**Book Report To Kill a Mockingbird**

**By Eva Sijtsma**

**Business data**

Title: To kill a Mockingbird

Author: Harper Lee

Publisher: Grand Central Publishing

Year of publication: 1960

**Point of view/perspective**

‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ is written from the first person. You are reading everything through the eyes of the main character.

Quote one: *‘Our mother died when I was two, so I never felt her absence. She was a Graham from Montgomery; Atticus met her when he was first elected to the state legislature. He was middle-aged then, she was fifteen years his junior. Jem was the product of their first year of marriage; four years later I was born, and two years later our mother died from a sudden heart attack.’* [[1]](#footnote-1)

**Genre**

Southern Gothic, the book includes deeply flawed, disturbing or eccentric characters. Boo Radley is a disturbing character.

Quote: *‘According to neighbourhood legend, when the younger Radley boy was in his teens he became acquainted with some of the Cunninghams from Old Sarum, an enormous and confusing tribe domiciled in the northern part of the county, and they formed the nearest thing to a gang ever seen in Maycomb.’[[2]](#footnote-2)*

To kill a mockingbird is also a Bildungsroman in other words a Coming-of-age novel. The story focuses on the psychological and moral growth of Jean Louise Finch.

Quote: ‘*He guided me to the bed and sat me down. He lifted my legs and put me under the cover. “An’ they chased hem ‘n’ never could catch him’ cause they didn’t know what he looked like, an’ Atticus, when they finally saw him, why he hadn’t done any of those things…. Atticus, he was real nice…..”*’ [[3]](#footnote-3)

In this quote, you can see that Scout learned a really important lesson, do not judge a book by its cover. Everyone is scared of Boo Radley, but when he made his entrance he seemed to be a really nice person.

**When and where**

The story takes place in 1933. The Civil War of 1860 is still close by, but the civil rights movement is already a little speck on the horizon. Maycomb is going nowhere fast; most people do not know what is happening elsewhere and they do not care.

Quote: *‘A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people: Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself.’[[4]](#footnote-4)*

The story is set in Maycomb, Alabama.

Quote: *‘When my father was admitted to the bar, he returned to Maycomb and began his practice. Maycomb, some twenty miles east of Finch’s landing, was the county seat of Maycomb County. Atticus’s office in the courthouse contained little more than a hat rack, a spittoon, a checkerboard and an unsullied Code of Alabama.’* [[5]](#footnote-5)

**Title explanation**

The word ‘Mockingbird’ stands for innocence. By replacing ‘Mockingbird’ for ‘innocence’ would make ‘To Kill Innocence’. That’s what the book is about. In the beginning/middle of the book, a black man (Tom Robinson) is convicted for raping a white woman, but the man is innocent. Later, he gets killed while trying to escape prison.

Alternative title: Defending the innocent

**Main characters**

Jean Louise Finch (known as Scout)

* Smart
* Alert
* Observer
* Quickly starts a fight
* Big mouth
* Boyish
* Tomboy
* Sees the good in people
* Strong relationship with her brother
* Not scared easily

Quote one: ‘*We stared at him until he spoke: “Hey.” “Hey yourself,” said Jem pleasantly. “I’m Charles Baker Harris,” He said. “I can read.” “So what?” I said. “I just thought you’d like to know I can read. You got anything needs readin’ I can do it….” “How old are you,” asked Jem, “four-and-a-half?” “Goin’ on seven.” “Shoot no wonder, then,” said Jem, jerking his thumb at me. “Scout yonder’s been readin’ ever since she was born, and she ain’t even started to school yet. You look right punny for goin’ on seven.”* ’[[6]](#footnote-6)

Quote two: ‘*Catching Walter Cunningham in the schoolyard gave me some pleasure, but when I was rubbing his nose in the dirt Jem came by and told me to stop. “You’re bigger’n he is,” he said. “He’s as old as you, nearly,” I said. “He made me start off on the wrong foot.”*’[[7]](#footnote-7)

In quote one you can see that Scout is a really smart girl, she could already read before she even went to school. In quote two you can see Scout quickly starts a fight.

Jeremy Finch (known as Jem)

* Big brother
* Courageous
* Sensible
* Cares about his little sister
* Best friends with Charles Baker Harris (known as Dill)
* Looks up against his father
* Helpful
* Self-conscious
* Careless
* His left arm was somewhat shorter than his right

Quote one: ‘*When Jem came home he asked me where I got such a wad. I told him I found it. “Don’t eat things you find, Scout.” “This wasn’t on the ground, it was in a tree.” Jem growled. “Well it was,” I said. “It was sticking in that tree yonder, the one comin’ from school.” “Spit it out right now!” I spat it out. The tang was fading, anyway. “I’ve been chewin’ it all afternoon and I ain’t dead yet, not even sick.” Jem stamped his foot. “Don’t you know you’re not supposed to even touch the trees over there? You’ll get killed if you do!” “You touched the house once!” “That was different! You go gargle --- right now, you hear me?”*’[[8]](#footnote-8)

Quote two: ‘*I could not put out my hands to stop, they were wedged between my chest and knees. I could only hope that Jem would outrun the tire and me, or that I would be stopped by a bump in the sidewalk. I heard him behind me, chasing and shouting. The tire bumped on gravel, skeetered across the road, crashed into a barrier and popped me like a cork onto pavement. Dizzy and nauseated, I lay on the cement and shook my head still, pounded my ears to silence, and heard Jem’s voice: “Scout, get away from there, come on!” I raised my head and stared at the Radley Place steps in front of me. I froze. “Come on, Scout, don’t just lie there!” Jem was screaming. “Get up, can’tcha?” I got to my feet, tremblings as I thawed*.’[[9]](#footnote-9)

In both quotes you can see Jem really cares about his sister. He fulfils his role as a big brother.

**Short summary**

The novel tells the story of the lives of Scout and her brother Jem. Along with their summer friend Dill, the children become entranced with the idea of getting a glimpse of their reclusive and unseen neighbour, Boo Radley. Meanwhile their father had decided to defend Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of raping a local white woman, Mayella Ewell. The children get caught up in the trial, in which Tom is convicted and eventually killed trying to escape from prison. Jem and Scout become the targets of the father of Mayella, who tries to kill them one night on their way home from school, but Boo Radley shows up to save them, killing Mayella’s father in the process.

**Themes, message and moral**

Theme: Justice, racism, courage, what goes around comes back around, small town mentality and innocence.

Message: Tolerance

Moral: People get what they deserve, the good always wins.

Qoute: ‘*“Mr. Finch,” Mr. Tate said stolidly, “Bob Ewell fell on his knife. He killed himself.”*’[[10]](#footnote-10)

Bob Ewell is the father of Mayella Ewell, those people are accusing Tom Robinson of rape. Because Atticus truly believes Tom, he tries to defend him with all his conviction. Bob Ewell thinks Atticus is a betrayer and to make that clear he starts threatening Atticus’s children. Eventually Bob becomes victim of his own actions. What goes around comes back around.

**Writer’s style**

Quote: *‘Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow, it was hotter then: a black dog suffered on a summer’s day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oaks on the square.’[[11]](#footnote-11)*

Harper Lee’s style in ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ can be characterized by the use of numerous anecdotes to show the reader about the setting and characters. Instead of just explaining that it is hot in Maycomb, she compares it to a black dog on a summer’s day.

**Do you agree?**

*Let it not be forgotten that a true piece of literature, like To Kill a Mockingbird, is meaningful in every period and that today, Atticus Finch’s message should be heard in the midst of all the global conflicts that we hear of on the news every night.*

Atticus Finch’s message is that no matter if you are black or white, everyone is equal to each other. Nowadays there still is a lot of discrimination, take for example the country South-Africa. Several politicians tried to give all races an equivalent status, but still most rich people are white and the poor people are black. I definitely agree with this message.

**Explain his character**

*Atticus would now be defending issues that Harper Lee did not consider when writing the book, because what is at the heart of his character is an acceptance of who people are.*

Atticus believes everyone is equal to each other no matter your skin colour, gender preference or religious conviction. He is a really honest person. Nowadays he could be defending someone in a case about homosexuality. Homosexuality is still forbidden in around 72 countries, in some countries even the death penalty applies to committing homosexual actions.

**My opinion**

I really liked the book, but to be honest it took me a while to find out. I liked finding out about the town and its people through the eyes of someone so young, but it wasn’t until three quarters of the way in the book when everything really started to make sense.

The book can be seen as a really eye-opening story, especially around the part when the black man that Atticus is defending is sent to jail, even though the evidence to let him free was great.

The ending of the book was really surprising too, when Boo Radley, a character I almost forgot, finally made his appearance.

1. Page 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Page 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Page 376 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Page 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Page 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Page 8 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Page 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Page 44 and 45 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Page 50 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Page 366 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Page 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)