

To Kill a Mockingbird **Group Discussion Questions**

On a separate piece of paper (or in the spaces below), answer these questions as we discuss them in class. Hold onto them as we will be discussing them periodically, and that will help you write your essays at the end of the unit.

1. Why do you think Harper Lee chose as her novel's epigraph this quote from Charles Lamb:
"Lawyers, I suppose, were children once"?
2. Why does the adult Scout begin her narrative with Jem's broken arm and a brief family history?
3. How does Boo Radley 's past history of violence foreshadow his method of protecting Jem and Scout? Does this aggression make him more, or less, of a sympathetic character?
4. How does the town of Maycomb function as a character with its own personality, rather than merely as a backdrop for the novel's events?
5. Atticus teaches Scout that compromise is not bending the law, but "an agreement reached by mutual consent." Does Scout apply or reject this definition of compromise? What are examples of her obedience to and defiance of this principle?
6. The novel takes place during the Great Depression. How do class divisions and family quarrels highlight racial tensions in Maycomb?

7. Atticus believes that to understand life from someone else's perspective, we must "walk in his or her shoes." From what other perspectives does Scout see her fellow townspeople?
8. How does Atticus quietly protest Jim Crow laws even before Tom Robinson's trial?
9. What does Jem learn when Atticus forces him to read to Mrs. Dubose as a punishment? Why does the lawyer regard this woman as the "bravest person" he ever knew?
10. Since their mother is dead, several women-Calpurnia, Miss Maudie, and Aunt Alexandra- function as mother figures to Scout and Jem. Discuss the ways these three women influence Scout's growing understanding of what it means to be a Southern "lady."
11. Why does Atticus Finch risk his reputation, his friendships, and his career to take Tom Robinson's case? Do you think he risks too much by putting his children in harm's way?
12. What elements of this novel did you find funny, memorable, or inspiring? Are there any characters whose beliefs or actions impressed or surprised you? Did any events lead you to revisit childhood memories or see them in a new light?
13. Adult readers may focus so much on the novel's politics that they may neglect the coming-of-age story. What does Scout learn, and how does she change in the course of her narrative?