

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD - ANALYSIS

PART ONE

Chapter One

This chapter merely gives the reader a view of the Maycomb society and its inhabitants. The main characters, of course, are Atticus and his family. Scout, his daughter, narrates the entire story in first person. Since the entire novel is a narrative seen through Scout's eyes, the visualization is purely from a child's point of view. This includes the depiction of her morbid fear of the Radley house, about which she has heard a number of stories, drawn out of proportion by the local gossips. The description of Boo, therefore, is a larger than life one: "he was six-and-a-half feet tall, dined on row squirrels -- there was a long jagged scar that ran across his face; what teeth he had were yellow and rotten; his eyes popped and he drooled."

The father's relation with his children seems superficial in the beginning -- "he played with us, read to us, and treated us with courteous detachment," yet the fact that the children call him by his name, and even later, as his outlook and conduct are revealed, they only point to the genuine love he has for his children.

Dill is introduced in the chapter. He is a child searching for love in a loveless family; he also has a tendency to fantasize and exaggerate. During the course of the novel, he will prove to be a good friend to both Jem and Scout.

Chapter Two

In this chapter, the reader is made aware of the narrow-minded and idealistic approach to learning which insists on a step-by-step approach. The fact that Scout already knows how to read and write is not appreciated, but is judged by the teacher an irritant to further learning.

The chapter also shows a section of the Maycomb society, where people, like the Cunninghams, are dirt-poor, but honest and hardworking. Scout's teacher, Miss Carolina, who comes from North Alabama, is unfamiliar with Maycomb society, and Scout's simple explanation about Walter Cunningham only serves to irritate the teacher all the more. Gradually, the intricacies of Maycomb society are being unravelled by the author.

Chapter Three

Another section of the Maycomb County is unveiled here. The Ewells are what was called the 'white trash' who live in dire poverty, yet make no attempts to ascend out of it. The society has to accept their way of life and they are merely evaded as far as possible. The Cunninghams, though as poor, are not like the Ewells, in that they possess self-respect, honesty and perseverance.

Atticus, being a lawyer, has to deal with all kinds of people including such as the Cunninghams and the Ewells, and is therefore aware of their particular failings and strengths.

Calpurnia serves as a surrogate mother for the children, who takes them at hand, teaching them rudimentary reading and the courteous conduct.

Chapter Four

The apparent futility of the new method of teaching makes Scout sluggish in her schoolwork. It is also evident that her fear of the Radley house has not mitigated with time.

The discovery of the chewing gum, and later the pennies, gives an insight into the character of Boo Radley, who is feared by all children but who loves them nonetheless, and therefore

shows his interest in them through such covert attempts. Even his laughter, that Scout overhears as she rolls onto his front yard, reveals his keenness in the children's actions and a fervour in living his life amidst people, as he did before he had been submitted to this severe punishment of confinement.

The game the children indulge in is typical of children who wish to enact things they hear about. And though Boo Radley scares the wits out of them, his life holds prominence too, which leads them to an enact (what they believe is) Boo's life. Though apparently it is an unkind thing to do, the children are displaying the way they come to terms with the adult world.

Chapter Five

People in the county have a very high regard for Atticus. As Miss Maudie puts it - "If Atticus drank until he was drunk, he wouldn't be as hard as some men are at their best."

Dill and Jem's desire to bring Boo out of the house not only shows their sincere attempts at befriending him; it is also an innocent need to see him and find out if he is for real. It is an innate curiosity of knowing what has never been clearly revealed to them. All such hopes are, however, quashed by Atticus who doesn't believe in interfering in other people's private lives.

Dill's childish desire of marrying Scout and his subsequent neglect towards her also indicates the evolving behaviour of children who at one point, want to do what grown ups do, and the next minute, get busy doing juvenile things. Scout's angry reaction of giving Dill a thrashing is also very typical of her temperament: she always likes to behave boyish and this is a chance to display her aggressive trait.

Chapter Six

The children, apparently, are undeterred by Atticus' instructions to leave the Radley family alone, and thus they dare to make second attempt to meet Boo in the night. But once again their plans backfire.

Jem is embarrassed at being caught without his pants in front of a gathering. So that their lie of having played strip poker, is not discovered, Jem has to attempt going into that area again to retrieve his pants. Scout's fear, as she awaits Jem's safe return, has been portrayed touchingly. Along with this, the added fear of Atticus waking up and catching Jem not at bed, is awesome. But all is well as Jem returns, holding up his pants speechlessly.

Chapter Seven

The reader can guess that Boo Radley wishes to befriend the children, in a covert manner, though. In fact, it is Boo who has not only stitched and folded his pants, but he has also been gifting them fantastic objects. The children, of course, are yet unaware of the truth, but wish to show their gratitude to this unknown friend of theirs.

This attempt, however, is thwarted by Nathan Radley. His apparent lie probably implies that he is against any friendship between his son and anyone. His self-imposed punishment to his son includes a total abstinence from any kind of normal and healthy relationships, which includes friendships with such children. Therefore, he comes across as an excessively stern character. Atticus on his part is probably aware of this attitude, which explains why he discourages the children from irritating Boo Radley.

Undoubtedly, Boo is portrayed as a pathetic personality, craving for friendship and attention, however little it may be. The various articles he leaves in the knothole is probably a cry for attention that any human being requires so desperately. The reader cannot help feeling sympathy towards him.

Chapter Eight

The fire at Miss Maudie's place creates quite a stir, but Scout's close encounter with Boo, albeit without her realization of it, causes more topic for conversation. Boo's love for the children is noted when he places the blanket on Scout's shoulders. It is obvious that Boo has done it, since Nathan Radley had been near Maudie's house, helping to put out the fire.

Though her entire house is razed to the ground Miss Maudie is still not disturbed and has recovered her sharp sense of humour. Her plans of setting up a new house, large enough to room her azaleas, portrays her as a practical and a worldly woman.

Chapter Nine

Scout cannot help picking a fight when her father's position at stake. Her behaviour and her use of expletives is greatly abhorred by Uncle Jack, but he is not able to sort out the confusion.

Uncle Jack has a talk with Atticus about the children, and Atticus, knowing that Scout is listening says that he hopes the children would trust him and come to him for answers instead of depending on the local gossips. Scout is surprised that her father knows she has been listening --"and it was not until many years later that I realized he wanted me to hear every word he said."

Atticus again displays his rich character through his penetrating sense of child psychology. He realizes, as do few adults, that sometimes children abhor being told what is to be done. In a very adept manner, he manoeuvres the conversation with Jack Finch in order to let Scout know (who he knows may be overhearing) that he hopes that his children would not be like the rest of the other citizens of Maycomb society, who refuse to associate with the blacks.

Scout, child that she is, is amazed at her father's perceptiveness. Harper Lee has very skilfully sketched the depth of this father - daughter relationship.

Chapter Ten

The mockingbird is mentioned for the first time. Atticus insists that a mockingbird, whose sole ambition in life is to bring pleasure to others, should never be killed, it being a virtual sin to do so. The reference to the mockingbird is important for Tom Robinson's trial, as well as in relation to Boo Radley.

Atticus' excellence in shooting greatly astonishes the children who have never seen their father shoot at anything. Maudie's explanations clears up the confusion. Atticus maintains an appreciable sense of propriety and civility in this chapter. The children's respect for their father is raised several notches now. Jem, especially, who is at the stage of emulating his father, is very proud of his him, which is demonstrated when he says jubilantly, "Atticus is a gentleman, just like me!"

Chapter Eleven

Jem and Scout have grown up, but they still cannot overcome their anger if anyone passes a comment on their father. Mrs. Dubose comes across to the children as an acidic and garrulous woman who can only say harsh things about others. Yet, Atticus is scrupulous enough to insist that the children respect her for her age.

The evenings in her house, reading to Mrs. Dubose, is a hard task for the children, but the essential reason for it is revealed only after her death. Her desire to get rid of her morphine addiction before her death, reveals her as a strong character, who would rather go through a gruelling experience to break the habit of addiction than die as an addict. Her gift to Jem is also typical of her perceptive character. The gift of the camellia shows that she had understood

Jem's anger when he had cut off her camellia bushes. Presenting him with the same flowers is her way of letting him know that she understands his feelings and acknowledges the same.

Atticus emphasizes the fact that whatever Mrs. Dubose went through revealed indisputable courage -- "Its when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through, no matter what." The children learn a great deal about strength of character and grit through their experience with Mrs. Dubose.

PART TWO

Chapter Twelve

The suffering that Jem undergoes through the process of maturing are not fully comprehended by Scout, who misses his company as well as Dill's. And her growing is evident too, when she finds kitchen work to have interesting prospects.

The day the children's time at the black church serves an eye-opener for them. They suddenly realize how inherently different they are from the blacks and how they may have to face mild opposition too. But the heartfelt welcome given by the rest of the members speaks a lot of the basic generous nature of the Blacks. Besides, the children also notice the general wish to help out Tom Robinson. The reason behind Tom's arrest is revealed, that he had apparently raped Bob Ewell's daughter.

The reader notices how well Calpurnia (essentially a black), has adjusted herself to the way of life of Atticus' family; having learnt to read, and even speak like the white folk. At the same time, she hasn't forgotten her origins, and attends the services with her Negro kin of their own Church, and smoothly switches over to their way of talking when she is with them.

Aunt Alexandra, it is realized (in the next chapter) has come to stay and being a strong influence on the children, a fact which is not quite agreeable to them.

Chapter Thirteen

Aunt Alexandra's presence in the family is not immediately comforting since a lot of adjustments are required. The children, who have never been used to such a rigid upbringing, find themselves at a loss. Atticus has probably been pressurized by his sister to let her stay in his house, to rear the children better, but not being such a stickler to rules and codes of behaviour himself, he too finds himself in a dilemma. Alexandra's basic reasoning of things is right, but having no children of her own, she is not able to comprehend their true

nature, and so, many uncomfortable situations ensue. It is Atticus' practical and non-conforming nature that lets the children believe that things are not as bad as they seem.

Chapter Fourteen

Aunt Alexandra reveals her narrow-minded puritan approach by her distress at the children attending Church with Calpurnia. Atticus, though, not in accordance with her, in any case does not allow Scout to be ill mannered with her, and insists on an apology from her. He is sensitive enough to insist on not throwing out Calpurnia, knowing full well her worth and the children's proximity to her.

Jem, at a mature stage, seems to understand his father's tensions and wishes to ease them as far as possible. His reasoning, however, is unheeded by Scout: Jem advising her is something she still cannot digest.

Dill's return is a harbinger of better times for Scout. She hopes that the three of them can get together as they used to, and enjoy themselves.

Dill with all his fantastic stories, is a pathetic character; a child seeking love and attention, who builds up stories boost his self-esteem.

Chapter Fifteen

Tom Robinson's trial is a hot topic for discussion in the Maycomb County, and various stands have been taken over the trial. Atticus demurs from leaving the case, even after some warning. To safeguard Tom's life before the trial, Atticus even goes out to guard him in the Maycomb jail.

Jem has matured enough to understand his father's frame of mind. But Scout is still quite immature and her attempts of making conversation with Mr. Cunningham about his entailments, causes a little embarrassment. Scout had earlier overheard her father and Mr. Cunningham discuss about entailments in their house. Atticus had legally solved Cunningham's problems about his land and Cunningham had been voicing his gratitude. On asking what entailments means, she had been sidetracked by Jem. Hence although she does not know its meaning and the background behind it, she had just mentioned the word to Cunningham. She probably wishes to show that she too is adult enough to participate in a mature conversation. Cunningham, however, gets embarrassed and being reminded of Atticus' favour, is unable to continue threatening him. Thus, Scout's innocent remarks, in a way, does prove beneficial to her father.

As the facts stand, Tom, a black man, has raped a white girl. The fact that a black has assaulted a white make the trial extremely precarious. Moreover, that Atticus has determined to take the case (and therefore defend Tom) is not

approved by the people in general. Though the supposed victim in the case, Bob Ewell's daughter, is what they call 'white trash', she is a white, and so the chances of Tom being excused are extremely remote.

Chapter Sixteen

Aunt Alexandra's disapproval is an expected one but Atticus, is depicted as a person who doesn't necessarily take his sister's side always. He does show his slight irritation at her, once in a while.

The Mennonites were a strict Christian sect who accept no authority except for the Bible and are opposed to anything modern. Miss Maudie's spending more time in gardening and less time in reading the Bible is considered as sacrilegious behaviour, but Miss Maudie is unmoved by their comments.

A brief description of the courthouse and the gathering is given. Whites and blacks have arrived in equal numbers to witness the trial. The scene outside the courthouse, before the initiation of the trial, resembles a picnic spot. However, once the trial begins, there is absolute silence in the courtroom.

The Finch children sitting in the coloured balcony with the blacks, is probably symbolic of how their family values endorse equality. However, they are also eager to watch their father handle the case, knowing full well that he would disapprove of their presence if he knew they were inside the courtroom.

Chapter Seventeen

A description of the lifestyle of the Ewells is given, which gives one a fair idea of the utterly shabby and dilapidated life they lead. Ewell comes across as an audacious person, with no respect for others and a mean manner of speech. Jem realizes that the reason Atticus had paraded Ewell's left-handedness is to verify that he could have beaten his daughter, as her bruises are mostly on the right side of her face.

When the talk of rape and sexual intercourse arises, the Reverend deems it better that the children leave, especially Scout, but Jem placates him; the children had no plans of leaving the courtroom however, they miss out on watching their father defend the case.

Chapter Eighteen

The courtroom is fraught with tension during the ensuing verbal battle first between Ewell and Atticus, and later between Mayella and Atticus. Atticus has his own style of throwing questions at the person quite casually to disarm one, and at the right moment, pelting questions to and rattle him.

The fact that Tom Robinson is crippled, with his left hand shrivelled, proves that he could not have been the one to beat up Mayella, since the bruises were on the right side of her face. The case logically appears to bend in favour of Tom Robinson.

Judge Taylor, for all his disposition of being a lazy man, prone to dozing during the court-scene, is truly a good judge; very sharp at particular points, and not without a sense of humour.

Chapter Nineteen

Through Tom's relation of his version of the story, he comes across an honest, hardworking Negro, well mannered and always willing to help anyone in distress. Moreover, Mayella's pathetic loneliness is poignantly portrayed. She is a girl seeking love and attention, and Tom is the only visible source of any affection that she could hope for.

Tom's fleeing from the house is by itself a sure sign of guilt otherwise, but here he insists that being a Negro and getting caught in such a situation would surely spell deep trouble, and so he had been forced to run away.

The case turns against Tom the moment he confesses that he had felt pity for Mayella. However poor she is, the basic fact is that she is still a white, and it was considered too forthright of Tom to feel pity for her.

Chapter Twenty

The children are wary of speaking to Mr. Raymond because he's supposed to be an alcoholic and a father of mixed children. But, after talking to him, they realize that he is an unusual person, in the sense that he prefers people to have a bad impression of him, so that he can live his life the way he wishes. He has very strong opinions against the way the whites treat the poor blacks.

Atticus' final speech is a powerful one, which penetrates the hearts of every black and white man present in the courtroom. He doesn't condemn anyone, not even Bob Ewell nor Mayella, since it is their circumstances that have led them to behave in such a manner. He presents the typical attitude of all whites -- "that all Negroes lie, all Negroes are basically immoral beings, that all Negro men are not to be trusted around our women." He reiterates the fact that all men are created equal. At the end of the speech, Atticus even mutters "In the name of God, believe him", probably perceiving that nothing (not even proof) is going to change the orthodox view of the jury.

Chapter Twenty-one

Aunt Alexandra is outraged that the children had been in the courtroom all the while, and she is all the more upset on hearing that Atticus had allowed them to return to the courtroom.

Jem is certain that his father will win the case, since a jury is expected to be fair. However, these are just childish delusions, and Atticus has to admit that no jury had till date favoured a coloured man over a white man.

The final verdict declaring Tom guilty, certainly seems unfair, yet one must take into consideration the period. Though slavery had been legally abolished, one cannot expect views of the whites to be mitigated easily. Undoubtedly, the verdict comes as no surprise for Atticus.

Chapter Twenty-two

Gifting food is the blacks' way of showing their appreciation for Atticus. One must take note that though Atticus had failed to save their man, they are still grateful to him for simply defending him, which in itself, was a big deal for the poor blacks.

Stephanie Crawford's curiosity is that of an idle mind working overtime. Miss Maudie is mercifully able to put a stern stop to her impudent questions. Giving Jem a larger piece of cake also says a lot about Miss Maudie's acute perception of human nature; that she can realize Jem to have matured. Again Stephanie displays her wretched nature in taking pleasure to inform the children that their father had been jeered by Bob Ewell.

Chapter Twenty-three

Ewell is such a perverted character that it is very probable that he would try to harm Atticus for having defended a black and for having grilled him and his daughter at court. The children's fear, therefore, is justified especially when the reader finds Ewell take his revenge, later on in the story. But Atticus at this moment feels that what Ewell is only serving empty threats.

Jem has shown amazing maturity during these trying times. He even mediates between Scout and Aunt Alexandra hoping for peace in the house. On discussing the various types of people in this world, his comment on Boo choosing to stay inside his house, touches a chord. It seems better to stay at home and be labelled a madman, rather than face a world full of evil and injustice.

Chapter Twenty-four

As expected, shrewd remarks about Atticus' defence are passed in Atticus' house itself. But Miss Maudie and Aunt Alexandra are able to handle the situation tactfully.

The news of Tom's death is shattering. Atticus is dejected since he had been quite sure that they would have won the case in the higher court. But it seems as if Tom had grown weary of the entire procedure, waiting for white men to do something for him, and so he himself took the chance to escape. Aunt Alexandra and Miss Maudie realize Atticus' merit and also perceive that he is being paid a high tribute by the few people in the society who acknowledge his worth.

Chapter Twenty-five

There is very little of action in this chapter; almost like a lull before the next storm. The interest and excitement over Tom's trial and his subsequent death has waned. Even the warning given by Ewell to Atticus has lost its force over the children.

Helen's silent reaction over her husband's death may seem unnatural, but it is as if she always knew about the inevitability of her husband's death. His death sentence had already been written the moment Mayella Ewell had opened her mouth to scream. Society had still not improved so much that a black would be given precedence over a white. Both Tom and Helen knew this all the while.

Chapter Twenty-six

Scout has outgrown her fear over the Radley house, but her wish to see Arthur Radley once before she dies, is at once squelched by Atticus. He does not want her to pester that family anymore.

The idea behind discussing news items in class is to give the child better poise, more confidence and to make him word-conscious. Unfortunately, however, half the children did not even have access to newspapers. Nevertheless, the subject of Adolph Hitler sparks of a chain of thoughts in Scout's mind. She has realized that though one should not hate anybody, at the same time, it was obvious that the people in her society are still very much against the blacks and could never accept them. Her young mind has figured out the fact that people don't usually practice what they preach.

Chapter Twenty-seven

Bob Ewell has not changed over the years. A brief spurt of industry and he is back to his old mischief. His pestering of Helen is one way to get cheap satisfaction out of an old case. Mr. Link Deas displays his goodness by retaining Helen as his employee and by protecting her from Bob Ewell's evil tormenting. Atticus is able to sum up Bob's predicament well: it is because Bob knows that the people in Maycomb had not believed his and Mayella's yarns that he behaves in such a manner.

Halloween has some unusual connotations this year. The Maycomb ladies have planned out a pageant with children in costumes, representing the country's various agricultural products. Scout is to be a ham and her costumes of bent chicken wire covered with brown paper is to later cause quite a lot of tension at the Finch house.

Chapter Twenty-eight

A very eventful chapter. Scout messes up her role and is extremely embarrassed as she has become a laughing stock for the audience.

Ewell's evil intentions are clearly exposed in this chapter. Here is a man who would stoop to anything to get even with Atticus; the cowardly act of attacking children can also be resorted to. Such a man's death is welcomed by the reader.

One wonders at this point, who it is that has saved the children and managed to get rid of the detestable Ewell. The reader is kept unaware of the identity of the savior only to be revealed in the next chapter.

It is unclear, though, whether Ewell aimed to kill them or merely terrify them. However, the irony is that he himself ends up losing his life in the process.

Chapter Twenty-nine

Bob Ewell's vindictive nature is finally realized. He is too weak a character to be able to face Atticus in the daytime, and even to frighten his children, he has to take the recourse of a few drinks.

As Scout relates the events, Heck Tate and Atticus realize that Bob Ewell actually meant to hurt the children seriously. The person to save the situation had been the hitherto unseen and unknown Arthur Radley. Scout, who had the long cherished wish of wanting to see him at least once has actually had her life saved by this same man. Arthur's physical appearance and behaviour reveals the fact that he has never ventured out of the house in the daytime. It is the children's greatest fortune that Boo had come at the right moment to save their lives.

Chapter Thirty

Atticus, at first certain that his son had killed Ewell in self-defence feels it is wrong to hide the truth. Atticus is a man who would never wish his son to live a life with the burden of a hidden truth. It is finally understood that Heck Tate is insisting that Ewell killed himself not to save Jem but only so that Boo would be spared from the publicity he so keenly avoids. It is anybody's guess that for having killed an inherently evil man, as Bob Ewell, he would have been smothered by public attention, which he obviously never wanted.

Scout's comparison of Boo to a mockingbird is absolutely accurate. Since mockingbirds only give enjoyment and never create problem, it is a sin to shoot them. Similarly, Boo had always been a mild character, not interfering in anybody's business. To harm him, by bringing him into the limelight would therefore, be a sin.

Chapter Thirty-one

The final chapter neatly rounds up all the incidents of the novel. Boo is never seen after that particular night. It is almost as if he had come out of his house

that once, only to fulfill Boo's dream of seeing him once, and then had once again disappeared into his solitude. Scout's protective demeanour towards Boo is touching. Scout too has matured by the end of the novel and has lost her initial fright of Boo. In fact, she even understands his mental and physical state and therefore guides him home, holding him by the crook of his arm. After reaching him home, Scout looks back at the neighbourhood and recollects the past events associated with it, seeing those events through Boo's eyes.

Atticus feels the need to be with Jem and so he sits with him while he sleeps peacefully. The ensuing conversation between Atticus and Scout again reveals his profound understanding of the children. Atticus does not wish to read out the horror story to her, as she has had her share of fright. But she insists that he go on. Even while Atticus completes the horror story, he tells her that ultimately most people in this world are nice. On this secure and positive note, the novel draws to a close.