

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee Chapter 8-11 - It's a sin to kill a Mockingbird

Essential Question:

What factors influence our moral growth? What kinds of experiences help us learn how to judge right from wrong?

Part III: Chapters 8-11 - It's a sin to kill a Mockingbird

Essential Questions

- How does a community determine who belongs and who does not? How does a society determine its "universe of obligation"?
 - What are the consequences for those who choose to challenge a community's rules—written and unwritten—about who belongs?
 - What dilemmas do individuals confront when their consciences conflict with the rules and expectations of their communities?
- What conflicts arise in literature out of the tension between characters and their setting?

Journal Prompts

1. What is courage? Write about a person or group from your own personal experience, the news, or history who behaved courageously. What made his or her actions courageous?

2. How do you define conscience? Write about a time when you or someone you know chose to act according to conscience. What were the circumstances of the choice? What were the consequences?

Handout 3.2 "Setting the Setting of To Kill a Mockingbird"

Use the following questions to guide your note-taking and reflection on the video "Setting the Setting of To Kill a Mockingbird":

1. David Cunningham describes Jim Crow segregation as both a system of laws and a system of customs. What is the difference between laws and customs? Which are more difficult to change?

2. Why did Mississippi and Alabama have fewer formal Jim Crow laws than other states in the South?

3. In what ways did black and white lives overlap in Alabama in the 1930s? In what ways were they completely separated?

4. What was the effect of the Depression on the relationships between whites and blacks in the Jim Crow South? Why?

5. What were some of the unwritten rules of segregation? What were some of the complications around those rules?

6. How were gender roles different between white and black Americans?

7. What were the consequences of questioning Jim Crow? How do you think they were different for blacks and whites?

8. How did this video help shed light on written and unwritten rules of life in Maycomb? What characters, choices, and events in the book so far did this video help you better understand?

3.1 Universe of Obligation (see handout)

Chapters 8-11 Questions

1. How would you describe Atticus's universe of obligation? How can he respect both his racist neighbors, such as Mrs. Dubose, and the black man he will defend in court, Tom Robinson?

2. Discussing the Tom Robinson case with Scout, Atticus says: "When you and Jem are grown, maybe you'll look back on this with some compassion and some feeling that I didn't let you down." Scout, as the narrator, is older as she tells us the story. Look for evidence in the text that suggests how the adult Jean Louise views these events.

3. What is courage? Compare Atticus's decision to represent Tom Robinson with Mrs. Dubose's decision to kick her morphine habit before her death. In what ways are their convictions similar? In what ways are they different? Are they both courageous?

4. What messages does Scout receive about the proper behavior of a young Southern girl? How does she respond to these messages? What do Scout's responses tell you about her character?

5. How are the ways people view gender roles in Maycomb different from the way we view gender roles today? How are they similar?

6. How does race complicate the circumstances of the characters we have met so far? What role does Calpurnia play in the Finch family? What authority does she have in the Finch household that she might not have elsewhere in Maycomb?

7. Give an example from this section of the novel of obstacles that prevent people in Maycomb from understanding and getting to know people who are different from them.

8. The novel is divided into two distinct parts. Now that you have finished Part 1, what title would you give it? Explain why your title is compelling. How does it connect to one of the major themes of *To Kill a Mockingbird*?

Journal Prompts

1. Everything we know about the events in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is filtered through Scout's perspective. Take a moment to imagine what some of the other characters might think about the events you have read about. Write a diary entry about the mad dog incident from either Jem's or Atticus's point of view. How do you think their perspective would be different from Scout's?

2. When Atticus shoots the mad dog, Scout and Jem see their father in a new way. Write about an experience that changed your impression of someone. What did you think about the person before the experience? What happened to change that impression?

3. Miss Maudie describes Atticus as "civilized in his heart." What does she mean? Do you know anyone who, like Atticus, is "civilized in his or her heart"? Describe him or her.

4. When Scout tells Atticus he must be wrong to defend Tom Robinson because everyone in the town seems to think they are right, Atticus replies, "The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience." What does Atticus mean? What does it mean to be a person of conscience? What are the consequences? Describe someone from your world who "marches to his/her own drummer" even if it goes against what everyone else thinks, says, and does.

Chapter 9 Close Reading Questions

"The Birthday Party" by Virginia Durr (Handout 3.4)
To Kill a Mockingbird, Chapter 9

Handout 3.4 "The Birthday Party"

In her autobiography, Outside the Magic Circle, white Southerner Virginia Foster Durr recalls how the customs of the Jim Crow South affected her seventh birthday party:

During the summer of Aunt May's visit, she heard the little black children in the backyard calling my sister "Sis." My brother called her Sis, and I called her Sister. Well, Aunt May sent Grandmother's house servant, Easter, out to tell the little black children they couldn't call Josephine Sis. They had to call her Miss Josephine. We were astonished and hurt and didn't know what this was about. Here Sister, who had been playing with the black children all her life, had to be called Miss Josephine all of a sudden. But Sister solved the problem by telling them, "Now, you don't have to call me Miss Josephine; you

just call me Miss Sis." So after that all the children, white and black, called her Miss Sis. She solved the problem by not hurting anybody's feelings. She spent her life doing that.

That incident was a warning that our idyllic days were over, but the great trauma of my early life came with my seventh birthday. I had always celebrated my birthday in Union Springs because it was in August. We would have a barbecue in the backyard with the black children. We would dig a pit in the backyard, which was sandy, and place a grill over the hole and build a fire. Then the cook would give us chickens, which we were allowed to baste and turn. Of course, by the time we got through, the chickens were full of sand, but to me this was a great event. Here I was presiding over the chickens! But on my seventh birthday my mother and grandmother and aunts all said I had to have my birthday in the front yard and have just white children. No black children could come to the party. Well, I got very angry about that. Mostly, I wanted the barbecue. I was thinking of food, as usual.

I had been planning the party for months. I'd had typhoid fever and had spent the whole time that I was ill planning my birthday party. I was going to have a pink cake and pink slippers and pink socks and a pink dress and a pink sash and a pink bow in my hair and a pink cake and strawberry ice cream. When August arrived, I had a pink dress, the pink socks, the pink everything, except the strawberries, which weren't available in August, but I was told none of the black children could come to the party. Only white children—perfect strangers they had picked up in Union Springs. So I had a temper fit early that morning and they finally agreed that I could have the barbecue in the morning and the party in the afternoon. The barbecue would be in the backyard with the black children, and the party would be in the front yard with the white children.

Elizabeth, Aunt May's daughter, was there. Aunt May had brought a French maid with her to Union Springs, too, if you can imagine. Aunt May really put on airs. Elizabeth was always dressed up in beautiful dresses with sashes and everything matching and her hair curled. She was a little older than I was, about my sister's age.

We had the birthday barbecue and everything was going fine. One of the little black girls was tearing up the chicken, and she offered a piece to Elizabeth. Elizabeth, who must have felt like an outcast in this group, all of a sudden said, "Don't you give me any chicken out of that black hand of yours. I'm not going to eat any chicken that your black hand has touched, you little nigger." I told Elizabeth to go to hell. I was just furious. You see, the black girl was Nursie's little girl, Sarah. She and I played together all the time. I was raised with her. The grown-ups put me to bed and said I was going to hell for being so bad.

When the afternoon came, I went to the birthday party with all these strange white children. I had another temper fit and screamed and yelled. I bashed the cake in and was put to bed again. By that time, the seventh birthday was pretty well shot, cake and all. That night at the supper table, my aunt said I was the worst child she had ever known. She told my mother, "I really think you have got to do something about her because she's so high-tempered, such a bad child." I was sitting right there listening to her, so I took a knife and threw it at her. Well, I was really a disgrace then, so they sent me away from the table. I went out to the back porch and sat in Nursie's lap. We could hear Aunt May through the window saying, "Annie, the trouble with Virginia is that nurse. She spoils her to death. And besides, I think it's terrible that you let her sit in her lap and sleep with her and kiss her and hug her. You know all those black women are diseased."¹

¹ Hollinger F. Barnard, ed., *Outside the Magic Circle: The Autobiography of Virginia Foster Durr* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 16-17.

PASSAGE BEGINS: *Beginning of Chapter 9*

PASSAGE ENDS: *"Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win," Atticus said.*

Scout in Chapter 9 and Virginia Durr in her memoir excerpt "The Birthday Party" are both thrown into situations that reveal social tensions around race and prompt a recognition of and reaction to these tensions. The questions that follow explore these issues.

1. What incident sparks Scout's questions regarding whom Atticus chooses to defend as a lawyer? What do her questions reveal about her understanding of the situation?

2. What event does Virginia describe as "the great trauma of [her] early life"? How does this event highlight racial tensions, and what does her reaction indicate about her understanding of her family's decision?

3. In these excerpts, both Scout and Virginia are provoked by other children's racially charged words. How do Scout and Virginia's reactions differ?

4. Both not only react in different ways but react in defense of different people. Who is Scout prepared to defend and who does Virginia defend?

5. Language and word choice play a role in both Scout and Virginia's coming-of-age experiences and early understandings of the unequal racial customs in the South. How does Atticus respond to Scout's use of the word "nigger"? How does Josephine, Virginia's sister, respond to Aunt May's order that the black children must start calling her "Miss Josephine" instead of "Sis"? How does each response signal recognition of racial tensions without fully addressing them?

6. How do the reactions of the adults in each text (Atticus and Aunt May) differ in response to the racial tensions that surface? What explanation can you give for their different reactions?

Create an Identity Chart for Scout, Jem, or Atticus Finch

After reading and discussing Chapters 8-11, answer the essential questions.

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