Walter’s fondness for molasses on all of his food illustrates the difference in status between his family and the Finches).

A correlation between social status and moral goodness becomes evident as the novel progresses. At the top of this pyramid rests Atticus, a comparatively wealthy man whose moral standing is beyond reproach. Beneath him are the poor farmers such as the Cunninghams. The Ewells are below even the Cunninghams on the social ladder, and their unapologetic, squalid ignorance and ill tempers quickly make them the villains of the story. We do not encounter them again until Part Two, but Burris’s vicious cruelty in this section foreshadows the later behavior of his father, Bob Ewell.

Miss Caroline’s teaching methods, meanwhile, facilitate Lee’s subtle critique of educational orthodoxy. Miss Caroline cannot accept that Scout already knows how to read and write, because it confounds the teaching formula that she has been taught to implement. She adheres strictly to a “method” that she learned from adults, instead of learning from her experiences in the classroom and adapting her teaching accordingly. To Scout, this method is dull; to the reader, it exemplifies how well-meaning but rigid thinking can fail. Just as Atticus encourages Scout to place herself in another person’s position before she judges that person, Miss Caroline would do better to try to think like her students and respond to their needs rather than simply trying to impose an external system on their education. Throughout the novel, Atticus’s moral position of sympathy and understanding is contrasted with rigid, impersonal systems such as Miss Caroline’s that fail to account for individual necessities. In this sense, Miss Caroline’s behavior in the schoolhouse foreshadows the courtroom scenes later in the novel, when the system that fails is not an educational technique but the law.

***Detailed Summary:***

* Jean Louise catches Walter Cunningham in the schoolyard and beats him up for being the reason she got in trouble, but Jem stops her.
* She explains to [Jem](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/jem-jeremy-atticus-finch) (who calls her Scout, so we will too) what happened.
* Jem invites Walter to come home for lunch with Scout and him.
* At the Finch house, [Atticus](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/atticus-finch) talks to Walter about farming, while Jem and Scout listen half-comprehendingly.
* Walter asks for molasses, which he proceeds to pour all over his food.
* Scout is all, "What?," and he stops in embarrassment.
* [Calpurnia](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/calpurnia) calls Scout into the kitchen, where she gives her a lecture on hospitality—Walter's a guest and so he can basically do whatever he wants.
* The kids go back to school, and Scout grumps silently about Calpurnia's lecture.
* She's called back to the here and now by a shriek from Miss Caroline, who's seen a "cootie" (3.37)—probably a louse, which may sound more familiar in the plural, lice—on one of the students.
* Miss Caroline tries to send the student, named Burris Ewell, home to wash his hair (after looking up lice remedies in a reference book), and says he should take a bath (which he apparently really needs, since he looks worse than Pigpen from Peanuts) before coming back to class.
* But Burris tells her that he's not coming back.
* What? Apparently, Burris is one of the Ewells. Ewells come the first day to satisfy the truant officer and then skeddaddle.
* Burris decides he's already done with school for the year even though the first day isn't over yet, and manages to make Miss Caroline cry before he leaves.
* The other students try to cheer Miss Caroline up, and she reads them another boring story.
* Highly dissatisfied with her first day of school, Scout goes home and makes plans to run away.
* Atticus comes home from work, having apparently forgotten about Scout's lunchtime misbehavior, and Calpurnia gets back on Scout's good side with tasty crackling bread.
* After dinner, Atticus invites Scout to come read with him, which brings up unpleasant memories.
* Scout tries to convince Atticus that she doesn't really need to go to school, but he's not buying it.
* She tells him about her first day of school, and Atticus tells her to try to think about things from the other person's perspective—in this case, Miss Caroline, who was only trying to do her best in a strange place, whose ways she doesn't yet understand.
* Scout says that Burris Ewell stays home from school so she should be able to do so too, but apparently what holds true for Ewells doesn't apply to Finches.
* Finally, Atticus proposes a compromise: they'll keep reading at home if she'll keep going to school—but she shouldn't tell Miss Caroline about it.

***Detailed Analysis:***

In the playground [Scout](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Scout) takes her frustrations out on Walter Cunningham for the morning's mishaps. [Jem](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Jem) stops her, realizing that Walter is the son of a man that [Atticus](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Atticus) defended in court. He invites the boy home with him and Scout for lunch. Walter is so hesitant at first that Jem and Scout leave, but he soon catches up to join them. At home the day doesn't get much better for Scout. When she questions Walter as to why he's pouring syrup on his food, [Calpurnia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Calpurnia) calls her to the kitchen and scolds her for embarrassing their guest. When Scout tries defending herself by saying he's "just a Cunningham" and not company, Calpurnia banishes her to the kitchen to eat alone.

As the boys head back to school Scout stays behind to seek comfort from Atticus. She tells him that Calpurnia likes Jem better and asks Atticus to fire her. Atticus tells Scout that Jem gives Calpurnia less to worry about and makes it clear that he has no intention of firing Calpurnia, explaining that the family wouldn't survive a single day without her.

Back at school Miss Caroline goes into a panic when she spots lice on a student's head. She asks the student, Burris Ewell, to go home and treat his condition so that the rest of the class doesn't get infected. Burris laughs at her suggestion, informing her that he won't be coming back. One of the older students explains that Burris is like all the other Ewell kids: they attend school the first day to keep the truant officer happy but do not come again. Miss Caroline asks Burris to sit down, but he begins shouting vile insults at her and eventually drives the young teacher to tears.

When the school day is over Scout is pleasantly surprised by Calpurnia's kindness when she gets home. After supper Atticus asks her to read with him, but Scout explains that her teacher told her to stop doing that. Scout asks if she can be like Burris Ewell and just go to school the first day and not go back.

Atticus explains that the Ewells are a special case because people have become blind to the way they live. Everyone feels so badly for the children that they allow the father, [Bob Ewell](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Bob_Ewell), to hunt for food outside of hunting season. But everyone else, including the Finches, have to live inside the law, and that's why Scout must continue going to school.

In the end Atticus strikes a deal with Scout: she continues going to school, and they'll continue reading together at night just as they always have.

It may have been [Scout](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Scout)'s first day of school, but her most valuable lessons occur outside the classroom. For instance, when she refers to Walter Cunningham as "just a Cunningham" and not a guest, [Calpurnia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Calpurnia) is quick to point out that everyone deserves respect, no matter their social status. Scout's first day in the classroom begins her exposure to just how socially divided the small town of Maycomb really is.

Maycomb's social division becomes even more apparent in the incident with Burris Ewell, the student with lice. His behavior toward Miss Caroline foreshadows the kind of interactions one can expect from the Ewells. Later in the book, particularly during the trial, it becomes clear just how backward the Ewells are in society.

In [Chapter 3](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/chapter-3-summary/) [Atticus](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Atticus)'s appreciation of Calpurnia also is made clear. It is already evident that Atticus is a loving father; this chapter provides insight into his attitude toward race.

***Critical Study:***

Jem invites Walter Cunningham over for lunch when he finds out that the boy doesn't have any food. Walter hesitates but then takes Jem up on the friendly offer. At the Finch house, Atticus and Walter discuss farming, and Scout is overwhelmed by their adult speech. Walter asks for some molasses and proceeds to pour it all over his meat and vegetables. Scout rudely asks him what he's doing and Calpurnia gives her a lecture in the kitchen about how to treat guests - even if they're from a family like the Cunninghams.

Back at school, there's a big scene when Miss Caroline screams upon seeing a louse ("cootie") crawl off of the head of one of the boys in the class. This boy, Burris Ewell, comes from a family so poor that Atticus says they "live like animals." Their children come to school on the first day of the year and then are never seen again. The children inform their teacher of this, explaining that "He's one of the Ewells." Miss Caroline wants Burris to go home and take a bath, but before he leaves the room for the rest of the year, he yells crude insults at her and makes her cry. The children comfort her and she reads them a story.

Scout feels discouraged returning home from school. After dinner she tells Atticus she doesn't want to go back. Atticus asks her to understand the situation from Miss Caroline's point of view - Miss Caroline can't be expected to know what to do with her students when she doesn't know anything about them yet. Scout wants to be like Burris Ewell and not have to go to school at all. As Atticus explains, the town authorities bend the law for the Ewells because they'll never change their ways - for instance, Mr. Ewell can hunt out of season because everyone knows he spends his relief checks on whiskey and his children won't eat if he doesn't hunt. Atticus teaches Scout about compromise: if she goes to school, Atticus will let her keep reading with him at home. Scout agrees and Atticus reads to her and Jem from the papers.

Critical Exploration:  
Scout chases down Walter Cunningham and grinds his face into the dirt at lunchtime because of what happened with Miss Caroline. Jem stops her from beating him up, however, citing the fact that their fathers know each other (Scout said in Chapter 2 that Walter’s family were so poor that they paid Atticus for his services with gifts of wood, holly, and chestnuts). Jem then invites Walter to lunch, bragging on the way home about how he once touched the Radley house. At lunch (which Scout calls “dinner”), Scout criticizes Walter for pouring syrup over his entire plate. Calpurnia is livid because of this and punishes Scout by making her eat in the kitchen instead of at the dinner table. Scout thinks this is reason enough to fire Calpurnia, but Atticus refuses to.

Back at school, Miss Caroline screams, “It’s alive!” as if she’s seen a mouse. In fact, it’s a cootie living in Burris Ewell’s hair. None of the kids are bothered by this, least of all Burris Ewell, but it leaves Miss Caroline shaken up. She’s not prepared to face Burris Ewell, one of the Ewell clan of children who show up on the first day of school, then ditch for the rest of the year. Burris doesn’t leave until Miss Caroline starts crying and the other kids have to comfort her. Back home, Scout is even more confused when Calpurnia says she missed Scout while she was at school. When her father tells her it’s time to read, it’s too much for her, and she goes to sulk on the front porch. She and Atticus strike a compromise: if she goes to school, they can keep reading together in secret.

Alliteration

This chapter has several examples of alliteration—Miss Caroline’s “sudden shriek,” the Finches’ “silver saucer,” and Burris Ewell’s threat, “Make me, missus,” to name a few.

Allusions

The Dewey Decimal System. Jem erroneously refers to this as a teaching method when it is, in fact, a classification system that libraries use to arrange their books. It was first employed in the 18th Century and was already in use in many schools by the 1930s, when the novel is set.

Conflict

The conflict in this chapter is largely benign, as it was in Chapters 1 and 2. Both Scout’s conflicts with Calpurnia and Walter stem from the conflict with Miss Caroline in Chapter 1, which in itself demonstrates Scout’s often quarrelsome nature. When she describes Calpurnia as “fractious,” it’s clear that Scout is really talking about herself and isn’t, as a child, the best judge of her actions.

Burris Ewell vs. Miss Caroline. Once again, Miss Caroline’s lack of familiarity with Maycomb’s ways leads to conflict, this time with Burris Ewell, who has been showing up for the first day of first grade for three years and is just about to leave when Miss Caroline sees a cootie on his head and screams. Burris’s attack of Miss Caroline and school in general is mean-spirited and ugly and leaves her in tears. Scout and all the other children have to comfort her and explain that it’s just his way. As we’ll see later, the Ewells are all like that.

Scout vs. Calpurnia. This conflict flares up in the middle of the chapter, when Calpurnia punishes Scout for criticizing Walter’s fondness for syrup. Their fight is so contentious that Scout actually wants Atticus to fire Calpurnia because of it. He of course does no such thing, and Scout is left smarting for the rest of the afternoon, until she comes home to find that Calpurnia has made her favorite cracklin’ bread. When Calpurnia tells Scout she missed her, the girl is so befuddled that she doesn’t know what to think. Their conflict isn’t over yet, but will begin to ebb after this chapter.

Scout vs. Walter Cunningham. When the chapter opens, Scout is chasing down Walter and grinding his face into the dirt because he’s indirectly responsible for her getting in trouble with Miss Caroline in Chapter 2. Eventually, Jem pulls Scout off of Walter and invites him over to their house for lunch. Scout, unable to fully let go of their fight, criticizes him for pouring syrup all over his plate. Part of this disdain for him stems from Scout’s superior social status: Walter Cunningham is from one of the poorest families in Maycomb, and, intentionally or no, Scout thinks that she’s better than Walter. This will change later in the novel, but, for now, Scout has no respect for Walter.

Diction

Lee’s use of diction is most apparent when Scout’s narrative voice breaks to allow Atticus’ use of legal jargon to seep through. Whenever this happens, the distinctly Southern character of Scout’s voice is enhanced, while Atticus’ formal speech and mannerisms become more apparent.

Idioms

Scout’s narrative voice makes use of many idioms, including: “I’ll be dogged,” “what in the Sam hill are you doing?” and Scout’s warning that she would “fix” Calpurnia or get back at her. These idioms contribute to the authenticity of Scout’s voice and emphasize her Southern roots.

Repetition

In addition to the alliterative phrases “sudden shriek” and “silver saucer,” Scout uses repetition in the scenes at school when she refers to the character Little Chuck Little, who appears, contrary to his name, to be something of a scrappy fighter, capable of scaring the bigger (and meaner) Burris Ewell. Lee uses repetition to trick the reader into thinking Little Chuck isn’t capable of violence.

Symbols

Harper Lee uses the symbols in this chapter to indicate social status. Later in the novel, symbols will be used as tools of character development, as elements of moral and logical arguments, and, collectively, as a method of emphasizing key themes (for example, innocence and justice).

Atticus’ Pocket Watch. Unsurprisingly, Atticus’ pocket watch is a symbol of time and its passing. He tends to take it out of his pocket when he wants to think, and in so doing imparts the watch with a sort of ruminative power, as if it were a talisman.

Cooties. When we say someone has cooties, we typically mean that they’re dirty and shouldn’t be touched or associated with (often, this is said of young boys). That Burris has a literal cootie in his hair is a symbol of his self-imposed social isolation, which he cultivates with vicious satisfaction.

Themes

Compromise. Atticus and Scout strike a bargain at the end of this chapter: if she goes back to school, then they can continue reading together in secret. He uses this as an opportunity to teach her about the idea of compromise, which he defines as two or more parties making concessions in order to reach an agreement. There will be many compromises in this novel, some more balanced than others.

Courage. The Finch children, being kids, have an underdeveloped idea of what constitutes real bravery. As such, Jem believes that running up and touching the Radley house was an act of great courage on his part, though Scout is quick to point out that he’s obviously still afraid of the Radleys. Later in the novel, their idea of courage will develop and become less childish.

Education. As in Chapter 2, education is a major theme and a source of some disillusionment for Scout. Her conflict with Miss Caroline sours her on formal education and makes her long for Atticus to take Miss Caroline’s place and homeschool her instead. This doesn’t happen, but from here on out the elementary school and the teachers there will be a source of frustration and amusement for Scout, who holds many of their teaching methods in disdain.

Empathy. Atticus attempts to teach Scout about empathy when he tells her, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view....” This is the equivalent of telling her to walk in someone else’s shoes in order to understand them. Scout doesn’t know how to do this as of yet, and it isn’t until the final chapters that she learns this lesson.

Gossip. Yet again, much of the gossip in this chapter concerns Boo Radley, whom Walter calls a “hain’t.” (A hain’t is a ghost or a spooky person).

Humor. Much of the humor in the novel stems from Scout’s narrative voice, which is naturally sharp and humorous, while at the same time being sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of life in Maycomb. She’s an innately perceptive character who enjoys pointing out curious facts and behaviors, such as the fact that sometimes Dr. Reynolds will accept payment in the form of a bushel of potatoes for his help delivering a baby. Lee uses these comical moments to temper the more serious events of the novel and provide some much needed levity to the narrative.

Loneliness. When Scout returns from her first day of school, she’s surprised to find that Calpurnia missed her and was lonely without her and Jem around the house. This loneliness helps develop Calpurnia’s character, which has been fairly flat thus far, thanks to Scout’s view of her as a disciplinarian. As the narrative progresses, Lee will continue to use loneliness as a way of creating empathy for her characters, particularly those who have been misunderstood.

Superstition. The children in Maycomb believe in “hain’ts,” or ghosts. That Walter calls Boo a hain’t suggests that there’s something otherworldly about him that frightens the children. Later, Scout will learn that this isn’t true, but for the moment, at least, the children hold onto their superstitions.

Violence. Though the conflict between Burris Ewell and Miss Caroline has its humorous moments, it is, by and large, a frightening encounter, with Burris calling Miss Caroline a “slut” and behaving in an inappropriate manner. There’s also a moment during this fight when Little Chuck Little threatens Burris and sticks his hand into his pocket as if he has a knife there. Little Chuck Little was earlier described as having infinite patience, and his sudden threat of violence here is meant to indicate that Maycomb isn’t as safe as it would purport to be.

***Significance(Ch2-3):***Dill goes back to Mississippi for the school year, and Scout turns her attention to starting first grade — something she's been waiting for all her life. However, Scout's first day at school is not at all the glorious experience she'd been expecting from the winters she spent "looking over at the schoolyard, spying on multitudes of children through a two-power telescope . . . learning their games,  . . . secretly sharing their misfortunes and minor victories."

Scout's teacher, Miss Caroline Fisher, is new to teaching, new to Maycomb, and mortified that Scout already knows how to read and write. When Miss Caroline offers to lend Walter Cunningham lunch money, Scout is punished for taking it upon herself to explain Miss Caroline's faux pas to her. (Walter refuses to take the money because his family is too poor to pay it back.)

Scout catches Walter on the playground, and starts to pummel him in retaliation for her embarrassment, but Jem stops her and then further surprises her by inviting Walter to have lunch with them. Scout is then punished by Calpurnia for criticizing Walter's table manners. Back at school, Miss Caroline has a confrontation with Burris Ewell about his "cooties" and the fact that he only attends school on the first day of the year.

That evening, Scout tells Atticus about her day, hoping that she won't have to go back to school — after all, Burris Ewell doesn't. Atticus explains why the Ewells get special consideration and then tells Scout, "'You never really understand a person . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.'" These words stick with Scout, and she will try with varying degrees of success to follow Atticus' advice throughout the course of the story.

In these two chapters, Lee uses Scout to help the reader gain a better understanding of the Maycomb community and how it functions. Meeting Scout's classmates paves the way for meeting their adult family members later in the book. The children introduced in these chapters are a microcosm of their families. For instance, Walter Cunningham, like his father, is polite, self-effacing, and unwilling to accept charity. The reader also learns that the Ewells are an unsavory family. Burris Ewell displays the same sort character traits that make his father, Bob Ewell, so dislikable.

Scout considers her first day of school to be a dismal failure, and compared to what she was hoping for, it is. However, she learns a great deal about people in and out of the classroom. In one day's time, Scout learns several important lessons, but most importantly, she gets her first inkling that things are not always what they seem.

Scout is different from other children. Miss Caroline's harsh reaction to the fact that Scout already knows how to read and write takes the little girl by surprise. Doesn't everyone already know how to read and write? Scout laments, "I never deliberately learned to read, but somehow had been wallowing illicitly in the daily papers" — one of many humorous observations that Lee sprinkles through these two chapters and throughout the book. Even more astounding to Scout is the fact that Miss Caroline expects her to stop reading and writing at home now that she's in school.

Scout is all the more confused because her father is not like the authority figures she meets at school. Atticus is not a typical parent. Lee does an expert job of getting this message across to readers simply by having the children call Atticus by his first name. He treats his children as individuals and speaks to them in an adult-like manner. Scout accepts this behavior as normal, noting, "Jem and I were accustomed to our father's last-will-and-testament diction, and we were at all times free to interrupt Atticus for a translation when it was beyond our understanding." Perhaps if Miss Caroline had reasoned with Scout, the day would not have been so devastating for either of them.

Other people don't understand "Maycomb's ways." Harper Lee again emphasizes that outsiders are viewed with suspicion. When Miss Caroline announces her county of origin, "The class murmured apprehensively, should she prove to harbor her share of the peculiarities indigenous to that region."

When Scout tries to explain Walter Cunningham's predicament to Miss Caroline by simply saying, "'he's a Cunningham,'" she remarks to readers "I thought I had made things sufficiently clear. It was clear enough to the rest of us." The children don't expect Miss Caroline to understand the intricacies of their town, but they're forced to expand their worldview when they realize that "a Cunningham is a Cunningham" is not explanation enough for a Maycomb newcomer.

Ironically, Scout soon learns that she doesn't understand as much about "Maycomb's ways" as she thinks. When Scout uses Burris Ewell's lack of regular school attendance as a good reason that she shouldn't have to go to school either, Atticus explains that "In certain circumstances, the common folk judiciously allowed them certain privileges by the simple method of becoming blind to some of the Ewells' activities." Dumbfounded, Scout can only accept Atticus' explanation.

Lee uses that explanation as foreshadowing — a literary device that alludes to something that will happen later in the story — of Mayella Ewell's reliance on special consideration for the accusations she brings against Tom Robinson. (Readers should note, too, that Lee masterfully keeps Boo Radley in the back of reader's minds by commenting that Scout "passed the Radley Place for the fourth time that day — twice at full gallop," while developing other major themes.)

Must be accepting of others' shortcomings. From Scout's perspective, all people, regardless of their station in life, are held to the same standards. Consequently, she feels perfectly justified in commenting on Walter Cunningham's table manners. Calpurnia takes her to task saying, "'Don't matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house's yo' comp'ny, and don't you let me catch you remarkin' on their ways like you was so high and mighty!'" Adding insult to injury, Atticus agrees with Calpurnia.

Interestingly, in spite of Scout's protests that Walter Cunningham "made me start off on the wrong foot," her friendship with him will later save Atticus in a potentially life-threatening situation.

The art of compromise. Despite Atticus' probing questions about Scout's first day of school, she says little. Scout is despondent at the thought of not being able to read at home anymore, but reluctant to tell Atticus after the trouble she's been in all day. Atticus is quite understanding and suggests a compromise: "'If you'll concede the necessity of going to school, we'll go on reading every night just as we always have.'" Surprisingly, Atticus asks that she keep their deal a secret from Miss Caroline, introducing Scout to the idea of a white lie. Throughout the story, Atticus functions as a peacemaker. Lee gives the reader a first glimpse into Atticus' reasoning abilities and personal beliefs in his choice to compromise with Scout rather than confront or ignore Miss Caroline.

Glossary

Big Mules political term referring to modern Alabama power brokers.

catawba worms a type of caterpillar highly prized by fishermen in the Southern United States.

Lorenzo Dow a fiery, itinerant Methodist preacher of the Eastern and Southern United States.

hookworms a disease caused by hookworms, characterized by anemia, weakness, and abdominal pain: the larvae enter the body through the skin, usually of the bare feet.

entailment the act of entailing or of giving, as an estate, and directing the mode of descent. In this case, Walter Cunningham is most likely in a dispute over who is rightful heir to a piece of property.

the crash the 1929 stock market crash, which gave rise to the period of the Great Depression.

WPA a part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built new roads, hospitals, and schools throughout America.

cootie [Slang] common head lice.

fractious peevish; irritable; cross.

magnesia a white, tasteless powder, used as a mild laxative and antacid.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[**Scout**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) finds and beats [**Walter**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/walter-cunningham) in the schoolyard until [**Jem**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) pulls her off. She explains the situation to Jem, who realizes that Walter is [**Mr. Cunningham**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/mr-cunningham)’s son, invites Walter for lunch, and assures him that Scout won’t jump him. Jem boasts about having touched the Radley house on the way home. At the table, [**Atticus**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) and Walter discuss farming. Walter asks if there’s any syrup and [**Calpurnia**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/calpurnia) brings him the pitcher. He pours it over his plate until Scout asks what he’s doing, at which point he puts it down and looks ashamed. Atticus shakes his head at Scout and Calpurnia calls Scout into the kitchen. Calpurnia scolds Scout for her rudeness, so Scout brings her plate into the kitchen. Scout scathingly tells Calpurnia that Calpurnia has already gotten her in trouble today for teaching her to write.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Again, Scout betrays how uncomfortable she is with difference of any sort when she calls Walter out for pouring syrup over his entire plate. This is something she’d never do but, presumably, is something normal in the Cunningham home. When Calpurnia is the primary one to scold Scout for this, it situates her in more of a parental role, not just the role of the Finches’ cook. In this sense, Calpurnia is one of the most important people in Scout’s life, as she’s one in charge of helping Scout develop her moral compass and figuring out how to deal with difference when she encounters it.

***Summary Part 2:***

After lunch, [Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) tells [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) that [Calpurnia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/calpurnia) is horrible and asks him to fire her. Atticus stonily refuses, so Scout concentrates on hating Calpurnia the entire way back to school. In class, [Miss Caroline](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters) shrieks and boys crowd around her, looking for a mouse. She shakily points to a hulking boy and says that “it” crawled out of the boy’s hair. [Little Chuck Little](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters) assures Miss Caroline that she shouldn’t be afraid of cooties (lice), fetches her water, and steers her to her desk. Miss Caroline ascertains that the boy with the cooties is named [Burris Ewell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters). He doesn’t know how to spell his name and is filthy. Miss Caroline asks him to go home to treat his scalp and to bathe before returning.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Scout’s narration draws out the differences between the Cunninghams and the Ewells: while Walter is clean for his first day of school, Burris is filthy. This introduces Scout to the idea that there are different levels of poverty in her small town, and a variety of different ways of dealing with that poverty among families. Miss Caroline’s reaction, meanwhile, leaves much to be desired and shows again how poorly prepared the school system is to serve all the children in it.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Burris](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters) stands and laughs rudely. He says that he’s already done his time, and another classmate explains to [Miss Caroline](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters) that the Ewell children come every year for the first day of school but don’t come back. He says that [Mr. Ewell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/bob-ewell) is contentious, and that they have no mother. Miss Caroline asks Burris to sit back down, but he looks suddenly enraged. [Chuck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters) tells Miss Caroline to let Burris go and she takes his side. Burris slouches to the door and once out of range, he hurls insults and slurs at Miss Caroline until she cries. The students cluster around Miss Caroline’s desk and comfort her.

***Analysis Part 3:***

When the students have to comfort Miss Caroline and essentially deal with this problem child themselves, it makes it even clearer that the education system isn’t designed to either give teachers the tools to deal with all of their students, or to effectively educate the willing students. That the Ewells’ situation is common knowledge in Maycomb speaks again to the insular and close-knit nature of the town.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) races past the Radley Place that afternoon, feeling as gloomy as the house. She decides to run away and answers [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch)’s questions about school with one-word answers. [Calpurnia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/calpurnia) is oddly kind to Scout and insists she missed Scout and [Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem), so Scout decides that Calpurnia has realized the error of her ways. After dinner, Atticus grabs the paper and invites Scout to read with him. Feeling overwhelmed, she heads for the porch. Atticus follows. Scout insists she doesn’t feel well and can’t go to school, but finally tells him her tale and begs to not go back.

***Analysis Part 4:***

When Scout walks away from Atticus rather than read with him anyway, it makes it clear how much pressure she feels to conform and follow Miss Caroline’s directions. Her unhappiness about having to conform is an early indicator that the adult world is rooted in conformity, something that Scout, especially at this point, can’t deal with. In other situations, however, Scout is able to conform and understand her surroundings properly, as shown by her ability to navigate and explain Maycomb’s eccentricities.

***Summary Part 5:***[Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) tells her that she should try to climb into other people’s skin and walk around so she can consider things from their point of view. He points out that [Miss Caroline](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters) had no idea she couldn’t give something to a Cunningham, so they can’t blame her for the mistake. Scout points out that [Burris Ewell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters) doesn’t have to go to school, so she shouldn’t have to go either. Atticus explains that the Ewell children don’t have to go because the Ewells have been the disgrace of Maycomb for generations. They live like animals and it’s silly to force them to go to school. He says that similarly, [Mr. Ewell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/bob-ewell) can hunt out of season because he spends his relief checks on whiskey and people don’t want the children to go hungry. Atticus agrees that they can keep reading but asks Scout to keep this from Miss Caroline.

***Analysis Part 5:***Given Atticus’s calm, kind, and general willingness to see the best in others, the way that he describes Mr. Ewell is telling. It indicates that these are, even in his opinion, people beyond help and beyond the law. In particular, the fact that Mr. Ewell seems to flat-out refuse to feed his children situates him as an evil and selfish person. In contrast, the fact that Maycomb looks the other way when he hunts out of season makes the case that not all of Maycomb is bad; it can, in cases like these, rally around its most vulnerable members to afford them some kind of protection.