

Discussion questions (Chapters 1-5)

1. Who was Simon Finch? Why does the narrator take the time to describe her family's history in Alabama?
2. Who is telling the story? Why is the point of view important in the telling?
3. What about the Radleys make them unusual in Maycomb?
4. What are some of the clues regarding the racism in Maycomb?
5. Describe Scout's complicated relationship with Calpurnia.
6. What word would you use describe Miss Caroline's first day as a teacher? Use details from the reading to support your choice.
7. Why won't Walter Cunningham allow the teacher to buy him lunch? What can be said about his character?
8. Why do you think Scout and Jem call their father by his first name?
9. What does Scout think of school? Do you agree with her views?
10. Why do you think Jem and Dill are so determined to see Boo Radley?
11. If racism and sexism were not an issue, would you want to grow up in small town like the one described in the novel?
12. What do you think is the truth about Arthur Radley?
13. Lee starts the book with a quote: "Lawyers, I suppose, were children once." What might be the importance of this quote?
14. Find the Chapter 1 excerpt that begins with, "Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather..." How does Lee use her words to create a mood?
15. Lee often uses humor in the telling of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Explain one example of Lee's humor from the reading.
16. How do people talk in Maycomb? Find three examples to share and explain.

Discussion questions (Chapters 6-9)

1. Lee tries to recreate the ways that young kids interact with one another. Does she succeed? Explain with examples.
2. How does Lee create a creepy mood in describing the kids' nighttime visit to the Radley place?
3. What does the event with Mr. Radley and his shotgun show us about racism in Maycomb?
4. Why does the episode of the gift-giving tree bother Jem so much more than Scout? How does it inspire him to confess everything?
5. Do you believe Mr. Radley's explanation of why he put cement in the tree? Support your view.
6. Find one example of humor from this reading. Explain the humor and its purpose. Is it simply to entertain or is there more to it?
7. Despite Scout's loving relationship with Calpurnia, she uses the N-word freely. What do you make of this?
8. How does Atticus react in an emergency? Use examples from the fire in your answer.
9. What is learned from the discovery of the mystery blanket? What is the importance of this detail?
10. What do you learn about Miss Maudie's character from her reaction to the loss of her house?
11. Atticus knows that defending Tom Robinson will impact his family negatively. His extended family is against it. What is Atticus' explanation of why he must?
12. What is Atticus' approach to dealing with Scout's swearing? What does this approach tell you about his style of parenting?
13. What are some examples of sexism from this reading? Think about Aunt Alexandra's views on how Scout ought to behave.
14. Why does Lee want to remind the reader that the Finch family comes from a plantation? (Finch's Landing functioned through a cruel system of racism and slavery.)

Discussion questions (Chapters 10-14)

1. What do Scout and Jem think of Atticus as a father? What are his strengths and shortcomings? Do you agree with their assessment?
2. It makes sense to pay special attention to any element that the author includes in the title. What references to mockingbirds and other birds have emerged so far?
3. A rabies infection is almost always fatal, so the people in town are terrified. What does the episode with the sick dog teach us about Atticus?
4. Jem finally has something to brag about when it comes to his father. Why does he decide against bragging about Atticus' talent? Does this make sense to you?
5. Jem can usually keep his head, so why does he lose his mind and destroy Mrs. Dubose' flowers?
6. Imagery is when an author helps us imagine with our senses. Descriptive details help us see, smell, touch, hear, and/or taste. Find one excellent example of imagery in the reading and explain how Lee creates it.
7. Describe the complicated relationship between Mrs. Dubose and Atticus. What do they think of one another?
8. What lessons does Atticus want Jem to learn from Mrs. Dubose? Do you think it worked?
9. Why does Lee label Chapters 12 onward as Part II? Speculate (make predictions) on how Part II will be different from Part I.
10. In what ways are Jem and Scout growing apart?
11. Why do you think Lula objects to Jem and Scout attending her church? Does Lula have a valid point?
12. What does Scout mean when she says that Calpurnia is leading a double life?
13. Do you think Aunt Alexandra is right about family tendencies? Is this a form of prejudice?
14. Aunt Alexandra suggests that Atticus end Calpurnia's employment. What reasons does she offer? What inferences can you make about her reasons?
15. Why do you think little kids run away from home? Do you think that Dill's case is typical or unusual?

Discussion questions (Chapters 15-18)

1. What does Atticus think of the hate group known as the Ku Klux Klan? Do you find his attitude reasonable? Explain.
2. How does Lee build suspense and anticipation in this reading?
3. When the narrator thinks back on the lynch mob at the jailhouse, she sees the “sickeningly comic aspect of an unfunny situation.” What does she mean? What is funny about it?
4. Why does the lynch mob suddenly lose interest and head home? They had every advantage, so what happened?
5. How might the attack on Tom Robinson have ended differently had the kids not arrived?
6. Even though *To Kill a Mockingbird* has taken a turn toward the serious, Lee still includes humor. Find one example of humor from this reading and offer analysis.
7. Have you noticed that flowers have special importance in *To Kill a Mockingbird*? What might be the meaning behind Mayella’s geraniums?
8. Why does Jem feel sorry for the kids that are half European American and half African American?
9. If the court has ordered Atticus to defend Tom Robinson, why are the people of the town angry with him?
10. How does the Ewell family fit into the town of Maycomb?
11. Lee creates a vivid and memorable character in Bob Ewell. How does the author create Bob Ewell in the mind of the reader?
12. Why do you think the Sheriff and Bob Ewell failed to get a doctor for Mayella?
13. The content of the Robinson trial is upsetting and troubling, yet many people want to be there. Why is this so? Make connections to human nature in your answer.
14. Why does Mayella feel mocked in court even though Atticus is treating her with complete respect?
15. What aspects of the Ewells’ testimony cast doubt on their version of the events?
16. It appears that the Ewells may be lying. Before you hear Tom Robinson’s testimony, suggest a theory about what is really going on.

Discussion questions (Chapter 19-23)

1. What details make the reader feel pity for Mayella Ewell?
2. Do you think Atticus should have called Link Deas or other character witnesses to vouch for Tom Robinson? Explain your view.
3. What might have happened had Tom Robinson stayed at the scene?
4. Mr. Gilmer reminds the jury of Robinson's place in Maycomb society. What are some of the ways that Gilmer disrespects Robinson?
5. According to Mr. Gilmer, some aspects of Tom's testimony point to guilt. What are they?
6. Scout remarks, "Well, Dill, after all he's just a Negro." Were you surprised by this comment? Why or why not?
7. Can you explain the logic behind Mr. Raymond's plan to act drunk all the time?
8. Why are many residents upset that Tom Robinson felt pity for Mayella Ewell? What's wrong with that?
9. In the Chapter 21 paragraph that begins, "But I must have been reasonably awake..." the narrator makes a strange comparison. To what does the narrator compare the courtroom scene? What is the meaning of this comparison?
10. Why do you think Judge Taylor appointed Atticus to defend Tom Robinson when the job should have gone to Maxwell Green?
11. Why does Miss Maudie think that the trial was a step forward for the town?
12. What does Dill mean when he says he is going to be a new kind of clown? What is his point?
13. Do you think Atticus is right about having nothing to fear from Bob Ewell? Make a prediction on this subject.
14. Do you think Jem is right about eliminating juries from the system? Explain your view.
15. What evidence is there that Atticus is also prejudiced?
16. Aunt Alexandra says that Scout cannot play with Walter Cunningham. What does she mean when she says that Walter Cunningham is "good folks" and also trash?
17. What life lessons does Jem learn from the trial?

Discussion questions (Chapters 24-31)

1. Do you think that Aunt Alexandra is justified in trying to guide Scout's development?
2. The Missionary Society is supposed to be about charity and Christianity, but what else is going on in these meetings?
3. Why are Mrs. Merriweather and Mrs. Farrow upset with the African American residents of Maycomb after the Robinson trial? Does this make sense?
4. Why do you think Miss Maudie and Aunt Alexandra make such an effort to hide how upset they are from the other ladies?
5. What is the meaning behind the details involving insects? (See Chapter 25.)
6. How does Lee build suspense leading to the attack on Scout and Jem?
7. Why do you think Atticus waits a year to reveal that he knew it was the kids in Mr. Radley's garden that night?
8. What reasons does Miss Gates offer as to why The United States is superior to Nazi Germany? Why is Scout so confused by Miss Gates' reaction to Hitler and the Nazi Party?
9. Why is Bob Ewell holding a grudge about the case if the outcome was what he sought?
10. How does Lee create the mood of the night leading up to the attack?
11. Why do you think Lee interrupts the serious business of the novel with the childish silliness of the Halloween pageant?
12. How does Lee create a sense of mystery during the attack on the children? (Hint: Think about Scout's point of view.)
13. Do you believe Heck's story about how he acquired the switchblade? Explain.
14. Do you find Scout's reaction to meeting Boo believable? Why or why not?
15. Why does Scout imagine different times and seasons when she stands on Boo Radley's porch? What is the point of this imagining?
16. What mood is created in the final two or three pages of *To Kill a Mockingbird*? How does Lee create this mood?