

## To Kill a Mockingbird

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is set in 1930s America – a country deeply divided along racial lines. Former slave states, such as Alabama, were particularly racist – with segregation in nearly all walks of life.

But, at the beginning of the book our narrator, Scout Finch, is oblivious to all this - spending her free-time playing with her older brother Jem. They're fascinated by a creepy house on their street where a man named Boo Radley has lived for years without ever coming outside.

Scout's playful childhood begins to change when her father, Atticus, agrees to defend Tom Robinson – a black man accused of raping a white woman.

At the trial Atticus argues that Tom's innocent. Despite an inspiring speech from Atticus - and convincing evidence - the all-white jury convicts Tom, who is then carted off to Enfield Prison Farm. At the end of the trial the 'colored balcony' stands for Atticus.

Later Tom's shot trying to escape from prison echoing one of the book's most famous passages;

“Remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird... Mockingbirds don't do one thing... but sing their hearts out for us.”

The mockingbird represents characters such as Tom Robinson and, spoiler alert, Boo Radley, who, left to their own devices, are decent and gentle but who are crushed by the evils of society when exposed to them.

A man named Bob Ewell – who was exposed as a liar during the trial – wants his revenge on Atticus.

On a pitch black evening Bob attacks Jem and Scout but he's stopped and killed by a mysterious savior – later revealed to be none other than Boo Radley.

Harper Lee's key theme is prejudice – which she grew to abhor during her own childhood in Alabama in the 30s. In the book she examines not only the white community's prejudice against the black community – but also middle class prejudice against the poor white community – not to mention all of Maycomb's prejudice against Boo Radley.

As Atticus says to Scout, perhaps the best weapon against prejudice is empathy.

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”