***To Kill a Mockingbird***

***Chapter 7***

***Summary:***

* After his adventures at the Radley Place, [Jem](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/jem-jeremy-atticus-finch) is in a bad mood for a week.
* Scout starts second grade. It's just as bad as first grade.
* Jem finally tells Scout what happened when he went back to [the Radley House](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/analysis/the-radley-place): his pants were folded up on top of the fence, and the tear in them had been sloppily mended.
* CREEPY.
* Passing by the knothole tree, they see a ball of twine resting inside it.
* [Scout](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/scout-jean-louise-finch) wants to take it, but Jem thinks it might be someone's hiding spot.
* When the twine is still there after a few days, Jem takes it, and from then on there are no more qualms about taking things found in the knothole.
* A few months later, the knothole holds their best find yet: two figures carved out of soap that bear a striking resemblance to Scout and Jem.
* Scout throws them on the ground, thinking about voodoo dolls, but Jem rescues them.
* Who could have made them?
* The knothole haul keeps getting better and better: a whole pack of chewing gum, a spelling bee medal, and a broken pocket watch (which Jem tries but fails to fix).
* Scout and Jem decide to write a letter to their secret benefactor.
* But the next day, they find that the knothole has been filled with cement.
* Jem stakes out [Mr. Nathan](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/nathan-radley) and asks why.
* Mr. Nathan says that the tree's sick and the cement is an attempt to cure it.
* Jem asks [Atticus](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/to-kill-a-mockingbird/atticus-finch) if that's true. Atticus says it looks healthy to him, but Mr. Radley should know his own trees.

***Brief Summary:***

Dill goes home and Scout gets ready for the second grade. But, she discovers it isn't any better than the first grade. In second grade, she can walk home with Jem. On the walk home, Jem admits his pants were folded and mended when he returned to the Radley's.

Scout and Jem walk home and glance something in the knothole in the Radley's tree. There is a ball of twine. Some time later, they find two soap figures of children. A couple of weeks later they discover a pack of chewing gum. The following week, they find a spelling bee medal lying in the knothole. Four days after that, they discover a broken pocket watch. Jem decides to fix the broken watch and then he can return the family watch to his father.

Jem thinks they should leave a note in the tree to say thank you for the gifts. When they go back to check the tree, the knothole is filled with cement. Nathan Radley walks by and Jem asks him why the hole was filled. Nathan tells the children that the tree was sick and he had to fill the hole. When they return home, they ask Atticus if the Radley tree was sick and he says it looks healthy to him. Later that evening, Scout thinks she sees Jem crying.

The reader assumes that Boo mended Jem's pants, which makes the man seem kind and thoughtful. We also assume that Boo is the person leaving gifts for Scout and Jem. This is a kind thing for him to do and is a way for him to have some human contact. Nathan Radley is a cruel force in the story when he fills the hole in the tree and cuts Boo off from making friends. Nathan's actions begin the disillusionment that Jem will experience throughout the book.

***Synopsis:***

A few days later, after school has begun for the year, [Jem](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/jem-finch/) tells [Scout](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/scout-finch/) that he found the pants mysteriously mended and hung neatly over the fence. When they come home from school that day, they find another present hidden in the knothole: a ball of gray twine. They leave it there for a few days, but no one takes it, so they claim it for their own.

Unsurprisingly, Scout is as unhappy in second grade as she was in first, but Jem promises her that school gets better the farther along one goes. Late that fall, another present appears in the knothole—two figures carved in soap to resemble Scout and Jem. The figures are followed in turn by chewing gum, a spelling bee medal, and an old pocket watch. The next day, Jem and Scout find that the knothole has been filled with cement. When Jem asks Mr. Radley (Nathan Radley, Boo’s brother) about the knothole the following day, Mr. Radley replies that he plugged the knothole because the tree is dying.  
***Critical Analysis(Ch6-7):***

On Dill's last night in Maycomb, he and Jem decide to "peep in the window with the loose shutter to see if they could get a look at Boo Radley." Scout discourages them from going to the Radley house, but reluctantly decides to join them. Someone inside the Radley house comes out and fires a shotgun. The children scurry out of the yard, but Jem gets caught on the fence and is forced to remove his pants to get to safety.

As the neighborhood gathers to discuss the gunfire, Dill concocts an unlikely explanation for Jem's lack of pants. Atticus tells Jem to get his pants from Dill and come home. At home, Jem confides in Scout that he's going back to the Radleys' to get his pants. Scout literally fears for his life, but Jem would rather risk life and limb than admit to Atticus that he lied.

School starts again. This year, Jem and Scout walk home together, and they again begin finding things in the Radleys' tree. After receiving several increasingly valuable treasures, Jem and Scout decide to write a thank-you note to whoever is leaving the gifts. When they try to deliver the note, however, they find to their dismay that the knothole has been filled with cement.

These two chapters mark several endings and beginnings for Jem and Scout in terms of understanding. Chapter 6 concludes their second summer with Dill, while Chapter 7 begins Scout's second year of school. The reader should remember that first sentence in Chapter 1 states that Scout is retelling the events that lead up to Jem's broken arm. These two chapters lay much of the remaining foundation for what is to come by further exploring the children's relationship — or lack thereof — with Boo Radley and his family.

Prejudice begins to play a bigger role in the novel in these two chapters. Truthfully, it is a kind of prejudice that spurs Jem and Dill to try to "get a look" at Boo Radley. All along they claim that their interest is in the name of friendship, but readers know by now that both boys have a morbid curiosity to gawk at what they assume must be a freak of nature.

The boys show prejudice toward Scout by saying things like, "'You don't have to come along, Angel May.'" They attribute her resistance to their plan as girlish behavior, when Scout is actually more rational about the situation.

Finally, prejudice appears when the neighbors comment that "'Mr. Radley shot at a Negro in his collard patch.'" Neither Mr. Radley nor the neighbors have any evidence that the trespasser was black; they make that assumption based on their perceptions of African Americans. The low station blacks hold in Maycomb is further revealed when Mr. Radley vows to aim low at the next trespasser, "'be it dog, [or] nigger.'" With this statement, blacks are relegated to the worth of an animal. Ironically, Atticus will later deal directly with a mad dog and a black man. How he handles each situation gives true insight into his moral code.

The truth becomes a blur in these chapters. Dill makes up a fantastic story as to why Jem lost his pants. The neighbors accept the story readily, although Atticus asks some questions that lead readers to believe he may suspect otherwise. Later, Mr. Radley tells Jem that he cemented the knothole because the "'Tree's dying.'" Mr. Radley and Jem both know that the tree is fine and that the hole is plugged to stop Jem and Scout from retrieving any more treasures. However, Jem is forced to accept that explanation when Atticus says, "'I'm sure Mr. Radley knows more about his trees than we do.'"

Jem's bravery reaches new heights in these chapters. He puts himself in peril three times: trying to peek in the Radleys' window, helping Scout and Dill get to safety, and returning to the Radley yard to retrieve his pants. In the last instance, pride drives his bravery more than fear of punishment. Scout recommends that Jem deal with the punishment for lying rather than risk his life, but Jem insists, "'Atticus ain't ever whipped me since I can remember. I wanta keep it that way.'" Although Scout doesn't understand Jem's thinking, she does realize that Jem would rather lose his life than disappoint his father.

A major shift occurs in Jem that night, and in an attempt to understand this change, Scout, significantly, tries "to climb into Jem's skin and walk around in it." A second, and equally important, shift occurs in Jem when he begins to realize exactly why Mr. Radley cemented the knothole in what he and Scout now referred to as their tree. With this harsh realization, Jem moves one step closer to adulthood.

Again, these two chapters show Scout and Jem that appearances aren't always what they seem. They rightly conclude that someone is deliberately leaving gifts for them in the knothole, but they can't understand why this donor won't make himself known. After hearing Mr. Radley's stance on trespassers, Jem tells Scout in amazement that his pants "'were folded across the fence . . . like they were expectin' me.'" No one would dare go into the Radley yard after the gunfire, but who in the Radley house would fold Jem's pants without confronting either him or Atticus? They discover that some adults would rather lie than be frank with them. Jem's reaction to cementing the knothole would've been entirely different had Mr. Radley admitted that he didn't want anyone leaving or taking things from his property. The Radleys remain a mystery to them.

Scout is faced again with the issue of femininity. When the boys reluctantly allow her to join them on their peeping-Tom mission, Scout continues to voice reservations. Jem puts a halt to her reasoning by saying, "'I declare to the Lord you're gettin' more like a girl every day!'" Acting like a girl is no compliment, and Scout feels thrust into the role of coconspirator.

Gender roles are still clearly defined in these chapters. When Jem tells Scout that his pants were sewn up when he retrieved them, he's careful to relate, "'Not like a lady sewed 'em, like somethin' I'd try to do.'" Not untypical of 1930s America, women are expected to sew well, men aren't. These clearly defined roles are often what Scout rebels against. Jem believes that whomever is leaving gifts in the tree is a man. Scout initially disagrees, but he convinces her that the mystery person is male. From Scout's perspective, the gift bearer is more likely to be a woman, but that idea is soon stifled.

This world is still one in which men don't cry. When Jem discovers the cemented knothole, his immediate response is, "'Don't you cry, now, Scout.'" Scout is surprised to find the cement in the tree, but she never shows any indication of tears. Jem, however, spends many tears on this loss, leading readers to believe that he was convincing himself, not Scout, not to cry. Jem cries because a silent friendship that was cemented figuratively through little gifts in a knothole has been ended — ended before he has a chance to say thank you — by someone else's decision to literally cement the tree. Curiously, Jem, though demonstrating a newfound maturity, shows what are thought to be more feminine emotions, while Scout grapples to understand why he's so upset.

Glossary

**kudzu**a fast-growing, hairy perennial vine of the pea family, with large, three-part leaves: sometimes planted in the South for soil stabilization or forage.

**Franklin stove**a cast-iron heating stove resembling an open fireplace, named for Benjamin Franklin who invented it.

**hoodoo** bad luck, or a person or thing that causes bad luck.

***Critical Study:***

School starts again and [Scout](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Scout) is worried about [Jem](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Jem)'s quiet demeanor ever since their misadventure at the Radley house the week before. He finally admits that he has been withholding some troubling information. When he went back to get his torn pants, he found them crudely stitched and neatly folded across the fence as if someone was expecting him to return.

As Scout and Jem walk past the old tree at the edge of the Radley property, they notice a ball of twine tucked into the knothole. They discuss who might be hiding things there, but Jem is convinced someone is leaving things specifically for them. From then on, believing the gifts are intended for them, they take whatever they find. Hoping to leave a thank-you note for the gifts, the children are disappointed to find the knothole mysteriously cemented.

Jem waits to catch Nathan Radley coming home so he can ask him if he put the cement in the tree. Nathan Radley tells Jem that he did put cement in the tree because the tree is dying, but Jem knows this isn't true.

In [Chapter 7](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/chapter-7-summary/) [Jem](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Jem) grows in both insight and maturity. He realizes, although he doesn't share the information with [Scout](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Scout), that [Boo Radley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/To-Kill-a-Mockingbird/character-analysis/#Boo_Radley) is probably the person who mended his pants and comes to believe it is Boo who is leaving the gifts in the oak tree. It upsets him when Nathan Radley cements the knothole closed because he understands that this has destroyed Boo's method of communicating with the outside world.

This chapter emphasizes the growing gulf of maturity between Jem and Scout. Both characters are older than their years, but Jem is beginning to see things in the world that Scout is still too young to understand.

***Significance:***Jem tells Scout what really happened when he went back for his pants that night: when he snuck back, he found that someone had mended them and left them on the fence for him to find. What's more, that someone didn't do a very good job of mending the pants, which leads Jem to think that someone knew he was coming back for them, like they read his mind. While they're talking, they pass the knothole, where they find a ball of twine. Scout convinces Jem to leave it there for a few days, in case it's someone's secret hiding place. When the ball is still there days later, they decide to keep it.

Soon after Jem goes through a phase where he tries to walk like an Egyptian, he and Scout find a pair of soap dolls that look just like them in the knothole. This confirms their suspicion that these knothole items are indeed intended to be gifts and that someone is trying to be their friend. Next, they find a watch and knife on a chain that Atticus says would be worth ten dollars if it were still running. Jem tries to fix the watch, but fails. Still, he wears it around, imitating Atticus, who has a real pocket watch that belonged to their grandfather.

When the kids go to place a thank you letter into the knothole, they find that Mr. Nathan Radley has already filled it up with cement. He tells them he did it because the tree is sick, but Jem asks Atticus, and he says the tree isn't sick at all. Later, Scout finds Jem crying and doesn't understand why. It's implied that he's crying because he realized that Boo was giving them the gifts and that Nathan tried to stop him.

One example of this would be the pants sitting on the fence "like they were expectin'" Jem.

**Symbols**

**Gifts.**Traditionally, gifts are symbols of one's affection or appreciation for their recipient. In the case of the gifts left for Jem and Scout in the knothole, they're communiques meant, most likely, to build trust between Boo and the Finch children and prove to them that there's no reason to be afraid of him. However, because the kids are forced to infer who left these gifts for them, their true intent is the subject of some speculation.

**Jem's Pocket Watch.**Unlike Atticus' pocket watch, which is a symbol of time and social status, Jem's pocket watch is a symbol of his respect for his father, whom he tries to emulate by carrying the watch and chain he finds in the knothole. It's also a symbol of their burgeoning friendship with Boo Radley.

**The Knothole.** The knothole is a medium of communication and, thus, symbolizes the connection that Boo tries to establish with the Finch children. His gifts represent his affection for Scout and Jem. When the knothole is cemented up, that line of communication closes, symbolizing the divide between Boo and the other characters in the novel.

***Notes:***Jem is "moody and silent" after the pants incident. The new school year starts, and Scout finds second grade just as boring as first. One day, she and Jem are walking home together when Jem reveals that when he found his pants that night, they were all folded up, and the tears had been crudely sewn up, as if someone knew that he would be coming back for them. He finds this highly eerie. Then, they find a ball of twine in the Radley oak tree knothole. Again, they aren't sure if it is a gift for them or not, so they leave it for a few days. When it remains in the hole for a few days, they take it, and decide that anything left there is okay to take.

Jem is excited about sixth grade, because he is going to learn about ancient Egypt. Jem tells Scout that school will get better for her. One day in October they find two little figures in their secret knothole, a boy and a girl, carved artfully out of soap. Upon closer examination, they realize that the figures are images of themselves. They wonder who could have done it - maybe Mr. Avery, a neighbor who whittles wood. In a couple of weeks, they find a package of chewing gum, an old spelling bee medal, a broken pocket watch on a chain, and an aluminum knife. Jem can't get it the watch to work, but he and Scout decide to write a letter thanking the mystery person who is leaving them these gifts. They write a note of thanks and leave it in the oak tree. The next day, they are horrified to discover that someone has filled their hole up with cement. They ask Mr. Radley about it, and he claims the tree is dying and filling the knothole with cement will keep it alive. Jem is suspicious, and when he asks Atticus about it, Atticus says the tree looks very healthy, but that Mr. Radley must have a good reason for plugging up the hole. Jem thinks on Atticus's statement and about who might be leaving the gifts. He stands out on the porch by himself for a long time. When he comes inside, Scout thinks it looks like he has been crying.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) says nothing for a week and [Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) tries to take [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch)’s advice and put herself in Jem’s skin. She reasons that she’d be dead if she’d gone to the Radley Place, so she gives Jem space. School starts and second grade is awful, but Scout and Jem usually walk home together. One afternoon, Jem says there’s something he didn’t tell Scout about his foray to the Radley Place: when he got to the fence, someone had folded his pants and mended them where they were ripped. Pleadingly, Jem asks Scout to confirm that nobody can read his mind and Scout plays along. They reach the oak tree and find a ball of gray twine. Scout insists it’s someone’s hiding place, but when the twine is still there three days later, Jem takes it.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Again, Scout’s ability to put herself in Jem’s shoes shows that she’s starting to grow up and think more critically about how people around her might see things. Finding his pants mended and waiting for him should impress upon Jem that someone—possibly Boo Radley—is looking out for him and doesn’t want him to get caught or killed, but his unwillingness to accept this speaks to Jem’s unwillingness to consider that someone he finds scary and different could be so caring.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) assures [Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) that school gets better, especially in sixth grade. In October, they find white soap carvings in their knothole. Scout pulls them out, sees that they’re a boy and a girl, and throws them, afraid that they’re hoodoo figures. Jem picks them up and they realize that the carvings are of them. They try to figure out who carved them, but Jem won’t explain what he’s thinking. Later, they find a packet of chewing gum and a tarnished spelling contest medal. Then, they find a pocket watch that [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) declares would be worth $10 new. Jem assures Atticus that he didn’t swap for it at school—Atticus lets him carry his grandfather’s watch once per week—but Jem says he’d rather fix and carry this broken one.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Scout’s fear that the soap carvings are hoodoo figures again makes it clear that her fear of Boo Radley doesn’t exist in a vacuum; it’s part of a much broader belief in the supernatural, which Boo is a part of because of his differences. The fact that Jem and Scout now seem to trust that the items in the tree are for them offers hope that they will one day learn to see that Boo isn’t a terrifying person—he is just different and, judging by the gifts, kind and generous.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Jem](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jeremy-atticus-finch-jem) isn’t able to fix the watch but asks [Scout](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/jean-louise-finch-scout) if they should write a letter to whomever’s leaving them things. They argue about whether [Miss Maudie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/miss-maudie-atkinson) left them the treasures but address their letter to a “sir” and sign it. The next morning, Jem runs ahead to put the letter in the knothole, but they discover that someone filled it with cement. Later, Jem catches [Nathan Radley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/nathan-radley) and asks about the hole. He explains that the tree is dying, so he filled the hole. That evening, Jem asks [Atticus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/to-kill-a-mockingbird/characters/atticus-finch) if the tree looks sick and relays what Nathan Radley said. Atticus says the tree looks fine, but that Nathan Radley is the expert on his trees. Jem stands outside for a long time and when he comes in, Scout can see that he’s been crying.

***Analysis Part 3:***

It’s never entirely clear whether Nathan Radley fills the hole to stop his brother leaving Scout and Jem treasures, which would support Miss Maudie’s implication that there are control issues, if not abuse, taking place behind closed doors at Radley Place. It could be that Nathan is simply tired of children playing with his trees, or that he truly thinks the tree is sick. Regardless, it’s important to note that Jem’s tears indicate that he is beginning to come around to the possibility that Boo is a kind and generous individual—even a potential friend.