

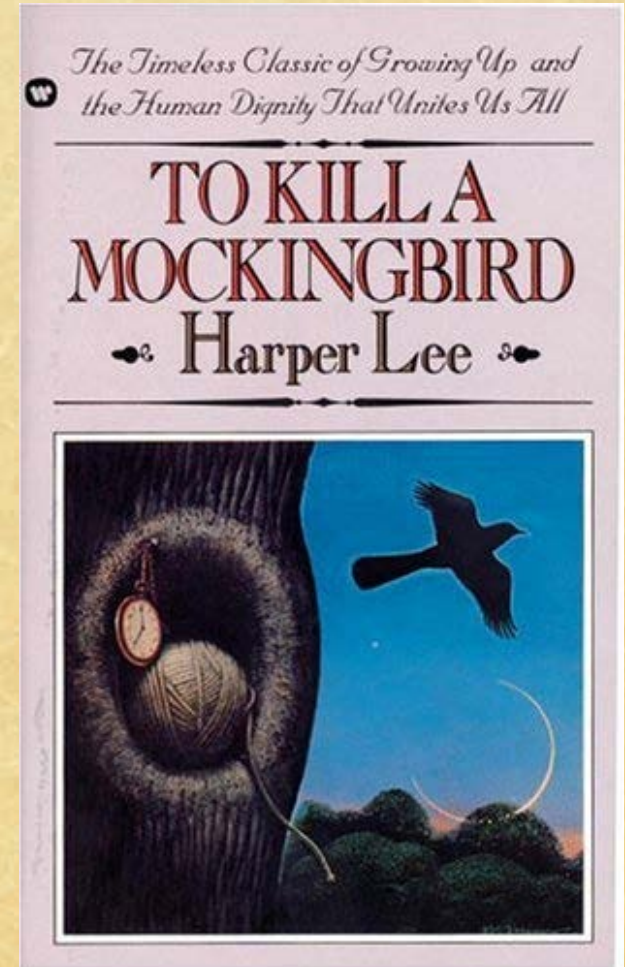


To Kill a Mockingbird

An Introduction to the Novel

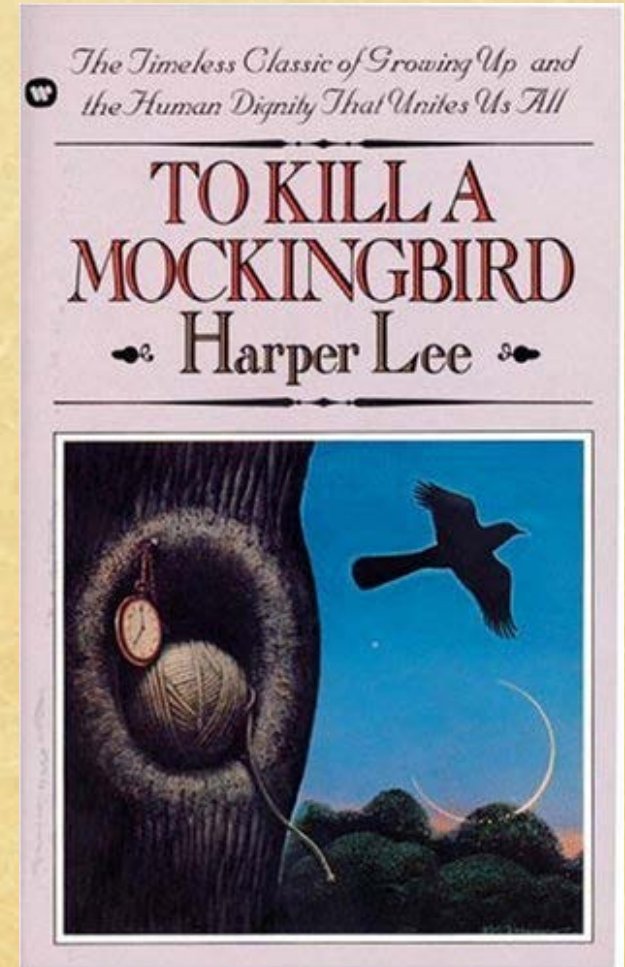
About the Novel

- ◆ Released in hardcover in 1960 and paperback in 1962
- ◆ An instant best-seller which earned Harper Lee the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1961 (awarded to American authors for fiction dealing with American life)
- ◆ Now, over 50 years since its publication, the novel sells nearly a million copies every year – hundreds of thousands more than *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Great Gatsby*, or *Of Mice and Men*, American classics that are also staples of high school classrooms



About the Novel

- ◆ No other 20th century American novel is more widely read
- ◆ British librarians, who were polled in 2006 and asked, “Which book should every adult read before they die?” voted *To Kill a Mockingbird* as number one. The Bible was number two.



About the Author

- ◆ Full name: Nelle Harper Lee
- ◆ Born in the small town of Monroeville, Alabama on April 28, 1926
- ◆ Started writing at the age of seven
- ◆ Left the University of Alabama six months short of earning a law degree in order to pursue a writing career
- ◆ In the early 1950s, she worked as an airline reservations clerk in New York City, writing essays and short stories in her spare time



About the Author

- ◆ Her literary agent suggested that one of her short stories be expanded into a novel
- ◆ She quit her airline job and spent several years revising her manuscript of *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- ◆ The final draft was completed in 1959 and published in 1960
- ◆ She became reclusive and published nothing other than a few magazine pieces in the early 1960s



Lee vs. Her Narrator

To Kill a Mockingbird is not autobiographical, yet Lee's own childhood certainly influences that of Scout.

Nelle Harper Lee

- Grew up in the 1930s – rural Southern Alabama town (Monroeville, Alabama)
- Father – Amasa Lee – attorney who served in state legislature in Alabama
- Older brother and young “literary” neighbour (Truman Capote) are playmates
- An avid reader
- Six years old when the Scottsboro trials were covered in state and local newspapers.

Jean Louise “Scout” Finch

- Grew up in the 1930s – rural Southern Alabama town (Maycomb, Alabama – fictional)
- Father – Atticus Finch – attorney who served in the state legislature in Alabama
- Older brother and young “literary” neighbour (Dill) are playmates
- Reads before entering school
- Six years old when the trial of Tom Robinson takes place

Narration

- ◆ First-person narration (Scout's perspective)
- ◆ She opens the novel as a grown woman reflecting back on her childhood
 - ◆ Therefore, the language is mature and insightful, yet still maintains the innocent outlook of a child
- ◆ The novel covers a two year period, beginning when Scout is six and ending when she is eight

Genre

- ♦ **Genre:** Coming of age novel (bildungsroman)
- ♦ **Bildungsroman:** sometimes called a “novel of formation” is a specific type of coming-of-age novel that presents the psychological, moral, and social maturation of the protagonist. Common elements include:
 - ♦ the protagonist embarks on a journey – whether literal or metaphoric – which prompts his/her growth from child to adult
 - ♦ the protagonist must have a reason to embark upon this journey – a loss or feeling of discontent
 - ♦ the process of maturation is long and difficult, where the protagonist experiences repeated clashes between his/her needs and desires and the values of an unbending social order
 - ♦ Eventually, as the protagonist matures, he/she is assimilated into the society; the novel ends with the protagonist’s new assessment of him or herself and his/her new place in that society

Setting

- ◆ *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a regional novel that portrays Southern American life during the mid-1930s in the fictional setting of Maycomb, Alabama
- ◆ Takes place entirely in Maycomb
- ◆ An old, conservative town steeped in tradition
- ◆ Events take place from 1933 to 1935 (in the midst of the Great Depression)

Alabama

- ◆ Became a “cotton state” which meant it had a high proportion of slaves working on cotton plantations
- ◆ An active area for Ku Klux Klan activity in the 1920s and 1930s
- ◆ The scene of many race riots during the Civil Rights Movement
- ◆ Like all states, it is divided into counties
- ◆ Maycomb County, Alabama is fictitious and is located somewhere in the south-west of the state



The Great Depression

- ◆ Occurred between 1929 and 1939
- ◆ Economic hard times that affected many industrialized areas of the world (i.e. North America and Europe)
- ◆ The value of assets decreased
- ◆ A drastic rise in unemployment
- ◆ Workers made very little money and could not afford to pay professionals (like Atticus, a lawyer); therefore, people paid with goods instead of cash



The Great Depression

- ◆ The South was hit hard by the Great Depression
- ◆ Farmers could not earn enough cash from their crops to afford their mortgages or living expenses
- ◆ Sharecropping was a practice that allowed tenant farmers to obtain acreage, food, and farming supplies by landowners
- ◆ Many black Americans were sharecroppers



Jim Crow

- ♦ The name of the racial caste system which operated in the southern U.S. from 1877 to the mid-1960s
- ♦ The system was more than a series of rigid anti-Black laws; it was a way of life
- ♦ Jim Crow represented the legitimization of anti-Black racism which was supported and encouraged even by ministers and theologians
 - ♦ Whites were the Chosen people and Blacks were cursed to be servants
 - ♦ Even God supported racial segregation



Jim Crow

- ♦ White people were innately culturally and intellectually superior to black people
- ♦ Segregation of the black community was crucial to the preservation of the white race. They were in great danger if integration were to occur
- ♦ Newspaper and magazine writers routinely referred to Blacks as “niggers,” “coons,” and “darkies,” as well as other derogatory terms



Jim Crow

- ♦ The system operated under the belief that ALL Whites were superior to Blacks
- ♦ Any sexual relations between Blacks and Whites would produce a mongrel race of people which would destroy America
- ♦ Miscegenation, or “racial-mixing” was not void but also illegal
- ♦ Treating Blacks as equals would only encourage interracial unions; if necessary, violence must be used to keep Blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy



Jim Crow Etiquette Norms

- ◆ Contact with men → A black male could not offer his hand (to shake hands) with a white male because it implied social equality
- ◆ Contact with women → A black male could not offer his hand or any other part of his body to a white woman because he risked being accused of rape
- ◆ Eating → Blacks and Whites were not supposed to eat together; if they did, whites were served first and a partition was placed between them

Jim Crow Etiquette Norms

- ♦ Affection → Blacks were not allowed to show public affection, especially kissing, because it offended white people
- ♦ Introductions → black people were introduced to white people, but not vice versa
- ♦ Courtesy Titles → white people did not use titles of respect (Mr., Mrs., Miss., Ms., Sir, or Ma'am) for black people – they were called by their first name. Blacks used titles of respect for white people

Jim Crow Etiquette Norms

- ◆ Travel → if a black person rode in a car driven by a white person, the black person sat in the back seat
- ◆ White motorists had the right-of-way at all intersections
- ◆ Curfews → instituted by state and local officials for black Americans
- ◆ Signage → “Whites Only” and “Colored” signs on parks, schools, hotels, water fountains, restrooms, and all modes of transportation



Jim Crow Laws

- ♦ Jim Crow was inconsistently applied
 - ♦ Disrespecting a white person may be met with laughter in one town or lynching in another
 - ♦ Southern white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan reached a membership of six million
 - ♦ Mob violence was encouraged
 - ♦ Torture became a public spectacle



Jim Crow Guide

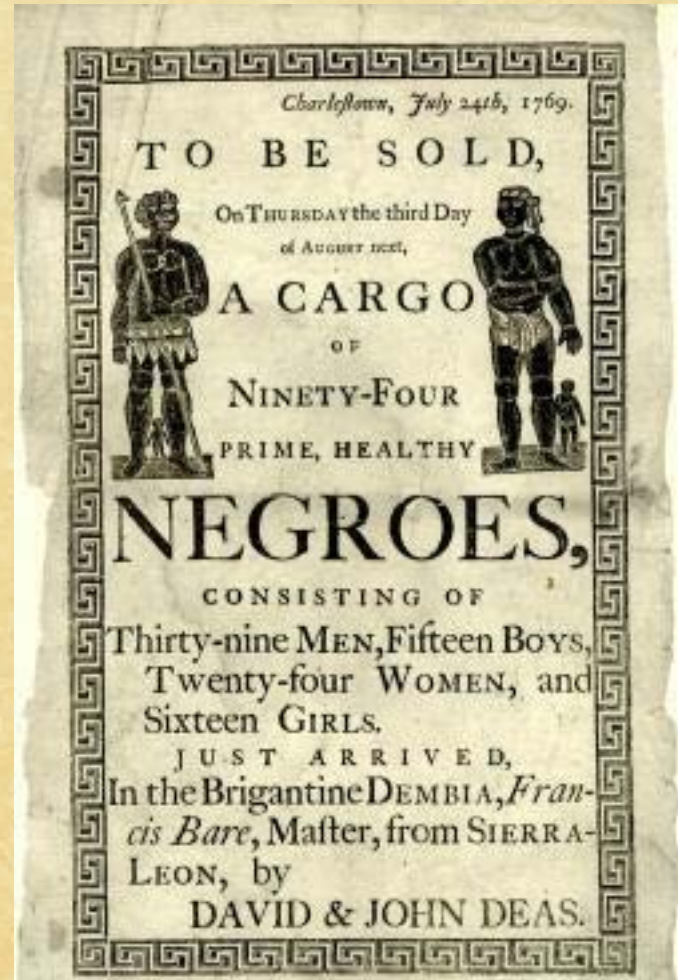
1. Never assert or even intimate that a white person is lying
2. Never impute dishonorable intentions to a white person
3. Never suggest that a white person is from an inferior class
4. Never lay claim to, or overly demonstrate, superior knowledge or intelligence
5. Never curse a white person
6. Never laugh derisively at a white person
7. Never comment upon the appearance of a white female

North and South

- ◆ The United States of America have always been divided into Northern and Southern states
- ◆ Before the 1930s, most black Americans, or Negroes as they were referred to then, lived in the Southern States, as that is where their ancestors had been brought as slaves
- ◆ The Great Depression during the 1930s caused a shortage of jobs and extreme poverty in the South, forcing people to move northwards in search of work

Slavery

- ◆ Before the Civil War (1861-1865) it was legal to own slaves in the Southern states
- ◆ The slave states of the South, especially those where cotton was grown, relied heavily on slave labour imported from Africa
- ◆ In 1850, there were over three million slaves who were bought and sold by White men in the Southern states



The Civil War

- ◆ Between 1861 and 1865, the Northern and Southern states fought a civil war against each other
- ◆ The North eventually won the war
- ◆ One of the outcomes of this was that all Black slaves were made free
- ◆ However, this did not change the manner in which most Southern white people responded to black people – white people still despised black people and treated them as though they were still slaves



The Ku Klux Klan

- ◆ Founded in the South in 1867
- ◆ Objective was to prevent black people from enjoying their newfound freedom
- ◆ The KKK used violent means to achieve this mission (1871: more than 150 Blacks were murdered in a single Florida county)
- ◆ The KKK's influence faded by the early 1900s yet returned, with renewed strength, in the 1920s
- ◆ Members usually wore long white cloaks and hoods which cover their faces



KKK Meeting

Ku Klux Klan

**STATE DEMONSTRATION
COMMUNITY PLAYGROUND
NORTH YORK**

Sunday and Monday, Sept. 4th and 5th

Addresses by

PROMINENT SPEAKERS

of the K. K. K.

Religious Services, Band Concerts, Singing by
Male Quartettes, Choruses and Glee Clubs

Street Parade Monday Afternoon

Huge K. K. K. Fireworks Display Monday Evening

Admission and Parking Free

GENERAL PUBLIC IS CORDIALLY INVITED

1930s

- ◆ Over 25% of labor force is unemployed during the worst years of the Great Depression
- ◆ Franklin D. Roosevelt becomes president with promise of his “New Deal” in 1932
 - ◆ His response to the Great Depression = Relief for the unemployed/poor; Recovery of the economy to normal levels; and Reform of the financial system to prevent a future depression



The Scottsboro Trial

- ◆ Trial lasted from 1931 to 1937 (Lee is four years old when the trial begins)
- ◆ Conviction of nine teenage African American boys accused of raping two white women on a train from Tennessee to Alabama
- ◆ Primary testimony came from the older woman, a prostitute trying to avoid prosecution herself
- ◆ Jury was composed exclusively of white men

The Scottsboro Boys



The Scottsboro Trial

- ♦ Jury ignored clear evidence that the boys were innocent
 - ♦ Similarly, *To Kill a Mockingbird* includes the Tom Robinson trial, wherein a black man is accused of raping a white woman
 - ♦ He is also considered “guilty” until proven innocent
- ♦ In January of 1932, the Alabama Supreme Court sentenced eight out of the nine boys to death



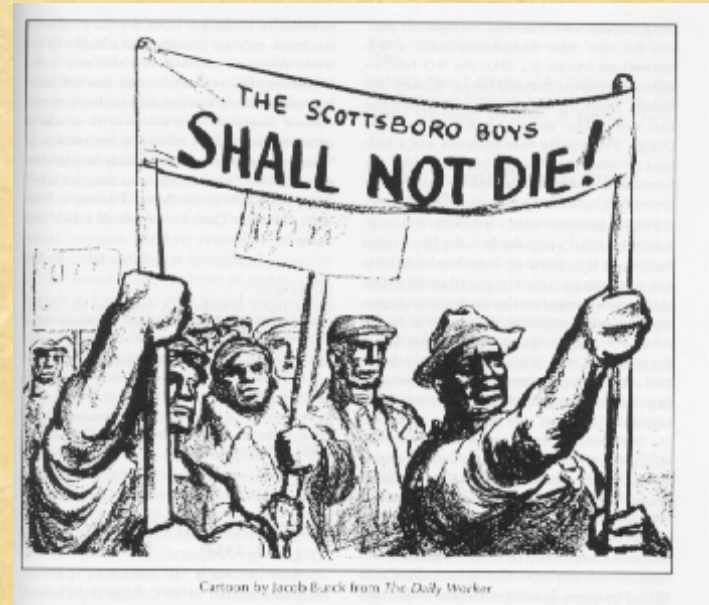
The Scottsboro Trial

- ◆ The case was appealed and thirteen-year-old Eugene Williams was granted a new trial because he was a juvenile
- ◆ The case returned to lower court and changed venues during the retrial
- ◆ One of the alleged victims admitted to fabricating the charges and that none of the Scottsboro Boys touched either of the women



The Scottsboro Trial

- ◆ Despite the confession from one of the victims, the boys were still found guilty
- ◆ After three trials, charges were finally dropped against four boys
- ◆ Sentences ranged from 75 years to death
- ◆ This case serves to highlight injustice and the corruption of the legal system
- ◆ It brought the end to all-white juries in the South



1950s

- ◆ *Brown vs. Board of Education* rules school segregation unconstitutional
- ◆ Rosa Parks refuses to surrender her bus seat to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama, 1955
- ◆ Protest over her arrest led to the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Alabama's segregation laws on buses



Early 1960s

- ◆ *To Kill a Mockingbird* is published in 1960
- ◆ The film that follows in 1962 wins Oscars for best actor, screenwriter, and set design
- ◆ Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers I have a Dream speech in 1963



Civil Rights and *To Kill a Mockingbird*

- ◆ It was against the background of the Civil Rights struggle that Lee wrote her novel
- ◆ When writers wish to make a statement about social injustice, it is not unusual for them to set their novels in the past (this gives the reader more distance, which in turn allows them to think more objectively about the issue)
- ◆ Imagine, for example, if Harper Lee had set *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the 1950s, among tensions and violence of the Civil Rights struggle. Feelings would have run so high that her message may well have been lost.

Mid-1960s

- ◆ Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, enforcing the constitutional right to vote
- ◆ Malcolm X is assassinated in 1965



Criticism

The novel has been a source of great controversy since it became the focus of classroom study as early as 1963. It includes:

- ♦ Racial slurs
- ♦ Profanity
- ♦ Frank discussions of rape

The worst thing
about censorship
is [REDACTED].
[REDACTED].

As a result, people have challenged the novels' appropriateness in libraries and classrooms, and have fought to have it banned altogether.

Criticism

“What seems wonderful or powerful to one group of students may seem degrading to another.”

- The English Journal



Value

- ◆ Cited as a major reason for the success of civil rights in the 1960s since it “arrived at the right moment to help the South and the nation grapple with the racial tensions (of) the accelerating civil rights movement”
- ◆ It inspires “hope in the midst of chaos and confusion” by showing how people can rise above their prejudices

Themes

- ◆ Prejudice vs. Tolerance
- ◆ Innocence vs. Guilt
- ◆ Justice vs. Injustice
- ◆ Knowledge vs. Ignorance
- ◆ Appearance vs. Reality
- ◆ Courage vs. Cowardice
- ◆ Maturation
- ◆ The need for compassion and conscience