

To Kill a Mockingbird Book Review

1 Plot Summary

In the small town of Maycomb, Alabama, in the middle of the Great Depression, six-year-old Scout Finch lives with her older brother, Jem, and her widowed father, Atticus. Atticus is a lawyer and makes enough to keep the family comfortably out of poverty, but he works long days. He relies on the family's black cook, Calpurnia, to help raise the kids. Scout, however, finds Calpurnia tyrannical and believes that Calpurnia favors Jem over her.

Scout and Jem spend much of their time creating and acting out fantasies. One year, a boy named Dill comes to spend the summer with his aunt, the Finches' neighbor Miss Rachel. The three children become friends, and, pushed by Dill's wild imagination, soon become obsessed with a nearby house called Radley Place. A man named Nathan Radley owns the house, but it is his reclusive brother, Arthur Radley (whom the children call Boo) who interests and terrifies them—he is supposedly locked up in the house and once stabbed his father, Mr. Radley, with scissors.

Summer ends, and Dill returns to Mississippi. Scout starts school, which she hates despite looking forward to it. On the first day, her teacher, Miss Caroline, criticizes her for already knowing how to read and forbids her from writing in cursive. When she comes home from school upset, Atticus encourages her to think about how Miss Caroline must've felt—she had no idea how to deal with the eccentricities of Maycomb children, just as Scout had no idea how to deal with her odd teacher. He suggests that she put herself in others' shoes to understand how they see things. The highlights of the school year come when Scout and Jem occasionally find treasures stuffed into a knothole of a tree next to the Radleys' fence. When they find several sticks of gum, Scout and Jem ignore the rumor that everything on the Radley property is poison.

Atticus forces Jem to read for an extra week and a month after he finishes, Mrs. Dubose dies. Atticus explains that Mrs. Dubose was a morphine addict and used Jem's daily reading to break herself of her addiction before she died—she wanted to die free. Atticus admits that he made Jem read because he wanted Jem to see that courage isn't a man with a gun—it's doing something you know is right, even if you know you'll fail. Mr. Tate decides to keep Boo's involvement in Mr. Ewell's death quiet, which Scout understands—she suggests to Atticus that punishing him would be like killing a mockingbird. Scout leads Boo to say goodnight to Jem, who's unconscious and then walks Boo home. As Scout stands on the Radley porch, she sees the world as Boo must see it and looks back on the experiences of her last few summers. She begins to understand that Boo truly was their neighbor and cared about "his children," Scout, Jem, and Dill. When she gets home, Scout falls asleep as Atticus reads to her at Jem's bedside.

2 Review

I'm not going to do my usual thing where I'd try to explain what I liked about this book. Normally, I would try to convince you why you should read it. I would speak about how important this book is and what message it could impart to its readers around the world. I would even say how it affected me personally. Today I'm not going to do that. Instead, I will simply say that I loved this book. I loved its characters. I loved its plot. And I loved the eloquent way in which Harper Lee wrote it. It made me laugh and it made me cry. Her words are real and her story is true. This book is one of the wisest, most finely crafted, pieces of prose fiction I have ever read.