To Kill a Mockingbird

Chapter Questions & Discussion Questions
Chapter 1

1) Is the narrator of the book an adult or a child? Quote from the text to support your answer.

2) Examine the description of Atticus Finch’s office. What does it reveal about his character?

3) Summarize what the children know about Boo Radley. Why do you think they are so interested in Boo?
1) According to Scout, how was North Alabama different from Maycomb?
2) What details in Scout’s description suggest that the Cunninghams are people of principle?
3) What assumptions does Miss Caroline make about the students in her class and vice versa?
1) Why does Scout beat up Walter? What does this reveal about Scout?
2) Why does Calpurnia scold Scout? What does it reveal about Cal’s role in the Finch family?
3) What do Atticus’s comments about the Ewell family and law suggest about his view of justice?
Chapter 4

1) What is the first thing Scout finds in the oak tree?

2) How can you tell that Scout, Jem, and Dill all believe in superstitions?

3) What game do the children invent? What does Atticus’s response suggest about his values?
1) Does Miss Maudie believe the rumors about Boo Radley? Find evidence in the text to support your answer.

2) What plan surrounding Boo Radley do Jem and Dill devise? How does Atticus respond?

3) Explain the “lawyer’s trick” that Atticus uses to get Jem to confess the truth about the kids’ game.
Chapter 6

1) Whom does Nathan Radley accuse of trespassing? What do his neighbors’ reactions suggest about racial tension in Maycomb?

2) How does Jem lose his pants? Do you think Atticus believes his lie?

3) Why does Jem want to go back to get his pants? What does this say about his relationship with Atticus?
1) What does Scout mean when she says she “tried to climb in Jem’s skin and walk around in it?”

2) Who do you think mended Jem’s pants? Why?

3) What is the significance of the objects Jem and Scout find in the tree in this chapter?
Chapter 8

1) Scout uses racist language in this chapter. Does she seem to actually be a racist?

2) Scout describes being woken up in the middle of the night. What specific sounds is she describing? What makes this an effective use of imagery?

3) How does the town help Miss Maudie? What does this say about the role of community in Maycomb?
1) How does Atticus respond when Scout repeats the racist language she heard at school?

2) Explain why Atticus takes the case.

3) What does Atticus ask Scout to do when people talk badly about him? Why will this be difficult for her?

4) What details of Finch Landing suggest the family owned slaves?
Chapter 10

1) Summarize Scout’s criticisms of her father and what they reveal about how her town defines “manliness.”

2) According to Atticus, why is it a sin to kill a mockingbird?

3) What does Miss Maudie reveal about Atticus’s old nick-name?
Chapter 11

1) What does Atticus do that causes Scout to observe, “It was times like this when I thought my father, who hated guns and had never been to any wars, was the bravest man that ever lived?”

2) What does Jem do as a way of apologizing to Mrs. Dubose? What is her response?

3) According to Atticus, why do some people use hateful language?
Chapter 12

1) Visualize the political cartoon of Atticus. What is the cartoon saying about him?
2) Cite specific evidence that suggests Calpurnia’s ancestors may have been enslaved.
3) How does Cal explain her reasoning for adjusting her language in different settings?
Chapter 13

1) Summarize Scout’s view of Maycomb county’s history and culture.

2) How does Aunt Alexandra believe Atticus has failed as a parent? Do you agree with her assessment of her brother?

3) What do you think Scout means when she says, “I know what he was trying to do, but Atticus was only a man. It takes a woman to do that kind of work?”
1) Does Scout understand Atticus’s response to her question about rape?
2) What is Scout referring to when she says that Jem “rose and broke the remaining code of our childhood?”
3) How can you tell that Scout is trying to see things from other people’s perspectives?
1) According to Scout, what is Atticus’s “dangerous question?” Why is it dangerous?
2) What details does Lee use to create a tense mood during the confrontation in front of the jail?
3) What do you think would have happened had the children not followed Atticus?
Chapter 16

1) Explain how Jem, Scout, and Dill made Walter Cunningham Sr. stand in Atticus’s shoes.
2) Where do the Finch children sit when they watch the trial, and why is this significant?
3) Has Tom Robinson been given a true “jury of his peers?” Why or why not.
Chapter 17-Heck Tate and Bob Ewell

1) What important questions did Atticus ask during his cross examination? Why did he focus on these details?

2) What is ironic about Scout’s description of the “little man on the witness stand”?

3) Why did Atticus teach Scout that lawyers should never ask a witness a questions they don’t know the answer to?
1) What does Scout’s comparison of Mayella to “a steady-eyed cat with a twitchy tail” suggest?
2) What does her belief that Atticus is making fun of her imply about the way Mayella is used to being treated?
3) What question does Mayella have a difficult time answering?
Chapter 19-Tom Robinson’s Testimony

1) Explain why Tom’s testimony makes Scout feel sympathetic towards both Tom and Mayella.

2) What does Tom say that outrages the white citizens in attendance? Why is this so offensive to them?

3) Why does Tom say he ran from the authorities in spite of his innocence?
Chapter 20-Closing Arguments

1) Why do you think Atticus unbuttons his vest, loosens his tie, and takes off his coat before addressing the jury?

2) Consider both the connotative and denotative meanings of Atticus’s statement that “This case is as simple as black and white.”

3) Summarize Atticus’s belief about equality.
Chapter 21

1) Why is Cal upset with Jem for taking Scout with him to the trial?
2) Explain why a jury would “never look at a defendant it has convicted.”
3) Why does Reverend Sykes tell Scout to stand up as her father passes? What does this suggest about the African American community’s feelings toward Atticus?
1) When Aunt Alexandra criticizes Atticus for allowing the children to attend the trial, how does he respond? Explain what he means by this.

2) How does Miss Maudie express her respect for the Finch family?

3) Explain how the end of this chapter parallels the mad dog scene in chapter 10.
Chapter 23

1) Why does Atticus think a jury of young people would have acquitted Tom?

2) Summarize Scout’s and Jem’s points of view about the different kinds of people in the world.

3) What insight has Jem’s experience given him about Boo?
1) Explain why Scout’s comment that “Immediately thereafter, the ladies adjourned for refreshments,” is ironic.

2) How do the women of the missionary circle behave in ways that contradict their Christian values?

3) Why does Atticus return home early? What does he say is especially tragic about what happened?
1) What does Scout’s comment about Jem suggest about gender roles in the 1930’s South?

2) What did Jem and Dill see Atticus and Cal doing? How do you think this impacted them?

3) What point was Mr. Underwood trying to make in his editorial?
Chapter 26

1) What do Scout’s feelings when passing the Radley house suggest about her character growth?

2) What does it say about the values of the community that Atticus was re-elected without opposition?

3) Summarize the lesson that Miss Gates teaches about democracy and prejudice. Why is this lesson ironic?
Chapter 27

1) How are the three “out of the ordinary” things that happened in October related?
2) Find an example of foreshadowing in the last 2 pages of this chapter. What does it imply?
1) Why do you think Lee has Scout and Jem hear a mockingbird on their way to the school auditorium?

2) How does Lee create a suspenseful mood when Jem and Scout are walking home in the dark?

3) Who does Heck Tate find dead? Who do you think killed him?
1) What evidence does Heck Tate find to suggest that Mr. Ewell was trying to kill Scout and Jem rather than just scare them?

2) Compare Scout’s description of the attack with Mayella’s account of being beaten in chapter 18? What do the similarities suggest?

3) What details in the description of the stranger who saved Jem and Scout give her clues to his identity?
Chapter 30

1) What things does Scout do as she interacts with Boo that suggest that she has been impacted by ladies like Miss Maudie?

2) Who does Atticus think killed Bob Ewell? Cite a quote to support your answer.

3) What does Mr. Tate say that suggests to Atticus and Scout who actually killed Bob? Why does he want to keep it a secret?
1) Explain how standing on Boo’s porch helps Scout see the world through his eyes.

2) What do you think Scout means when she says, “As I made my way home, I thought Jem and I would get grown but there wasn’t much left for us to learn, except possibly algebra?”

3) Some critics have noted that Atticus plays the role of a Christ figure. How does the novel draw on the Bible for theme, pattern of events, and character type?
Discussion Questions
Overall Analysis: Themes

How does Harper Lee introduce the novel’s major issues of race and class? In addition to its social commentary, the novel is also a coming-of-age story and a tale about childhood memories. How does Harper Lee combine both?
Analyzing Narrator and POV

The book is narrated by Scout looking back to her childhood self between the ages of six and nine. How does the narrator influence how a story is told? If Jem were telling the story, how might it be different? What if it were told from an adult’s point of view—from that of Atticus or Miss Maudie? What about Cal or Boo?
Characters: Scout, Jem, Dill, Cal

Describe Scout, Jem, and their friend Dill. Would you say they are ordinary children? If not, what sets them apart? How does being raised by a single father affect Scout and Jem? What role does Cal play in their lives?
Gender Roles: Scout

What do the adult women in Scout’s life--Cal, Aunt Alexandra, Miss Maudie, and even Mrs. Dubose--teach her about being a “lady?” How does she contend with others’ expectations of her because of her gender? Are the expectations the same for young girls today?
Character Development: Scope of the Novel

How do Scout and Jem change over the course of the novel? Are those changes inevitable, or are they shaped by the people and events around them?
How do Scout and Jem view their father, Atticus? How does the town regard him? What do they learn about their father over the course of the novel? What lessons does he teach them both directly and indirectly about life, community, duty, and courage?
The Radleys: Perceptions and Truth

What draws the children to the Radley place? What are the perceptions of the Radley family, and especially the mysterious Boo? What hints does Harper Lee give us about Boo Radley’s character and how do they contrast with what the children believe about him (at first)?
Scout explains, “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.” What does predilection mean, and why was their behavior unforgivable? Why do people value privacy? Why do others often not trust people who choose to not be social or socialize?
Jem tells Scout that there are four kinds of folks in Maycomb County, “our kind of folks don’t like the Cunninghams, the Cunninghams don’t like the Ewells, and the Ewells hate and despise the colored folks.” Is this a good description of Maycomb? Does it describe American society itself during the 1930s, or is it too black and white? What about our society today? Why does Scout see everyone as simply “folks?”
Scout and Jem: Racial Understanding

How do Scout and Jem learn about the Tom Robinson case? Why does Atticus defend Tom? What does Scout understand about race when we first meet her, and what does she learn as the story unfolds? What about Jem?
One of the most famous lines in literature comes from To Kill a Mockingbird. “Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit ‘em, but remember it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.” Explain Atticus’s meaning. Who are the mockingbirds in the novel? How is this an allusion to the notion of innocence itself?
Would children be allowed to witness such a trial today? What do the children discover about their town, their father, and themselves by attending the trial? Are adults today too protective of children? What are they trying to protect them from, and what happens when those children grow up and become adults themselves? Today, high-profile trials can often be viewed on TV or online; what impact does this have on children and our society?
Setting

What role does the setting play in the story? What would have been different had the story taken place outside a small Southern town? Racial issues still occur in our society today--what impact does location/setting play in relation to these issues? (Trayvon Martin case, Charleston Riots, Michael Brown, etc.)
Banned Books: Conclusion

Librarians across America voted *To Kill a Mockingbird* the best novel of the twentieth century, yet the book is continuously challenged and often banned by schools and communities. What makes the novel so important and so divisive? What does the novel say about America in the recent past? What insights and lessons does it hold for us today?