

约克文学作品辅导丛书

YORK NOTES ON

# TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

枪打反舌鸟

Harper Lee



LONGMAN  
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GUIDES

# YORK NOTES

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Harper Lee

# TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

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## 《约克文学作品辅导丛书》介绍

《约克文学作品辅导丛书》(York Notes)系 Longman 集团有限公司(英国)出版。本丛书覆盖了世界各国历代文学名著,原意是辅导英国中学生准备文学课的高级会考或供英国大学生自学参考。因此,它很适合我国高校英语专业学生研读文学作品时参考。

丛书由 A. N. Jeffares 和 S. Bushrui 两位教授任总编。每册的编写者大都是研究有关作家的专家学者,他们又都有在大学讲授文学的经验,比较了解学生理解上的难点。本丛书自问世以来,始终畅销不衰,被使用者普遍认为是英美出版的同类书中质量较高的一种。

丛书每一册都按统一格式对一部作品进行介绍和分析。每一册都有下列五个部分。

① 导言。主要介绍:作者生平,作品产生的社会、历史背景,有关的文学传统或文艺思潮等。

② 内容提要。一般分为两部分:a.全书的内容概述;b.每章的内容提要及难词、难句注释,如方言、典故、圣经或文学作品的引语、有关社会文化习俗等。注释恰到好处,对于读懂原作很有帮助。

③ 评论。结合作品的特点,对结构、人物塑造、叙述角度、语言风格、主题思想等进行分析和评论。论述深入浅出,分析力求客观,意在挖掘作品内涵和展示其艺术性。

④ 学习提示。提出学习要点、重要引语和思考题(附参考答案或答案要点)。

⑤ 进一步研读指导。介绍该作品的最佳版本;版本中是否有重大改动;列出供进一步研读的参考书目(包括作者传记、研究有关作品的专著和评论文章等)。

总之,丛书既提供必要的背景知识,又注意启发学生思考;既重视在吃透作品的基础上进行分析,又对进一步研究提供具体指导;因此是一套理想的英语文学辅导材料。

北京师范大学外文系教授 钱 瓊



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## Part 1

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# Introduction

## The author

Harper Lee belongs to the younger generation of writers from the American South which has emerged since the Second World War. She was born in 1926 in Monroeville, Alabama, a small Southern town closely resembling Maycomb, where the novel is set, both in its geographical location near the town of Montgomery and in its general character. Like Scout, who is the narrator of the novel, Harper Lee was educated at local public schools. Later she went on to the Alabama State University. The novel may be said, therefore, to be firmly based in the author's own background experience. It came out in 1960, won the momentous Pulitzer prize, and soon afterwards was made into a film starring Gregory Peck in the role of Atticus Finch. The author now lives in New York. She has not yet produced any further novels.

## General historical background

Some knowledge of the history of the American South, and of the Civil War of 1861–5 in particular, is essential to a proper understanding of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The novel is actually set in the period from 1933 to 1935, but the past is still strongly alive in the minds of the characters, and the moral and social issues with which the novel is concerned are those which were fought over in the Civil War. Study of the novel's historical background should begin, therefore, with that conflict.

The bond between the states in the American Union was always fragile. From the time when the original thirteen colonies declared their independence from Britain in 1776 there was always the possibility that individual states would break away from the group. In the event, however, they stayed together until divided by the issue of slavery which in 1861 split the South from the North. Some cultural differences between the South and the North had always existed. The South was an agricultural society, deriving its wealth from the production of cotton, tobacco, rice, sugar and hemp on plantations worked by black slaves, descendants of the Africans imported into the United States from the seventeenth century onwards through the slave trade. The Northern states had a more urban, industrialised economy, and as time passed

Northerners became more and more unwilling to condone what they felt to be the evil of slavery in the South. Southerners justified their practice by arguing that the black race was naturally inferior, and that the imported Africans were actually fortunate to be American slaves, since their slavery brought them into contact with Christianity and civilisation. At times the slave system was enforced with great brutality, and at best Southern whites tended to regard their black slaves as ignorant, simple-minded, child-like, lazy, irresponsible and in need of firm guidance from their white superiors. This attitude may still be observed among the white inhabitants of Maycomb County in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The division between North and South came to a crisis in 1861, when the Southern states of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Florida, and Texas broke away from the Union, joined themselves together as the Confederate States of America, and went to war with the rest of the country. Both sides expected a short war. At the start President Lincoln called for volunteers for the Union side to join up for three months only. Fighting dragged on, however, till 1865, when General Robert E. Lee, on behalf of the Southern Confederacy, surrendered to the Northern Union General Ulysses Grant.

The suffering on both sides had been terrible, and the South was unable to forget. The bitterness of their defeat was then exacerbated by the reconstruction period which followed, when the new Northern rulers attempted to reshape Southern society and to give practical force to the emancipation of the blacks, by offering them political power. For the white Southerners the whole experience of defeat and reconstruction only served to strengthen their sense of separate identity and their loyalty to distinctive Southern values and traditions. They continued to give their children the names of Confederate Generals (several examples of this practice can be found in *To Kill a Mockingbird*), and they refused to change their attitude to the newly emancipated blacks. The poor whites, in particular, who had never owned slaves in the pre-war period, now greatly feared and resented the free blacks, whom they saw as a threat to their own security and status. During the reconstruction period white Southerners successfully resisted government efforts to implement ideas of social and political equality for blacks, and many state laws were passed in the South with the object of preserving white supremacy. Similarly, though the rich leisurely life-style of the Old South had been largely destroyed by the Civil War, Southerners continued to pride themselves on the aristocratic elegance of their traditions. All these Southern tendencies can be found in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where racial prejudice, social snobbery and attachment to 'Southern' values are major motive forces in the plot.

In spite of all that has been said, the novel is not a simple attack on white Southern culture. Harper Lee is indignant about the cruel treatment received by black Americans, but she continues to feel a nostalgic affection for some aspects of the White Southern tradition. In the novel Atticus Finch warns his children not to reject their own community, whatever faults they may find in it. Similarly, Harper Lee criticises Alabama society, but retains some attachment to it.

## Literary background

As a writer Harper Lee belongs by birth to a special tradition, that of the Southern novelist. In this century the South has produced a remarkable number of successful authors, of whom the novelist William Faulkner (1897–1962) is probably the most famous. His example quickly inspired others, until by the mid-twentieth century Carson McCullers (1917–67), another Southern novelist, could claim that ‘the South at the present time boils with literary energy’. This burst of literary creativity is believed by Southerners to be a result of their defeat in the Civil War, which they feel deepened their sense of tragedy. Whatever the reason, modern Southern writers have produced many novels of high quality and distinctive character. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a typical Southern novel in that it shares in this distinctive character.

One of the most striking features of Southern novels is their strong regional sense. Defeat in the Civil War only strengthened feelings of local loyalty among Southerners. They had always been deeply attached to their own land, and the isolation of Southern rural communities after the Civil War served to increase the attachment. This has produced valuable results in Southern fiction. As Carson McCullers points out, all novelists tend to write well about environments known in childhood, but Southerners seem to feel with special intensity about their early surroundings. Flannery O’Connor (1925–64), another modern Southern novelist, believes this is a major advantage. ‘The best American fiction,’ she says, ‘has always been regional. The ascendancy passed roughly from New England to the Midwest to the South, it has passed to and stayed longest wherever there has been a shared past, a sense of likeness, and a possibility of reading a small history in a universal light’. All the qualities listed here can be found in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in which Maycomb County is described in loving detail, the sense of community is very powerful, and the small local events are shown to be relevant to universal moral issues of justice and equality.

Mention of the importance of the community leads on to another characteristic feature of Southern novels: the powerful evocation of loneliness. Two factors are operating here: the isolation of the South itself and the particular experience of modern Southern writers. In the

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years of decline after the Civil War the South was largely cut off from the rest of the country. While the rest of the United States was booming, the South was neglected and stagnating, and because of this modern Southern writers are born to some knowledge of social isolation. Secondly, these modern writers themselves often undergo the painful experience of alienation from their own communities. After growing up in their beloved Southern environment almost all of them move away to the North either to complete their education or to work. Upon returning to their homeland they tend to find themselves no longer at home, as they have lost sympathy with Southern values, especially as regards race. They therefore find themselves torn between love and hate for their old community, a community which they know is dying but which they cannot wholeheartedly mourn. All this may help to explain why Southern writers lay such emphasis on and describe so poignantly the pain of not belonging. Harper Lee conforms to the typical pattern; she grew up in a small Southern community and left it for New York. In *To Kill a Mockingbird* the theme of loneliness is repeatedly stressed: loneliness caused by lack of a warm family life, as in the case of Arthur Radley and Dill; the loneliness of growing up, which Scout experiences when she finds her relationship with her brother changing; the loneliness of being social outcasts, as are M yella Ewell and her family; and the loneliness which arises from racial intolerance, most clearly seen in the reference to Mr Dolphus Raymond's half-caste children who 'don't belong anywhere'.

The very existence of the black community in the South provides another major common theme for Southern novelists. Though they may feel pride in their gracious aristocratic past Southerners can never escape from the curse and sin of slavery. This produces a sense of guilt which hangs over modern Southern fiction. The evil of slavery cannot be forgotten, since the black Americans are still a visible presence in the South and are still exposed to white intolerance and prejudice. Race relations naturally tend, therefore, to be a central theme in Southern fiction, so the fact that the climactic event of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is the trial and wrongful conviction of a black man places it right in the mainstream of the Southern tradition.

One further characteristic feature of modern Southern fiction is the emphasis on violence, which has been a constant feature from Faulkner onwards. Carson McCullers claims that Southern literature closely resembles classic nineteenth century Russian fiction, in that both emerge from societies whose dominant characteristic is the cheapness of human life. This is not merely a question of black life, as white Southerners have also traditionally been quick to turn their violence against each other. An instance of this in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is to be found in the account of Atticus Finch's first legal case, in which he

defended two men who murdered the local blacksmith in a minor dispute over a horse. Hot temper and swift recourse to violence were always matters of pride in the white Southern tradition, and after the Civil War much of the violence was inevitably directed against the blacks. Moreover, this racial violence became involved with an obscure fear or envy of the black man's sexuality. Thus the classic case of violence in Southern fiction concerns rape followed by lynching and involving a confrontation between black and white. *To Kill a Mockingbird* conforms closely to this pattern: the black Tom Robinson is accused of raping the white Mayella Ewell; a lynching party comes to the jail to get him, and finally, though an innocent man, he dies with seventeen bullet-holes in him. At the end of the novel two children narrowly escape violent death. Harper Lee clearly disapproves of violence, but it is a prominent feature of her description of small-town Southern life in the 1930s.

Finally, Harper Lee's identity as a woman puts her in a special category of Southern writers. Among the successful modern Southern novelists a high proportion have been women. The reasons for this are not clear, though it has been suggested that Southern culture, with its emphasis on close-knit family and local loyalties, provides a specially favourable environment for female writers. In addition to this, the frustrations of female life may themselves contribute to the excellence of Southern female fiction. Women were much idealised in Southern society, which liked to regard them as pure, delicate, fragile beings, unfit to deal with the coarser realities of life. In theory this meant a high status for women, but in practice many women found it restrictive and oppressive. They were therefore in a good position to understand feelings of frustration and oppression in general, and such feelings were common in the South after the Civil War. Black men were oppressed by white, the South was oppressed by the North: the entire community suffered from a sense of frustration. Women in the South, simply because they were women, were particularly well able to capture and convey such feelings. In *To Kill a Mockingbird* a recurrent theme is Scout's resentment of the gracious, ladylike role which her aunt tries to impose on her. Like the heroines of Carson McCullers' novels *The Member of the Wedding* and *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* she rejects her feminine name of Jean Louise and prefers to use her unfeminine nickname, 'Scout'. The female point of view, therefore, is significant in bringing out certain aspects of the themes of the novel, especially frustration, social oppression and desire for freedom. The fact that Harper Lee is a woman may thus have been of advantage to her in tackling the subject of Southern society.

## A note on the text

*To Kill a Mockingbird* was first published by Lippincott, Philadelphia, in 1960. Its wide popularity has ensured frequent reprintings since that time.

The text used in preparing this guide is the British paperback edition produced by Pan Books, London in association with Heinemann, London, first published in 1974 and also reprinted many times.

## Part 2

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# Summaries

of *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

### A general summary

The main event in the novel is the trial of a black man, Tom Robinson, who is accused of raping a white girl, Mayella Ewell. The story begins, however, not in the year of the trial, which is 1935, but two years earlier, in the summer of 1933. The narrator is a little girl, Scout Finch, daughter of Tom Robinson's white defence attorney. In the first part of the book she recounts various incidents in which she, her elder brother Jem and their friend Dill are concerned between 1933 and 1934.

When the novel begins Scout is nearly six, Jem is nearly ten, and their friend Dill, who comes to spend his summer holiday in Maycomb with his aunt, is nearly seven. Their main interest in the early part of the book is in trying to establish communication with a neighbour, Arthur Radley, nicknamed 'Boo', who has been shut up in his house for years and who has the reputation of being a dangerous lunatic. In the first summer, 1933, Jem just summons up enough courage to run and touch the Radley house. Then, at the end of the following school year, Jem and Scout find gifts of chewing-gum and polished coins in a hole in a tree outside the Radley house. When Dill comes back to Maycomb in the summer of 1934 he joins them in a game in which they enact what they believe is the true history of the Radley family: Arthur's involvement with a teenage gang, his punishment by incarceration in the house, and his attack on his father with a pair of scissors some years later.

The children's father, Atticus Finch, sees them playing this game and discourages it. Next Jem and Dill try to push a message on the end of a stick into the Radley house. Atticus catches them, and forbids them to try again. On Dill's last evening in Maycomb the children creep to the Radley house and try to peer in at the window. They see the shadow of a man, and run away. Mr Nathan Radley, Arthur's brother, fires a shot into the garden, claiming that he thought a Negro was stealing his vegetables. In escaping Jem gets his trousers caught on the fence, and when he goes to retrieve them later that night he finds the tear in them has been mended. He realises Arthur has helped him.

During the following school year Jem and Scout find further gifts in the tree: a ball of string; carved soap figures, an old medal and a broken watch on a chain with a knife. Jem is aware that the gifts come from

Arthur, so he writes a letter of thanks, intending to put it in the hole. Before he can do so Mr Nathan Radley, who has also realised what is happening, blocks the hole with cement. The children's next contact with the Radleys occurs during a fire at the house of another neighbour, Miss Maudie. While the children stand outside watching the fire on a cold winter's night, Arthur comes unnoticed out of his house to put a blanket round Scout's shoulders. This is their last contact with him until the very end of the novel, when he emerges to save their lives when they are attacked by Bob Ewell. In this way the Radley adventures, which dominate Part One of the book, come to a climax at the end of Part Two.

Apart from the Radley adventures the major episodes in Part One, in order of occurrence, are Scout's first experience of school; the children's Christmas visit to Aunt Alexandra; the shooting of a rabid dog and the encounter with another neighbour, Mrs Dubose.

In her account of her first day at school Scout describes the children of some of the characters who are to play crucial roles in Part Two of the novel. One is Burris Ewell, the son of the man who accuses Tom Robinson of rape; the other is Walter Cunningham, the son of a poor white farmer who leads a lynch mob to the jail where Tom is held. Both boys closely resemble their fathers in character, so their appearance here helps to prepare us for later events.

The next excitements in Part One, again excluding the Radley adventures, are the children's first sight of snow and the burning of Miss Maudie's house. The Christmas following the fire, Atticus gives the children air-rifles, but warns them never to kill mockingbirds, which do no harm. Christmas itself is spent at the home of Aunt Alexandra. There Scout fights her cousin Francis and is punished for it by her bachelor uncle Jack. The next adventure happens in February, when a rabid dog approaches the Finch house. The family's black cook, Cal, warns the neighbours and summons Atticus, who bravely steps into the road and kills the dog with a single shot. The children now discover that he is the best shot in the county, but rarely uses a gun because he feels his skill gives him an unfair advantage over other living creatures.

By this time Atticus has agreed to take on the defence of Tom Robinson. Though the children do not know the details of the case, they soon discover that their father's action is unpopular with the white community. First one of Scout's classmates criticises Atticus for defending niggers. Scout wants to fight to avenge the insult, but Atticus forbids her. Then her cousin Francis makes the same criticism during the Christmas visit, provoking the fight for which Scout is punished. Finally Jem too gets into trouble because of the Robinson case. Mrs Dubose, who lives in a neighbouring house, shouts abuse at the children's father when they pass her house. Jem breaks her flowers in revenge, is sent by Atticus to apologise, and for a month afterwards has to read aloud in the

afternoons to the old lady. Scout goes too, and is puzzled by Mrs Dubose's strange, moody behaviour. A few months later the old lady dies, and Atticus explains that she was very ill and had become a morphine addict. She used the reading sessions as a means of conquering her addiction. He tells the children that they should respect such courage. That is the end of Part One.

Part Two begins in the summer of Tom's trial. Scout is feeling lonely, since Jem is growing away from her, Atticus is out of town, and Dill is not coming for the summer as his divorced mother has remarried. One Sunday Cal takes the children to attend the service in the African church, and when they return home they find Aunt Alexandra waiting for them. She has come to look after the family during the period of the trial. Since she is a snobbish person she fits easily into Maycomb society and annoys the children by her efforts to make them behave conventionally. The next excitement happens one evening when Scout feels something strange under her bed, and she and Jem find Dill hiding there. He has run away from home because he felt his mother and stepfather did not really want him. Atticus arranges for Dill to be allowed to spend the rest of the summer in Maycomb, and the children have a week of enjoyment before what Scout calls the 'nightmare' begins.

The 'nightmare' is Tom Robinson's trial. The tension begins when a group of responsible citizens come on Saturday evening to the Finch house to warn Atticus that they fear violence when Tom is moved to the county jail on the following day. The next night Atticus goes to sit outside the jail to protect Tom. A lynch mob led by Walter Cunningham comes to the jail hoping to seize Tom and execute him before the trial begins. Luckily Jem has a premonition of trouble and takes Scout and Dill downtown to find out what is happening. Scout does not realise that the group of men surrounding her father is different from the friendly group who visited the house the previous night, and she runs forward to greet them. Atticus is afraid, but Scout, by her innocent attempts at friendly conversation, reminds Cunningham that the Finch family has been generous to him. He therefore calls off the mob, and the Finches go home to bed. The next morning the trial begins.

Aunt Alexandra forbids the children to attend the trial, but they go anyway, and sit with the black community in the coloured balcony. They hear evidence from the sheriff, from Bob Ewell, the father of the girl who is supposed to have been raped, from Mayella Ewell herself, and from Tom. The sheriff states that he was summoned one evening to the Ewell house, and heard Bob Ewell accuse Tom of having raped Mayella. Bob Ewell claims to have actually witnessed the rape, and Mayella supports her father's story. In his cross-questioning Atticus establishes several points favourable to Tom. He shows that Bob Ewell's pretended concern for his daughter is false, as he did not even think of calling a

doctor to tend her injuries. Atticus also brings out the fact that Mayella's bruises were mainly on the right side of her face. When Tom stands up the children see he is crippled. His left arm is useless, making it most unlikely that he could have beaten Mayella in the manner described. After Atticus has completed his examination of the witnesses the truth is clear. Tom had simply been a kind neighbour to Mayella, often assisting her with household tasks and never demanding payment. On the evening of the supposed rape she made sexual advances to him. He resisted and while he was doing so Bob Ewell arrived, saw what was happening, and immediately threatened to kill Mayella. Tom, realising the danger of the situation, ran away. It was Bob Ewell, then, who beat Mayella. The truth is so clear that the children understand it at once. As the final cross-examination draws to a close Dill starts crying, because he cannot bear the way the prosecuting attorney speaks to Tom. Scout takes him out of the courtroom, and when they return Atticus is making his final appeal to the jury. Jem is certain his father has won the case, but when the jury return after several hours of deliberation, they declare Tom guilty.

On the following day Miss Maudie tries to explain that, though Atticus was defeated, he has also triumphed, since only he could have made the jury take so long to decide a case of this sort. Bob Ewell realises that he has been discredited, and threatens revenge against Atticus. Atticus himself remains optimistic, believing Tom may be acquitted when his appeal is heard in a higher court. However, during a tea-party given by Aunt Alexandra for the ladies of the Missionary Circle, news comes that Tom is dead shot when trying to escape from prison.

The holidays end; the children return to school, life seems to be quiet again. But Bob Ewell still wants revenge. He tries to break into Judge Taylor's house, he molests Tom's widow, and finally, on the night of Hallowe'en, when Scout has been performing in the Maycomb Pageant, he follows the children home in the dark and attacks them with a knife. They are saved by Arthur Radley, who kills their attacker. Jem's elbow is broken, but otherwise the children are unhurt. Atticus thinks at first that Jem killed Bob Ewell, but the sheriff explains that Arthur was responsible, and they agree to avoid publicity by reporting the death as accidental. Scout then escorts Arthur home and returns to her house, where Atticus puts her to bed. That is the end of the story.

## Detailed summaries

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### Chapter one

Scout introduces her family to the readers, provides a little historical background to Maycomb society, recounts the first meeting with Dill, and opens her narration of the Radley adventures.