

To Kill A Mockingbird
By Harper Lee

Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow, it was hotter then: a black dog suffered on a summer's day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oaks on the square. Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o'clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum.

People moved slowly then. They **ambled** across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, took their time about everything. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of **vague optimism** for some of the people: Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself.

1. In History, what is this quotation, “nothing to fear but fear itself” a reference to? Discuss.

We lived on the main residential street in town—Atticus, Jem and I, plus Calpurnia our cook. Jem and I found our Father satisfactory: he played with us, read to us, and treated us with courteous **detachment**.

Calpurnia was something else again. She was all angles and bones; she was nearsighted; she squinted; her hand was wide as a bed slat and twice as hard. She was always ordering me out of the kitchen, asking me why I couldn't behave as well as Jem when she knew he was older, and calling me home when I wasn't ready to come. Our battles were epic and one-sided. Calpurnia always won, mainly because Atticus 'ways took her side. She had been with us ever since Jem was born, and I had felt her **tyrannical** presence as long as I could remember.

Our mother died when I was two, so I never felt her absence. She was a Graham from Montgomery- Atticus met her when he was first elected to the state legislature. He was middle-aged then, she was fifteen years his junior. Jem was the product of their first year of marriage; four years later I was born, and two years later our mother died from a sudden heart attack. They said it ran in her family. I did not miss her, but I think Jem did. He remembered her clearly, and sometimes in the middle of a game he would sigh at length, then go off and play by himself behind the car-house. When he was like that, I knew better than to bother him.

When I was almost six and Jem was nearly ten, our summertime boundaries (within calling distance of Calpurnia) were Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose's house two doors to the north of us, and the Radley Place three doors to the south. We were never tempted to break them. The Radley Place was inhabited by an unknown entity the mere description of whom was enough to make us behave for days on end; Mrs. Dubose was plain hell.

That was the summer Dill came to us. Early one morning as we were beginning our day's play in the backyard, Jem and I heard something next door in Miss Rachel Haverford's collard patch. We went to the wire fence to see if there was a puppy—Miss Rachel's rat terrier was expecting—instead we found someone sitting looking at us. Sitting down, he wasn't much higher than the collards. We stared at him until he spoke: “Hey.”

“Hey yourself,” said Jem pleasantly. “I'm Charles Baker Harris,” he said. “I can read.”

“So what?” I said.

“I just thought you’d like to know I can read. You got anything needs readin’ I can do it....”

“How old are you,” asked Jem, “four-and-a-half?”

“Goin’ on seven.”

“Shoot no wonder, then,” said Jem, jerking his thumb at me.

“Scout yonder’s been readin’ ever since she was born, and she ain’t even started to school yet.

You look right puny for goin’ on seven.”

“I’m little but I’m old,” he said.

Jem brushed his hair back to get a better look. “Why don’t you come over, Charles Baker Harris?” he said. “Lord, what a name.”

“’s not any funnier’n yours. Aunt Rachel says your name’s Jeremy Atticus Finch.”

Jem scowled. “I’m big enough to fit mine,” he said. “Your name’s longer’n you are. Bet it’s a foot longer.”

“Folks call me Dill,” said Dill, struggling under the fence.

“Do better if you go over it instead of under it,” I said. “Where’d you come from?”

Dill was from Meridian, Mississippi, was spending the summer with his aunt, Miss Rachel, and would be spending every summer in Maycomb from now on. His family was from Maycomb County originally, his mother worked for a photographer in Meridian, had entered his picture in a Beautiful Child contest and won five dollars. She gave the money to Dill, who went to the picture show twenty times on it.

“Don’t have any picture shows here, except Jesus ones in the courthouse sometimes,” said Jem. “Ever see anything good?”

Dill had seen Dracula, a revelation that moved Jem to eye him with the beginning of respect. “Tell it to us,” he said.

Dill was a **curiosity**. He wore blue linen shorts that buttoned to his shirt, his hair was snow white and stuck to his head like duckfluff; he was a year my senior but I towered over him. As he told us the old tale his blue eyes would lighten and darken; his laugh was sudden and happy; he **habitually** pulled at a cowlick in the center of his forehead.

When Dill reduced Dracula to dust, and Jem said the show sounded better than the book, I asked Dill where his father was: “you ain’t said anything about him.”

“I haven’t got one.”

“Is he dead?”

“No . . . “

“Then if he’s not dead you’ve got one, haven’t you?”

Dill blushed and Jem told me to hush a sure sign that Dill had been studied and found acceptable. Thereafter the summer passed in routine **contentment**. Routine contentment was: improving our treehouse that rested between giant twin china berry trees in the back yard, fussing, running through our list of dramas based on the works of Oliver Optic, Victor Appleton, and Edgar Rice Burroughs. In this matter we were lucky to have Dill. He played the character parts formerly thrust upon me the ape in Tarzan, Mr. Crabtree in The Rover Boys, Mr. Damon in Tom Swift. Thus we came to know Dill as a pocket Merlin, whose head teemed with **eccentric** plans, strange longings, and quaint fancies.

But by the end of August our repertoire was vapid from countless reproductions, and it was then that Dill gave us the idea of making Boo Radley come out.

The Radley Place fascinated Dill. In spite of our warnings and explanations it drew him as the moon draws water, but drew him no nearer than the light-pole on the corner, a safe distance from the Radley gate. There he would stand, his arm around the fat pole, staring and wondering.

The Radley Place jutted into a sharp curve beyond our house. Walking south, one faced its porch; the sidewalk turned and ran beside the lot. The house was low, was once white with a deep front porch and

green shutters, but had long ago darkened to the color of the slate-gray yard around it. Rain-rotted shingles drooped over the eaves of the verandah; oak trees kept the sun away. The remains of a picket drunkenly guarded the front yard—a “swept” yard that was never swept—where Johnson grass and rabbit-tobacco grew in abundance.

Inside the house lived a **malevolent** phantom. People said he existed, but Jem and I had never seen him. People said he went out at night when the moon was down, and peeped in windows. When people’s azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he had breathed on them. Any stealthy small crimes committed in Maycomb were his work. Once the town was terrorized by a series of morbid nocturnal events: people’s chickens and household pets were found mutilated; although the culprit was Crazy Addie, who eventually drowned himself in Barker’s Eddy, people still looked at the Radley Place, unwilling to discard their initial suspicions. A Negro would not pass the Radley Place at night, he would cut across to the sidewalk opposite and whistle as he walked. The Maycomb school grounds adjoined the back of the Radley lot; from the Radley chickenyard tall pecan trees shook their fruit into the schoolyard, but the nuts lay untouched by the children: Radley pecans would kill you. A baseball hit into the Radley yard was a lost ball and no questions asked.

The misery of that house began many years before Jem and I were born. The Radleys, welcome anywhere in town, kept to themselves, a **predilection** unforgivable in Maycomb. They did not go to church, Maycomb’s principal recreation, but worshipped at home; Mrs. Radley seldom if ever crossed the street for a mid-morning coffee break with her neighbors, and certainly never joined a missionary circle. Mr. Radley walked to town at eleven-thirty every morning and came back promptly at twelve, sometimes carrying a brown paper bag that the neighborhood assumed contained the family groceries. I never knew how old Mr. Radley made his living—Jem said he “bought cotton,” a polite term for doing nothing— but Mr. Radley and his wife had lived there with their two sons as long as anybody could remember.

The shutters and doors of the Radley house were closed on Sundays, another thing alien to Maycomb’s ways: closed doors meant illness and cold weather only. Of all days Sunday was the day for formal afternoon visiting: ladies wore corsets, men wore coats, children wore shoes. But to climb the Radley front steps and call, “He-y,” of a Sunday afternoon was something their neighbors never did. The Radley house had no screen doors. I once asked Atticus if it ever had any; Atticus said yes, but before I was born.

2. What is the significance of the house not having screen doors? What does this indicate about the house?

According to neighborhood legend, when the younger Radley boy was in his teens he became acquainted with some of the Cunninghams from Old Sarum, an enormous and confounding tribe domiciled in the northern part of the county, and they formed the nearest thing to a gang ever seen in Maycomb. They did little, but enough to be discussed by the town and publicly warned from three pulpits: they hung around the barbershop; they rode the bus to Abbottsville on Sundays and went to the picture show; they attended dances at the county’s riverside gambling hell, the Dew-Drop Inn & Fishing Camp; they experimented with stumphole whiskey. Nobody in Maycomb had nerve enough to tell Mr. Radley that his boy was in with the wrong crowd.

3. How does this definition of a “gang” compare with the “gangs” of today. Discuss.

One night, in an excessive spurt of high spirits, the boys backed around the square in a borrowed flivver, resisted arrest by Maycomb’s ancient beadle, Mr. Conner, and locked him in the courthouse out-house. The town decided something had to be done; Mr. Conner said he knew who each and every one of them was, and he was bound and determined they wouldn’t get away with it, so the boys came before the

probate judge on charges of disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, assault and battery, and using abusive and profane language in the presence and hearing of a female. The judge asked Mr. Conner why he included the last charge, Mr. Conner said they cussed so loud he was sure every lady in Maycomb heard them. The judge decided to send the boys to the state industrial school, where boys were sometimes sent for no other reason than to provide them with food and decent shelter: it was no prison and it was no disgrace. Mr. Radley thought it was. If the judge released Arthur, Mr. Radley would see to it that Arthur gave no further trouble. Knowing that Mr. Radley's word was his bond, the judge was glad to do so.

The other boys attended the industrial school and received the best secondary education to be had in the state, one of them eventually worked his way through engineering school at Auburn. The doors of the Radley house were closed on weekdays as well as Sundays, and Mr. Radley's boy was not seen again for fifteen years.

But there came a day, barely within Jem's memory, when Boo Radley was heard from and was seen by several people, but not by Jem. He said Atticus never talked much about the Radleys: when Jem would question him Atticus's only answer was for him to mind his own business and let the Radleys mind theirs, they had a right to; but when it happened Jem said Atticus shook his head and said, "Mm, mm, mm."

So Jem received most of his information from Miss Stephanie Crawford, a neighborhood scold, who said she knew the whole thing. According to Miss Stephanie, Boo was sitting in the livingroom cutting some items from The Maycomb Tribune to paste in his scrapbook. His father entered the room. As Mr. Radley passed by, Boo drove the scissors into his parent's leg, pulled them out, wiped them on his pants, and resumed his activities.

Mrs. Radley ran screaming into the street that Arthur was killing them all, but when the sheriff arrived he found Boo still sitting in the livingroom, cutting up the Tribune. He was thirty-three years old then.

Miss Stephanie said old Mr. Radley said no Radley was going to any asylum, when it was suggested that a season in Tuscaloosa might be helpful to Boo. Boo wasn't crazy, he was high-strung at times. It was all right to shut him up, Mr. Radley conceded, but insisted that Boo not be charged with anything: he was not a criminal. The sheriff hadn't the heart to put him in jail alongside Negroes, so Boo was locked in the courthouse basement.

4. How do you react to such a statement? What does this comment reveal about the society of this period?

Boo's transition from the basement to back home was **nebulous** in Jem's memory. Miss Stephanie Crawford said some of the town council told Mr. Radley that if he didn't take Boo back, Boo would die of mold from the damp. Besides, Boo could not live forever on the bounty of the county.

Nobody knew what form of intimidation Mr. Radley employed to keep Boo out of sight, but Jem figured that Mr. Radley kept him chained to the bed most of the time. Atticus said no, it wasn't that sort of thing, that there were other ways of making people into ghosts.

5. What does this comment mean? Is it to be taken literally? Do you agree or disagree? Discuss.

My memory came alive to see Mrs. Radley occasionally open the front door, walk to the edge of the porch, and pour water on her cannas. But every day Jem and I would see Mr. Radley walking to and from town. He was a thin leathery man with colorless eyes, so colorless they did not reflect light. His cheekbones were sharp and his mouth was wide, with a thin upper lip and a full lower lip. Miss Stephanie Crawford said she woke up in the middle of the night one time and saw him looking straight through the window at her . . . said his head was like a skull lookin' at her. Ain't you ever waked up at night and heard him, Dill.

He walks like this—” Jem slid his feet through the gravel.

“Why do you think Miss Rachel locks up so tight at night?

I’ve seen his tracks in our back yard many a mornm’, and one night I heard him scratching on the back screen, but he was gone time Atticus got there.” “Wonder what he looks like?” said Dill.

Jem gave a reasonable description of Boo: Boo was about six-and-a-half feet tall, judging from his tracks; he dined on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch, that’s why his hands were bloodstained—if you ate an animal raw, you could never wash the blood off. 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 most of the time.

6. What do you think? Is this going to be a “reasonable description of Boo”? Make a prediction.

“Let’s try to make him come out,” said Dill. “I’d like to see what he looks like.”

Jem said if Dill wanted to get himself killed, all he had to do was go up and knock on the front door. Our first raid came to pass only because Dill bet Jem The Gray Ghost against two Tom Swifts that Jem wouldn’t get any farther than the Radley gate. In all his life, Jem had never declined a dare.

Jem thought about it for three days. I suppose he loved honor more than his head, for Dill wore him down easily: “You’re scared,” Dill said, the first day. “Ain’t scared, Just respectful,” Jem said. The next day Dill said, “You’re too scared even to put your big toe in the front yard.” Jem said he reckoned he wasn’t, he’d passed the Radley Place every school day of his life.

“Always runnin’,” I said.

But Dill got him the third day, when he told Jem that folks in Meridian certainly weren’t as afraid as the folks in Maycomb, that he’d never seen such scary folks as the ones in Maycomb.

7. This is a reference to where Jem lives. Why would this make a difference in getting him to accept a dare?

This was enough to make Jem march to the corner, where he stopped and leaned against the light-pole, watching the gate hanging crazily on its homemade hinge.

“I hope you’ve got it through your head that he’ll kill us each and every one, Dill Harris,” said Jem, when we joined him.

“Don’t blame me when he gouges your eyes out. You started it, remember.” “You’re still scared,” murmured Dill patiently.

Jem wanted Dill to know once and for all that he wasn’t scared of anything.

“It’s just that I can’t think of a way to make him come out without him gettin’ us.” Besides, Jem had his little sister to think of.

When he said that, I knew he was afraid. Jem had his little sister to think of the time I dared him to jump off the top of the house: “If I got killed, what’d become of you?” he asked. Then he jumped, landed unhurt, and his sense of responsibility left him until confronted by the Radley Place.

“You gonna run out on a dare?” asked Dill.

“If you are, then—”

“Dill, you have to think about these things,” Jem said. “Lemme think a minute . . . it’s sort of like making a turtle come out . . .”

“How’s that?” asked Dill.

“Strike a match under him.”

I told Jem if he set fire to the Radley house I was going to tell Atticus on him.

Dill said striking a match under a turtle was hateful.

“Ain’t hateful, just persuades him—’s not like you’d chunk him in the fire,” Jem growled.

“How do you know a match don’t hurt him?”

“Turtles can’t feel, stupid,” said Jem.

“Were you ever a turtle, huh?”

“My stars, Dill! Now lemme think . . . reckon we can rock him....”

Jem stood in thought so long that Dill made a mild concession: “I won’t say you ran out on a dare an’ I’ll swap you The Gray Ghost if you just go up and touch the house.”

Jem brightened. “Touch the house, that all?”

Dill nodded.

“Sure that’s all, now? I don’t want you hollerin’ something different the minute I get back.”

“Yeah, that’s all,” said Dill. “He’ll probably come out after you when he sees you in the yard, then Scout’n’ me’ll jump on him and hold him down till we can tell him we ain’t gonna hurt him.”

8. Make a prediction. What’s going to happen.

We left the corner, crossed the side street that ran in front of the Radley house, and stopped at the gate.

“Well go on,” said Dill, “Scout and me’s right behind you. “

“I’m going,” said Jem, “don’t hurry me.”

He walked to the corner of the lot, then back again, studying the simple terrain as if deciding how best to effect an entry, frowning and scratching his head.

Then I sneered at him.

Jem threw open the gate and sped to the side of the house, slapped it with his palm and ran back past us, not waiting to see if his foray was successful. Dill and I followed on his heels. Safely on our porch, panting and out of breath, we looked back. The old house was the same, droopy and sick, but as we stared down the street we thought we saw an inside shutter move. Flick. A tiny, almost invisible movement, and the house was still.

9. The last sentence . . . is this an example of foreshadowing? Define the word and explain why you do or do not think this is foreshadowing.

Dill left us early in September, to return to Meridian. We saw him off on the five o’clock bus and I was miserable without him until it occurred to me that I would be starting to school in a week. I never looked forward more to anything in my life.

Vocabulary	What you think the word means?	The dictionary says the word means?
1. They ambled across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, took their time about everything		
2. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people		
3. He played with us, read to us, and treated us with courteous detachment .		
4. I had felt her tyrannical presence as long as I could remember.		
5. Dill was a curiosity		
6. He habitually pulled at a cowlick in the center of his forehead.		
7. Thereafter the summer passed in routine contentment .		
8. Thus we came to know Dill as a pocket Merlin, whose head teemed with eccentric plans, strange longings, and quaint fancies.		
9. Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom.		
10. The Radleys, welcome anywhere in town, kept to themselves, a predilection unforgivable in Maycomb.		
11. Boo's transition from the basement to back home was nebulous in Jem's memory.		