

CliffsNotes.com® Conversation Starters for **TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD**

Why does Atticus choose not to reveal to his children that Judge Taylor appointed him to Tom's case? How does his decision affect Scout's perception of her father?

Do you think that the adult Jean Louise telling the story through Scout's eyes may have added any embellishments to the story? Think of an event from your own life that occurred at least five years ago. Do you see the event differently now? How does memory and education affect your perception of the event?

If Scout and Jem's mother were still alive, how might the following people be different: Atticus, Scout, Jem, Calpurnia, and Aunt Alexandra?

Would Heck Tate have filed charges against Tom Robinson so quickly if Tom were white? Why or why not? Would Sheriff Tate have been so unwilling to file charges against Boo Radley if Boo was black? Why or why not?

Read the play *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Christopher Sergel. What elements in the story are different? What limitations does the book have that the stage doesn't? What limitations does the stage have that the book doesn't? Does Sergel tell the same story that Harper Lee does? What events does Sergel highlight as important? Why do you think he made those choices? Do you agree with his choices?

How does the relationship between Jem and Scout compare to the relationship between Atticus and Aunt Alexandra? How are the two relationships similar? How are they different?

Based on what you know about Scout, describe the adult Jean Louise Finch.

Suppose that Mayella had admitted that she was lying when she testified against Tom. What would have happened to her? What would've happened to Tom? How would Scout, Jem, and Dill perceive the situation differently? Would the town have been willing to accept Tom's innocence? Why or why not?

What significance do the items that Boo leaves for the children have? What do they tell you about Boo? Why does his brother object so strongly to his leaving items for the children?

Harper Lee uses language and grammar that mirrors how the characters actually speak. Is this technique helpful in understanding the characters? Is it distracting? Could Lee have told the same story with the same impact if she'd used proper grammar throughout?

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Read Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Compare the lessons Scout learns with those that Huck learns. How is Jim like or unlike Tom Robinson? *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Huckleberry Finn* are both novels that have undergone many censorship attempts, especially in schools and public libraries. Why do you think people would want to censor these stories? Is censorship ever appropriate? Why or why not?

Why would Lee choose to tell the story through a child's point of view? Why is that important?

Why do you think Boo Radley is a recluse? Is it because he wants to? Does his family force him to be one? Both?

Jem and Scout often try to get Boo to come out of his house. They invented wild stories and nicknames for him, even though they had never met him. Why then do you think Boo leaves the children gifts, mends Jem's pants, covers Scout with a blanket during the fire, and saves them from Bob?

Explain the significance of this quote: "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy... but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird." What does it mean? Who are the mockingbirds in this novel? How can you kill a mockingbird without actually ending its life? Who kills the mockingbirds in this novel?

Compare and contrast the Cunninghams and the Ewells. How are they similar? How do their similarities make them different?

What role do birds play in the novel? How do birds shape the theme of the novel?

Why does Atticus say Mrs. Dubose is the bravest person he knew? What does this kind of comment say about Atticus' character?

Describe Atticus Finch. Does he have any flaws? Why has Lee characterized him in the way she has?

Why does the majority of the novel take place during the summer? Why do Scout and Jem learn their greatest lessons during the summer? Would the story have been different if it took place mostly during the school year?

Why is the visit to Calpurnia's church important? What does it teach Jem and Scout?

Do Calpurnia and Aunt Alexandra present different views of femininity?

What did Mayella Ewell stand to gain by accusing Tom of sexual assault? Why would she lie?
