

An Intro to:  
*To Kill a*  
*Mockingbird*  
By Harper Lee

# To Kill a Mockingbird?

- Not a story of hunting, or shooting, NOT, as some like to suggest, “HOW to kill a mockingbird”
- The “mockingbird” is a central theme in the story
- The mockingbird is a picture of innocence and vitality, to kill it would be pure evil
- "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."

# Author: Harper Lee

- Book seems to mirror her life in some ways
- Born in Monroeville, Alabama in 1926
- Her attorney father served in the State Legislature from 1926 to 1938
- Childhood best friend was Truman Capote (who later became a famous author), who came to Monroeville during the summers to stay with his aunt
- Lee attended Huntington College and the University of Alabama



# More About Harper Lee/*TKAM*

- Submitted the manuscript for *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1957, and then spent 2½ years editing before its publication in 1960
- *TKAM* an instant success, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, over 30 million copies in print today
- Movie version in 1962, Gregory Peck won an Oscar as Atticus



# Setting of the Novel

- *To Kill a Mockingbird* is set in fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama
- BUT Monroeville, Alabama, is a real town, and you can visit a replica of the courthouse there
- Begins summer 1933, ends Halloween 1935
- U.S. in middle of Great Depression
- Segregation common, especially in the South



# Historical Background

## The Great Depression

- 1929 Stock Market Crash caused people to lose billions, entire banks wiped out
- By 1933 over 60% of population was considered poor
- Hundreds of thousands lost homes, farms and possessions
- 25% of population had no job, even those with jobs were affected because nothing was being produced
- President FDR famously said of these years: “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” as his government sponsored programs to create jobs, house the homeless and feed the starving

# Historical Background

## Social Class in the 1930s

The social class structure in the novel is similar to how class structure existed during the 1930s in the South. The wealthy, although fewest in number, were most powerful. The blacks, although great in number, were lowest on the class ladder, and thus, had the least privileges.



- **Wealthy**
- **Country Folk**
- **"White Trash"**
- **Black Community**

Examples of each social class:

Wealthy - Finches

Country Folk - Cunninghams

"White Trash" – Ewells

Black Community – Tom Robinson

# Historical Background

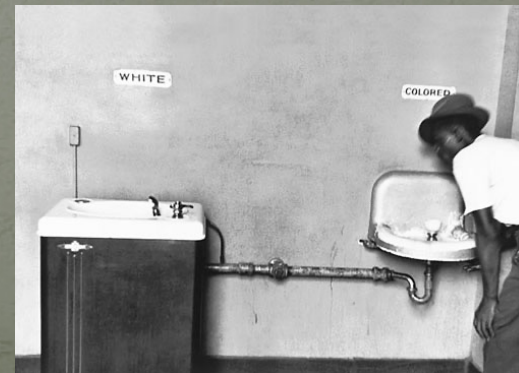
## 1950s Racial Tension

- 1954 – Brown vs. Board of Education states that “separate but equal” facilities for education were unconstitutional, and schools must be integrated
- 1955 – Rosa Parks arrested for refusing to give her seat on a bus to a white person
- 1955 – Emmett Till, a 14-year-old boy, is beaten, shot, and lynched in Mississippi for whistling at a white woman
- 1957 – Nine black students attempt to enter an all-white high school in Little Rock, Arkansas, and had to be protected from white mobs by Federal troops
- 1960—TKAM published
- “Jim Crow” laws promote separation of races, blacks inferior in everything



# Some examples of Jim Crow Laws:

- A black male could not shake hands with a white male because it implied social equality
- A black person could not even suggest that a white person was lying
- Schools, restaurants, water fountains, even parks were separate
- Cruel justice, such as lynching, was “necessary” because blacks were thought to be prone to violence



# Scottsboro Boys Trial

- On March 25, 1931, a freight train was stopped in Paint Rock, Alabama
- Nine African American male teenagers were riding on the train, as were two Caucasian young women
- The white girls, who were known prostitutes, accused the black boys of rape
- There were no physical injuries, girls not examined by doctors
- All nine boys were convicted by an all-white jury
- Later one of the girls recanted her story and admitted the story was all false.
- Harper Lee had been studying this court case when she wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

# Main Characters:

- Jean Louise “Scout” Finch
- Jem Finch
- Atticus Finch
- Aunt Alexandra
- Calpurnia
- Dill
- Boo Radley
- Mrs. Dubose
- Miss Maudie
- Bob Ewell
- Mayella Ewell

Many other characters also appear as residents of Maycomb or people who impact the main characters above

# As you read, look for

## Themes:

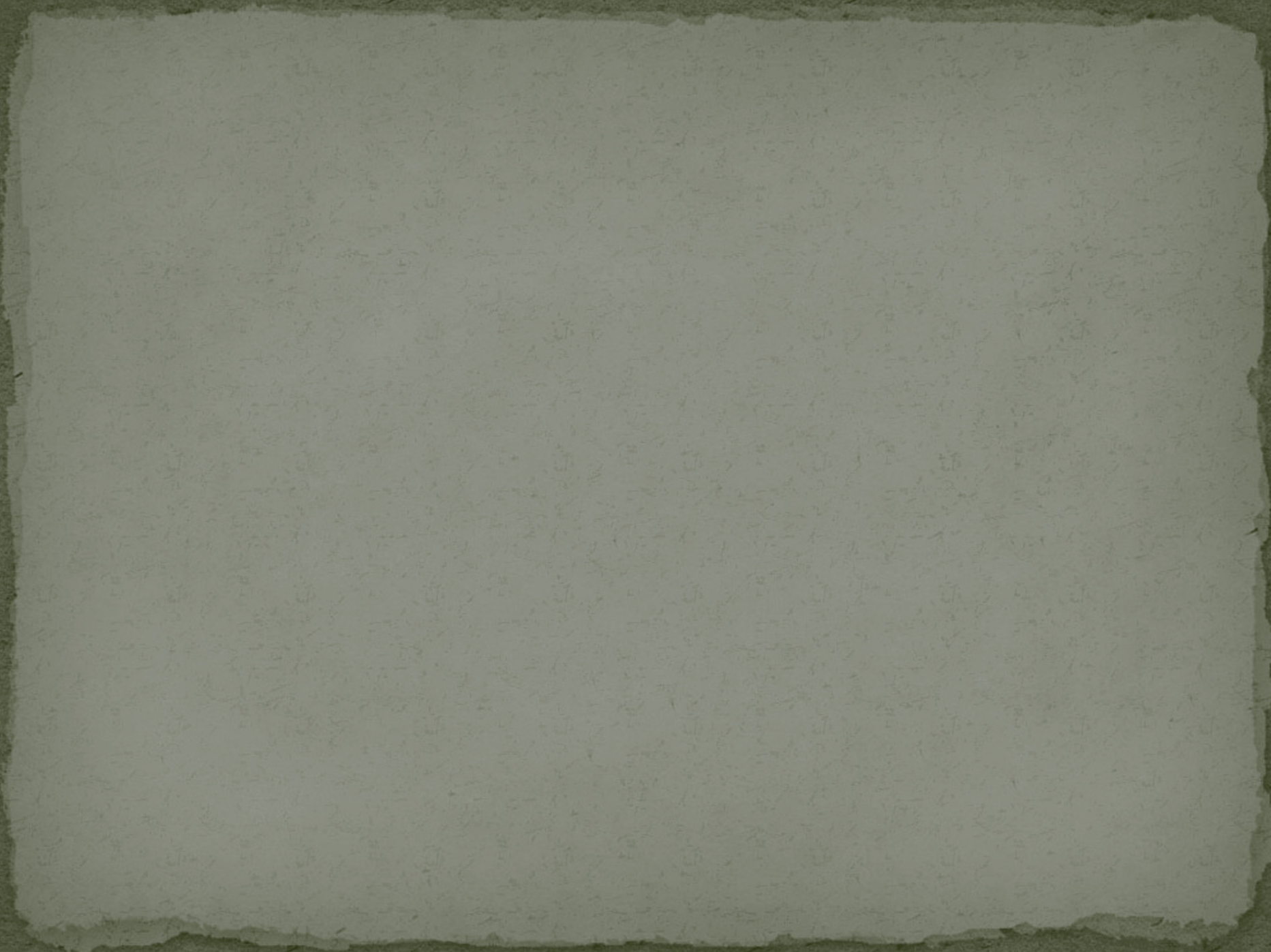
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- Morals: Right vs. Wrong
- Social Inequality
- Racism/Prejudice
- Coming of Age (growing up)
- Integrity
- Courage

## Symbols:

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- Mockingbird/other bird imagery
- Boo Radley
- The mad dog



## Watch for these Lit. Elements as well:

- Mood
- Local Color (items that are specific to the setting, things that make Macomb, Macomb)
- Foreshadowing
- Imagery
- Irony
- Simile/Metaphor

You will be asked to note the above items in the reading guides, and they will also be useful for the reading responses

# TKAM Reading Guides

- Download the Reading Guide for each assigned group of chapters BEFORE you read
- The Reading Guides will direct your attention to characters, themes, symbols, and literary devices that you should be aware of in the assigned chapters
- If you read first and then access the Reading Guide, you will likely have to go back and re-read to find the info
- If access the Reading Guide first, you will be able to look for these things and note them as you read
- You are writing weekly in-class reading responses based on assigned reading—use the Reading Guides to help you read carefully