***To Kill a Mockingbird***

***Chapter 6***

***Summary:***

* [Jem](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/jem-jeremy-atticus-finch) and Scout spend the day with Dill at his aunt's fish pond.
* [Scout](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/scout-jean-louise-finch) wants to keep an eye out for Mr. Avery, a neighbor who had previously astonished them by peeing in an impressive arc off his front porch, but Dill just wants to go for a walk.
* Scout, knowing that no one in Maycomb just goes for a walk, smells a rat.
* Oh, you know, they're just going to go to the streetlight by the Radley Place.
* And then they just want to peek in the window.
* Scout doesn't like this at all, but stops complaining when they accuse her of being a girl about it.
* The trio go under the wire fence at the back of [the Radley Place](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/analysis/the-radley-place) and, after dealing with swishy collard greens, a squeaky gate, and clucking chickens, make it up to the house.
* Jem and Scout raise [Dill](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/dill-charles-baker-harris) up so he can look through the window, but all he sees is curtains.
* They're still skulking when Scout sees a shadow—a man's shadow, heading towards Jem.
* The shadow goes up to Jem, raises his arm, drops it again, and then leaves.
* The kids scram, and Scout trips as she hears a loud noise—someone's shooting at them.
* The kids make it home (Jem loses his pants along the way) and see a bunch of neighbors in front of the Radley Place.
* Miss Maudie tells them that Mr. Radley has been shooting at a "N\*\*\*\*" (6.60) in his yard.
* Suddenly everyone notices that Jem doesn't have any pants on.
* Dill tries to save the day by saying they were playing strip poker, but playing cards is a big no-no in Maycomb, so Jem says that they were actually playing with matches.
* Whatevs, everyone says, and they head off to bed. Scout worries that every sound she hears might be Boo Radley coming to wreak his revenge. But Jem's off to get his pants. Scout tries to stop him, but Jem heads off anyway.
* Scout sits outside on the porch, listening for the dreaded shotgun blast and waiting for Jem to return.
* Finally Jem returns. With the pants.

***Brief Summary:***

Jem, Dill and Scout decide to walk around the neighborhood that evening. As usual, the plans turn to the Radley house. They decide to peek in the windows, so Jem and Scout lift Dill to look through the window. It doesn't work and Jem climbs onto the porch. Dill and Scout see the shadow of a man walking toward Jem. The man lifts a shotgun and shoots into the air. After the shot, the children race across the backyard and crawl under the fence.

Jem gets stuck and his pants are caught on the fence. He wiggles and eventually gets free, only after slivering out of his pants. The shot rouses the neighborhood, Atticus finds the children and asks what they were doing. Dill jumps in and says that were playing strip poker. Scout and Jem know they shouldn't play cards, so Jem says they were playing with matches. This quick thinking gets them off the hook temporarily. Atticus goes to sleep while Scout and Jem go to their cots on the back porch. They try to sleep, but the night noises keep the children awake. At about two in the morning, Jem decides that he must retrieve his pants and stay out of trouble with Atticus. He sneaks over to the Radley's and when he returned, he went to bed without saying a word. The only sound was his cot trembling.

Jem makes a valuable and emotional discovery when he returns to get his pants. He expects to find a cruel "monster," but instead he finds his pants have been mended and are folded. It is as if someone expected him to return.

***Synopsis:***

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.

***Analysis Ch 4-6:***

These chapters serve primarily as a record of Jem and Scout’s childhood adventures with Dill and the specter of Boo Radley. Even as the children play the “Boo Radley game,” make their attempts to give a message to Boo, and peek through his shutters, Boo’s character is transformed from a monster into a human being. Although Boo’s relevance to the main plot of the novel is still unknown, the compelling human story that these chapters weave around Boo keeps the reader interested in him, even if he serves only as a diversion to the young Finch children at this point.

***Critical Analysis:***On the night before [Dill](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Dill) returns home at the end of summer, he and [Jem](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Jem) plan to peek into the windows of the Radley house. [Scout](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Scout) tries to stop them, but when Jem tells her she is acting more like a girl every day she ends up going with them. As they try unsuccessfully to peer into the windows, they see the shadow of a man approaching. They start running as a shotgun is fired, narrowly escaping through the fence at the back of the property. Unfortunately Jem gets caught in the wire and is forced to leave his pants behind.

When they get home the whole neighborhood is abuzz with excitement, so the children slip quietly into the crowd. The adults believe Nathan Radley scared off a black man who had come to steal collard greens from his garden.

Standing in the crowd, Stephanie Crawford points out that Jem isn't wearing any pants. Dill quickly comes up with a story that he had won Jem's pants playing strip poker by the fishpond.

Later that night and against his better judgment, Jem decides that he must go back to recover his pants before morning to protect their secret. Scout tries to persuade him otherwise, but he is determined and quickly returns with his pants.

The action in [Chapter 6](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/chapter-6-summary/) keeps the [Boo Radley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Boo_Radley) subplot alive even as the author builds the foundation for what will become the central plot: [Atticus](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Atticus)'s participation in the [Tom Robinson](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Tom_Robinson) case. It is also revealed that [Dill](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Dill) and [Jem](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Jem)'s attempts to lure Boo Radley outside have become more daring.

The theme of race—and racism—is central to this chapter. Nathan Radley makes a hasty assumption that the intruder is black. He doesn't even consider the possibility that the intruder might be white—or just kids having a little fun.

Another significant aspect of the chapter is Jem's determination to retrieve his pants rather than have Atticus know he lied. Jem takes pride in the fact that Atticus and [Calpurnia](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Calpurnia) trust him with caring for [Scout](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Scout). He is already a thoughtful boy developing his moral code.

***Critical Analysis:***

On Dill's last night in Maycomb, the kids all go down to Miss Rachel's fishing pond. While there they happen to see Mr. Avery across the street urinate in the light of the streetlamp. He appears to do it from ten feet away, which leads Jem and Dill to have a literal pissing contest. After that, the boys want to peep into the Radley house, and they go sneaking into the yard. Jem and Scout hoist Dill up so that he can see through the broken shutter. When Dill doesn't see anything, they try the back window, where they nearly get caught by Mr. Nathan Radley.

The kids narrowly manage to escape. Scout trips amongst collards, and Jem gets his pants caught in the fence after Nathan fires his shotgun, assuming that the children are really an African American man who is trespassing on his property. The town, hearing the gunshot, comes out into the street, where Dill makes up a lie about winning Jem's pants while playing strip poker in order to cover up what really happened. Atticus is suspicious of this lie but accepts it, and Dill goes to Miss Rachel's for the night, stopping only to kiss Scout goodbye, having remembered that they are engaged.

Later that night, Jem goes back for his pants but refuses to let Scout come with him. The two of them have been sleeping on the screened back porch, so Atticus doesn't hear him leaving. Scout freezes for a moment because she hears Atticus's cough and fears that they have been caught, but it proves to be a false alarm. Jem comes back and refuses to talk about what happened, though he is clearly shaken up. They both have trouble falling asleep that night.

**Allusions**

**"One-Eye, Two-Eyes, and Three-Eyes" by the Brothers Grimm.**One of the many German fairy tales collected by the Brothers Grimm. In it, Little Two-Eyes is a young girl shunned by her mother and two sisters, who hate her for having "normal" eyes. When a knight comes along, Little Two-Eyes's sisters hide her under a cask in the hopes that the knight will speak to them, instead. This doesn't work out for the two sisters, and Little Two-Eyes winds up marrying the knight. Jem alludes to this story to suggest that he and Scout are Little One-Eye and Little Three-Eyes, respectively.

**Themes**

**Sound.** This is the first chapter where sound (and the lack of it) makes a real impact on the narrative. As the children walk down the street, they listen to the sounds of porches creaking, lights flickering, distant characters laughing. Lee uses these sounds to create an apprehensive feeling in the reader and contribute to the spooky mood associated with the Radleys. The creeping silence they hear is broken by the loud blast of Mr. Nathan Radley's shotgun, which scares the children both because it's a deadly weapon and because the sound is so forceful. Later that same night, when the silence sets in again, Scout and Jem have trouble falling asleep, because they think any little sound could be Boo Radley coming to get them.

***Critical Study:***

It is Dill's last summer night in Maycomb. Jem and Scout get permission to go sit with him that evening. Dill wants to go for "a walk," but it turns into something more: Jem and Dill want to sneak over to the Radley place and peek into one of their windows. Scout doesn't want them to do it, but Jem accuses her of being girlish, an insult she can't bear, and she goes along with it. They sneak under a wire fence and go through a gate. At the window, Scout and Jem hoist Dill up to peek in the window. Dill sees nothing, only curtains and a small faraway light. The boys want to try a back window instead, despite Scout's pleas to leave. As Jem is raising his head to look in, the shadow of a man appears and crosses over him. As soon as it's gone, the three children run as fast as they can back home, but Jem loses his pants in the gate. As they run, they hear a shotgun sound somewhere behind them.

When they return, Mr. Radley is standing inside his gate, and Atticus is there with various neighbors. They hear that Mr. Radley was shooting at a "white Negro" in his backyard, and has another barrel waiting if he returns. Dill makes up a story about playing strip poker to explain Jem's missing pants, and Jem says they were playing with matches rather than cards, which would be considered unforgivable. Dill says goodbye to them, and Jem and Scout go to bed. Jem decides to go back and get his pants late that night. Scout tries to persuade him that it would be better to get whipped by Atticus than to be shot and killed by Mr. Radley, but Jem insists on going. Jem explains that he's never been whipped by Atticus and doesn't want to be. Jem is gone for a little while, but returns with the pants, trembling.

***Significance:***In **Chapter 6**, the children come even closer to bridging the distance between themselves and Boo. Scout is reluctant to participate in these games, but can't stand to be left out, especially on charges of being too "girlish." Later on, Scout learns why Boo likes his privacy and understands why it's important to leave him alone, but for now, she is suspicious of him.

The children's attempts to connect with Boo evoke, again, the sense that children will be able to see Boo with more decency and sincerity than the rest of the populace. Their search through the darkness, the many gates, the vegetables in the yard, and then Dill's glance through the dark window with curtains through which there is one small light are somewhat symbolic of the children's search through layers of ignorance and rumor to find the truth underneath it all. By searching for the man who has been made into a monster by society, they bring back his basic common humanity and unite him with everyone else in spite of his unusual personality. Likewise, Atticus wants to make it possible for black people to exist on the same plane as whites, no longer subjected to an inhuman subjugation. Color is not insignificant here: Boo Radley is described as very, very white at the end of the book, and Tom is described as being extremely "velvety" dark - they are at opposite ends of the flesh color spectrum but both of these main "mockingbird figures" share the common dilemma of being markedly different from the flesh color considered the norm in Maycomb.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) allows [Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) and [Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) to go sit by [Miss Rachel](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/miss-rachel-haverford)’s fish pool with [Dill](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/charles-baker-harris-dill) the night before he leaves. They look for [Mr. Avery](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/mr-avery), who lives across the street from [Mrs. Dubose](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/mrs-henry-lafayette-dubose) and whom they once watched urinate an impressive distance. Dill casually suggests they go for a walk, something nobody does in Maycomb. Jem agrees and assures Scout that they’re not disobeying Atticus. They stroll down the sidewalk and try to send Scout home. They explain that they’re going to look into [Boo Radley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/arthur-radley-boo)’s window, since if he kills them now, they’ll just miss school. Jem complains that Scout is acting more and more like a girl, so she feels compelled to join them.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The aside that if Boo kills them now, they’ll miss school, is mean to be humorous for the reader, though it also drives home again how the children see Boo as fundamentally different from them and because of that, see him as dangerous and scary. This also begins to make the case that even though Dill can empathize with Boo at times, he’s not entirely sold on Boo being a real, normal person.

***Summary Part 2:***

They slip under the wire fence in the back of the Radley Place and creep to the back porch. [Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) and [Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) boost [Dill](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/charles-baker-harris-dill) up so he can look in the window, but he only sees curtains. Jem ignores Scout’s insistence that they leave, creeps onto the porch, and peeks in another window. Scout sees the shadow of a man wearing a hat come toward them and then disappear. Jem and Dill freeze and then they all race back to the fence. They hear a shotgun go off as they reach the wire fence. Jem gets his pants stuck and ditches them in his escape.

***Analysis Part 2:***

This event makes it clear that there truly is some real danger in going onto the Radley property, even if it doesn’t necessarily come from the monster the children imagine Boo to be. This begins to show the possible consequences of holding such prejudiced views: in this case, the morbid curiosity that comes along with fearing someone could actually culminate in major injury or even death.

***Summary Part 3:***

The children race across the schoolyard and reach the Finches’ back porch before strolling casually to where neighbors are gathered at the Radley front gate. [Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) insists that they have to go, or it’ll look suspicious. [Miss Maudie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/miss-maudie-atkinson) tells the children that [Nathan Radley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/nathan-radley) shot at a black man in his collard patch and [Miss Stephanie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/miss-stephanie-crawford) notices that Jem isn’t wearing pants. [Dill](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/charles-baker-harris-dill) explains that he won Jem’s pants in a game of strip poker, which the adults seem to buy. [Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) has no idea what strip poker is. [Miss Rachel](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/miss-rachel-haverford) shrieks about children gambling on her property and [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) asks if the children were playing cards. Jem says they were playing with matches, which is still bad but better than cards. Exasperated, Atticus bans poker, sends them home, and tells Jem to get his pants back.

***Analysis Part 3:***

It’s clear, given Scout’s confusion and Jem’s answer that they were playing with matches, that none of them have any idea what they’re actually talking about—cards are necessary to play poker of any kind, but in the 1930s, cards weren’t considered a benign game at all. Scout later discovers that Atticus knows exactly what happened, so it’s possible that he’s just trying to save the children some face or trouble by allowing this to slide and letting the humiliation of being in public without pants be its own punishment.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Dill](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/charles-baker-harris-dill) is comforted, but [Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) still has no pants. Before they say goodbye, Dill kisses [Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) and bawls, asking them to write. On the sleeping porch later, Scout and Jem barely sleep, waiting for [Boo Radley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/arthur-radley-boo) to jump them. Jem whispers that he’s going for his pants when they see [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch)’s light go out. Scout tries to talk him out of it, noting that Atticus will whip him but that this is better than getting shot by [Nathan Radley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/nathan-radley). Jem mutters that he doesn’t remember the last time Atticus whipped him and wants to keep it this way. This is beyond Scout’s understanding, but she waits for Jem to return and hopes that Atticus stays asleep. Jem returns a while later with his pants and goes to bed.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Both Scout and Jem exhibit their own versions of maturity here. Scout recognizes the very real danger posed by returning to the Radley property, while Jem wants to look more adult in Atticus’s eyes by avoiding what he believes would be a childish whipping. Jem’s reasoning in particular speaks to how much he respects Atticus and wants to give his father a reason to respect him in return, even if he knows that Atticus is displeased with him.