

To Kill a Mockingbird

Based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Harper Lee

Dramatized by Christopher Sergel

ABOUT THE PLAY

OVERVIEW

Based on Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, the two-act play by Christopher Sergel places the narrator, Atticus Finch's young daughter, Scout, at the centre of the story. The play uses the adult Scout as the Narrator, a role that is sometimes doubled with the character of Miss Maudie. Although the novel was written in 1960, and appeared as a celebrated film in 1962, this stage play was not written until the late 1980s.

The play is frequently produced by high schools. It is estimated that over 260 amateur productions were done in the period of 2001-2003, with 80 per cent of them in schools. Although it has been banned, Mr. Sergel is said to have refused to censor the play because he wanted to protect "authenticity and fight censorship." Prior to 2003, in 15 years there had not been a request to censor it.

SOURCES AND ORIGINS

Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel on race relations provided the inspiration for the play. Written in 1960, the best-selling book was Lee's first and only novel. It was made into a film in 1962.

The character of Dill, the young friend of the Finch children, is rumored to have been based on Harper Lee's childhood friend, Truman Capote. The father, Atticus Finch, is based on Lee's own father, also a lawyer.

Harper Lee herself studied law and would have drawn on her legal knowledge in writing the novel. The Alabama town in which she grew up is fictionalized in the novel. Her neighborhood had a haunted house with a mysterious recluse similar to Boo Radley. However, Miss Lee once said that the book was not autobiographical.

The 1931 Scottsboro, Alabama, trial of nine young black men wrongly accused of the rape of two white women is said to have inspired the novel. At that time, Harper Lee was the same age as her heroine, Scout.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Harper Lee set her novel at a time of intensifying class and racial tensions in the United States. During the Great Depression, the failing economy hit the South very hard, and the black population, already poor, felt the effects more than anyone. Segregation was normal, as were hunger, unemployment and deprivation. Organizations such as the racist Ku Klux Klan had enormous influence on both local politics and the consequences of judicial procedures. Mob justice – including lynching – was frequent and vicious.

STAGE HISTORY

Christopher Sergel's highly successful play adaptation was first presented in England in 1987. It is a staple of American regional theatres with over 190 productions since 1999, and has been one of the most frequently produced plays in the U.S.A. The Theatre Communications Group reported it among the top 10 most produced plays by the group's members from 1994 to 1998, with over 40 different productions. It is also very popular in Canada and the U.K.

IN OTHER TERMS

A film was made of Lee's novel in 1962 at the height of the civil rights movement in the United States. The film studio bought the rights to the novel for actor Gregory Peck, whose performance as Atticus Finch won him the Academy Award for Best Actor. The movie lost the Best Film Oscar to *Lawrence of Arabia*, the blockbuster hit of that year. Young actress Mary Badham, who played Scout, was nominated for Best Actress in a Supporting Role. Screenwriter Horton Foote won the Oscar for best adapted screenplay. The film also won best art direction/set direction for a black and white film.

Gregory Peck went to Alabama before filming began to meet the inspiration for Atticus Finch, Harper Lee's father. Miss Lee gave Mr. Peck her father's own watch in gratitude for his wonderful performance. So popular was his performance that a recent American Film Institute poll named Atticus Finch the "Number One Movie Hero."

The play covers some areas of the novel that the film didn't explore. Some characters – nosy Miss Crawford and cranky old Mrs. Dubose – that have only minor roles in the movie are more fully developed characters in the play.

ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

PERIOD AND SETTING

The play is set in 1935 in the fictional Maycomb County of Alabama in the southern United States. Maycomb is said to be the fictional representation of writer Harper Lee's birthplace of Monroeville, Alabama. 1935 was the height of the Great Depression in the U.S. Our production will be set in period.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

HARPER LEE (1926–)

Nelle Harper Lee was born on April 28, 1926, in Monroeville, Alabama, the youngest of four children. She attended Huntingdon College from 1944 to 1945, studied law at the University of Alabama from 1945 to 1949 (leaving six months short of her degree), and studied for one year at Oxford University. She traveled across America with her childhood friend Truman Capote, upon whom the character of Dill is based. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published in 1960. It is her only published book, but she has also published several articles and essays. Miss Lee continues to live in Alabama.

CHRISTOPHER SERGEL (1918-1993)

Christopher Sergel III was born in Iowa City. He graduated from the University of Chicago and served as a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Merchant Marines during World War II. Mr. Sergel was a partner and later the vice-president of the Dramatic Publishing Company, which was founded by his great uncle, Charles Sergel, in 1885. He wrote more than a dozen plays and stage adaptations that were published by Dramatic Publishing Company. Prior to joining his family's publishing firm, Mr. Sergel spent two years as the captain of a schooner in the South Pacific and later lived for a year in the African bush while writing for *Sports Afield* magazine.

IN THE NOVELIST'S OWN WORDS

"People are people anywhere you put them."

Interview, 1960

"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."

From *To Kill A Mockingbird*

INSPIRATION

Atticus Finch shares his last name with novelist Harper Lee's mother. Her father was a lawyer – who, it is said, informed the character of Atticus – and she herself had studied law so was acquainted with legal procedures and language. Miss Lee based the character of young Dill on her childhood friend, Truman Capote.

THE TEACHERS' FAVOURITE

To Kill a Mockingbird, the novel, was published to mostly favorable reviews in July 1960. It was featured by the Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Guild and Reader's Digest Condensed Books, and was soon near the top of the best-seller lists for hardcover fiction. A National Council of Teachers of English survey in 1963 found that the book was being taught in 7 per cent of American schools. By 1988, when the survey was repeated, the figure was 74 per cent. Only *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* and *Huckleberry Finn* were being assigned more often.

(source: www.newshousenews.com)

GET SMART AND SUPERMAN and more

In the comics, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is Superman's favorite book. On TV Maxwell Smart of the '60s TV show *Get Smart* hunts down a Mexican artifact, the "Tequila Mockingbird." A British band is named the Boo Radleys and an American band calls itself Atticus.

SYNOPSIS

To Kill a Mockingbird is primarily a novel about growing up under extraordinary circumstances in the 1930s in the Southern United States. The story covers a span of three years, during which the main characters undergo significant changes. Scout Finch lives with her brother Jem and their father Atticus in the fictitious town of Maycomb, Alabama. Maycomb is a small, close-knit town, and every family has its social station depending on where they live, who their parents are, and how long their ancestors have lived in Maycomb.

A widower, Atticus raises his children by himself, with the help of kindly neighbors and a black housekeeper named Calpurnia. Scout and Jem almost instinctively understand the complexities and machinations of their neighborhood and town. The only neighbor who puzzles them is the mysterious Arthur Radley, nicknamed Boo, who never comes outside. When Dill, another neighbor's nephew, starts spending summers in Maycomb, the three children begin an obsessive—and sometimes perilous—quest to lure Boo outside.

Scout is a tomboy who prefers the company of boys and generally solves her differences with her fists. She tries to make sense of a world that demands that she act like a lady, a brother who criticizes her for acting like a girl, and a father who accepts her just as she is. Scout hates school, gaining her most valuable education on her own street and from her father.

Not quite midway through the story, Scout and Jem discover that their father is going to represent a black man named Tom Robinson, who is accused of raping and beating a white woman. Suddenly, Scout and Jem have to tolerate a barrage of racial slurs and insults because of Atticus' role in the trial. During this time, Scout has a very difficult time restraining from physically fighting with other children, a tendency that gets her in trouble with her Aunt Alexandra and Uncle Jack. Even Jem, the older and more levelheaded of the two, loses his temper a time or two. After responding to a neighbor's (Mrs. Dubose) verbal attack by destroying her plants, Jem is sentenced to read to her every day after school for one month. Ultimately, Scout and Jem learn a powerful lesson about bravery from this woman. As the trial draws nearer, Aunt Alexandra comes to live with them under the guise of providing a feminine influence for Scout.

During the novel's last summer, Tom is tried and convicted even though Atticus proves that Tom could not have possibly committed the crime of which he is accused. In the process of presenting Tom's case, Atticus inadvertently insults and offends Bob Ewell, a nasty, lazy drunkard whose daughter is Tom's accuser. In spite of Tom's conviction, Ewell vows revenge on Atticus and the judge for besmirching his already tarnished name. All three children are bewildered by the jury's decision to convict; Atticus tries to explain why the jury's decision was in many ways a foregone conclusion.

Shortly after the trial, Scout attends one of her aunt's Missionary Society meetings. Atticus interrupts the meeting to report that Tom Robinson had been killed in an escape

attempt. Scout learns valuable lessons about achieving the ideal of womanhood and carrying on in the face of adversity that day.

Things slowly return to normal in Maycomb, and Scout and Jem realize that Boo Radley is no longer an all-consuming curiosity. The story appears to be winding down, but then Bob Ewell starts making good on his threats of revenge. Scout is in the Halloween pageant at school, playing the part of a ham. With Atticus and Aunt Alexandra both too tired to attend, Jem agrees to take Scout to the school. After embarrassing herself on-stage, Scout elects to leave her ham costume on for the walk home with Jem.

On the way home, the children hear odd noises, but convince themselves that the noises are coming from another friend who scared them on their way to school that evening. Suddenly, a scuffle occurs. Scout really can't see outside of her costume, but she hears Jem being pushed away, and she feels powerful arms squeezing her costume's chicken wire against her skin. During this attack, Jem badly breaks his arm. Scout gets just enough of a glimpse out of her costume to see a stranger carrying Jem back to their house.

The sheriff arrives at the Finch house to announce that Bob Ewell has been found dead under the tree where the children were attacked, having fallen on his own knife. By this time, Scout realizes that the stranger is none other than Boo Radley, and that Boo is actually responsible for killing Ewell, thus saving her and Jem's lives. In spite of Atticus' insistence to the contrary, the sheriff refuses to press charges against Boo. Scout agrees with this decision and explains her understanding to her father. Boo sees Jem one more time and then asks Scout to take him home, but rather than escort him home as though he were a child, she has Boo escort her to his house as a gentleman would.

With Boo safely home, Scout returns to Jem's room where Atticus is waiting. He reads her to sleep and then waits by Jem's bedside for his son to wake up.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

ATTICUS FINCH

The voice of reason in the town of Maycomb and in the novel. Atticus dispels the wisdom and logic that is the core of the novel. He is a man that goes beyond the word tolerance; tolerance is merely to put up with something. Atticus looks at everyone and tries to understand who they are and where they are coming from. And he quietly and subtly passes on wisdom to his children about taboo subjects like racism.

Atticus is also a consistent man. People say that he is the same in the courtroom as he is on the streets. The code of conduct that he maintains for himself remains the same no matter what situation he is placed in. That is why he feels he is responsible to take Tom Robinson's case and defend him to the best of his abilities. If he didn't, he would see himself as a hypocrite.

Although Atticus seems mellow and even old-fashioned, many of his beliefs are quite revolutionary. He allows Calpurnia to truly be a member of his family. He gives her full respect and fair treatment at all times. When Cal takes his children to her church, he seems unaffected. It is all part of his consistent code of conduct.

At times, Atticus may almost seem a caricature of goodness. Never once does he falter or think ill of people. But in Harper Lee's capable hands, Atticus seems believable and true.

AUNT ALEXANDRA

Aunt Alexandra is a relic of the old South. She holds firm to out-dated beliefs about being a Southern lady. Many 20th century Southern authors have criticized the archaic notion of Southern breeding and the unofficial Southern aristocracy. It is a class of people characterized by subtle racism and class warfare. Harper Lee uses Aunt Alex to expose what is wrong with the Southern gentility. She believes that by dressing well, using manners, and being social, she is a true lady. But Aunt Alex cannot stand up for what is right; she cannot go against old notions. In the novel, it is Scout who becomes the true lady. Scout stands up for what is right and is true to herself and her values. Aunt Alex can be no such person because of her breeding.

SCOUT

Scout is the antithesis of Aunt Alexandra and what she stands for. Scout is the new Southern woman; strong willed, opinionated, and accepting. The relics of racism and classicism that occupy Aunt Alex and her standards are not present in Scout. Although she is still young, and under the guidance of Atticus, we get an impression of what Scout will become as she gets older. She does not carry the racism and double standards that the rest of the town carries. Rather, she forms a code of conduct very similar to Atticus; a code of understanding and acceptance of all human beings. Scout is not nearly as mellow as Atticus, though. She can be very outspoken and isn't afraid to challenge others whenever she sees fit, sometimes with her fists. But Scout is the true heroine of the novel.

MAUDIE ATKINSON AND CALPURNIA

Both of these women are the positive female influences of Scout in the absence of her mother. Maudie is one of the few white citizens in the town who stand up for Tom. In fact, Maudie is not afraid to challenge any of the town's notions. When the women on her street gossip about Boo Radley, Maudie puts them in their place. And when Maudie's house burns down, she shows a tremendous strength and resilience. Maudie, like Atticus, has a strong sense of character; she is just more outspoken.

Calpurnia teaches Scout many of the same lessons. Since Atticus sees Calpurnia as a member of the family, she is allowed to freely scold and lecture Scout if need be. Cal teaches Scout about treating people with respect and taking time to understand others. Scout watched Cal and even sees that being a girl isn't such a bad thing. Cal, despite being black and the Finch's cook, becomes a kind of mother to Scout in many ways.

JEM

Jem, like Scout, is learning a code of conduct from Atticus throughout the book. And also like Scout, Jem is intelligent, yet impressionable. The events that take place in Maycomb and uncharacteristically dark for the town, and a naïve Jem cannot fully comprehend them without Atticus' guidance. This guidance is what causes Jem to be the moody young man he is throughout parts of the book. He is learning to comprehend some of the darker aspects of human nature. When Scout asks him about weightier topics like racism and justice, Jem often becomes rude and angry. This is because Jem is currently trying to understand them as well, but finds the topics have no easy answers.

Toward the end of the novel, Jem becomes calmer and more realized. After all that has happened, Jem has matured and better understands his world. He now also concerns himself with being a gentleman, just like his father. Jem has grown both physically and emotionally throughout the novel and is close to being a grown man.

DILL

The seasonal friend of Jem and Scout. Like Jem, Dill is coming to terms with what is going on around him. The trial is too much for him to bear. He is young, and cannot fully comprehend the magnitude of the trial, but he can sense that something is wrong. That is why during Tom's testimony he and Scout have to leave. He is sensitive enough to understand that Tom is being mistreated.

Dill comes to Maycomb to stay with his Aunt. He has been dumped by his parents who don't seem to want to be bothered with his presence. This is why he so often lies and tells tall tales. He is looking for attention from the people around him to make up for what he doesn't receive from his family. This parental absence is also why he clings to the Finch family and he runs away to see them. The Finches are close and loving, something that includes Dill and something that he needs. When his own life is lonely and uncertain, the Finches are a rock that he can rely on.

BOO RADLEY, TOM ROBINSON, DOLPHOUS RAYMOND

Although each of these three characters occupy different parts of the novel, they all serve the same purpose; to teach Scout, Jem, and the readers, that people are not so easily judged. Despite the town's preconceived notions of these men, they are not what others

think of them. No one truly knows these men, but they make outrageous claims nonetheless. Since no one sees Boo Radley, it is easy to make accusations and spread rumors about him. He is reclusive, introverted. He hides away from the town, which gives them free reign to make outrageous claims about him.

Tom Robinson is a black man, and pays for the stereotypes that society has had for years. There has always been a fear of black male sexuality, perpetuated by stories of white women being raped and defiled by black men. When Mayella Ewell makes the charge of rape, Tom's judgment comes not from the facts, but the stereotypes that clouded every jury member and every citizen of the town. They do not take the time to understand Tom, but fear and hate him unfairly.

Although Dolphus Raymond is an inconsequential character, he is a prime example of the town's judgment. He has been written off as a drunk who lives among the black community, but when Dill and Scout sit and talk with him, they find the only beverage he abuses is Coca-Cola. Dolphus furthers some of the rumors about himself, however. He understands the town's mentality, and creates some of the stir around himself.

THEMES

RACISM AND ACCEPTANCE

Nothing more pervades the novel than the ideas of racism and acceptance. Atticus has built a whole value system around the idea that a person must examine and respect who people are and where they come from. This includes even the most unsavory characters like Bob Ewell and Mrs. Dubose. When others would rather forget about these people, Atticus takes the time to understand them. This is a value Atticus passes onto his children as well. Towards the end of the novel Scout says, "I think there's just one kind of folks. Folks." She understands Atticus' belief that all human beings must be accepted and treated equally.

But Atticus must also live these beliefs, not just voice them, which is why he takes the case of Tom Robinson. When no one in the town will stand by Tom, Atticus is there for him, defending him to the best of his abilities. Tom is a African-American in a small Southern town and very few people would act as Atticus does. Racism is cultural and runs very deep in the town of Maycomb. Even those who believe in Tom's innocence will not stand up for him. It would be against the social mores of most people to defend a black man, especially in a case that contradicts the word and honor of a white woman. But Atticus stands for what he knows is right, and his children learn from this. We watch them mature into people who look into a person's soul and life and don't make judgments based on race or social status.

When Scout wishes to invite Walter Cunningham to dinner, we see that she has gained a new knowledge of acceptance. But Aunt Alex, a model of archaic Southern manners, doesn't believe an individual of Walter's standing should associate with them. She also disagrees with the way Atticus sees Calpurnia as part of the family. Alex cannot accept the presence of an African-American woman that transcends servitude in her home.

In the end, Scout and Jem have blossomed into young people more like their father. Although still young, they have become tolerant and accepting of all people and share their fathers discerning eye for looking deep into people before making any judgment upon them.

CODE OF CONDUCT

In *To Kill a Mockingbird* there are two different codes that come into conflict. There is the older, archaic notions of Southern chivalry and class, held by most of the town of Maycomb. It is a code defined by racial supremacy and maintaining the status quo. When Mayella Ewell confronts the men in the courtroom and challenges their honor, she is making it an issue of white against black. It is not a matter of right and wrong, but a matter of trusting the word of a white woman over that of a black man. And rather than seem like "nigger lovers," they take the side of the Ewells. Perhaps no one embodies the old Southern code more than Aunt Alexandra. It is she who believes that her prestigious lineage makes her superior to most others. She sees herself as a lady, and that her families fine breeding leaves them separated from people like the Cunninghams, the Ewells, and any African American. Although she sympathizes with Tom's plight, she believes that Atticus should not take on his case. Aunt Alexandra's notions of right and wrong do not include all people equally, and the town operates the same way.

It is Atticus who is the standard of a new code. Atticus stands up for right, no matter the situation. When other put parameters around who they will help, Atticus stands by anyone in need, regardless of their race or social standing. And Atticus goes beyond just helping others, he takes the time to understand them. He points out to Scout that to truly understand a person you must get inside their skin and walk around in it for awhile. Atticus does this with all the people he associates with. Rather than writing people off as "trash" or social deviants, he analyzes people and comes to a greater understanding of them. Unlike Aunt Alex, Atticus' code requires understanding, sympathy and consistency among all people.

DECEPTIVE APPEARANCES

Many of the characters in the novel are not what they truly seem to be. Most would write off Boo Radley as a reclusive madman, Miss Dubose as a mean spirited old woman, and Dolphous Raymond as a social deviant. These people are reviled by most, but these are not fair judgments. Once we get beyond the gossip surrounding these people, we get a clear view of some very strong human beings.

Jem hates Ms. Dubose so much for what she says that he destroys her bushes. But when forced to spend time with her, he finds her a more acceptable person. And when Atticus points out that she is overcoming a morphine addiction, we see that Ms. Dubose was a woman of tremendous strength and character. She was not going to spend her last days as a drug addict, and despite the pain that caused her, she succeeded.

Dolphous Raymond, so easily written of as a drunk who lives among Negroes, is not what they town has painted him. True, he does live among the black community, but there is nothing wrong with that. He has seen the true nature of the white residents of

Maycomb and would rather live among a people he sees as honest. And his bottle of alcohol is nothing more than soda.

And we already know about Boo Radley. Despite his exile from the town, he risks going out in order to save the children. These are all characters who challenge how we judge others, which is just what Harper Lee wanted. Despite how easy it is to judge others, once you look closer, you see something more in everyone. The Finches do this and they gain new friends and invaluable insight into others because of this. No one is what they truly seem, and everyone has something inside them that motivates them to be who they are. One must look closely to see this, and the Finches do just that.

NOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT...

(This section tells the end of the story, so don't read on if you have not finished the book!)

Meeting with Harper Lee to discuss the stage adaptation of her extraordinary book *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* was an event about which I felt some trepidation.

She was born Nellie Harper Lee in 1926 in the small town of Monroeville, Alabama, the youngest of three children born to Amasa Coleman Lee and France Finch Lee. It will not surprise you that her father was a lawyer or that she had a childhood friend named Truman Capote who is often thought to be “Dill.”

In 1945 she became a law student at the University of Alabama and later became an exchange student at Oxford University, which she left before graduating to go to New York City and to write. The first manuscript of *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* was submitted for publication in 1957, but was not published until 1960 after a great deal of additional work. It was an immediate success, being selected by the Literary Guild and recommended by the Book of the Month Club. It was the basis of an Academy Award film starring Gregory Peck in the role of Atticus Finch. Since then the book has sold well over fifteen million copies!

My father, Roger Sergel, who had been Professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh and who had been close to many leading writers of his day—Sherwood Anderson dedicated a book to him—particularly admired Harper Lee's book. He died before I met with Harper Lee, but I can still remember his unqualified enthusiasm for her work. When *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* won the Pulitzer Prize, my father said, “This is the first time I entirely agree with the Pulitzer Prize.”

Prior to meeting directly with Harper Lee I had a number of useful discussions with Maurice Crain who was a creative force in her life, as to some extent he was in mine. Lucille Sullivan of that office was also a source of excellent advice on this project. The meeting with Harper Lee, as I recall it from twenty years ago, took place at the Hotel Pierre in New York City. It began as an early lunch and lasted several hours. As we discussed the adaptation and the reasons for the choices being made, I had a sense that she felt the work was on the right track which, of course, was due at least in part to the

good advice I'd been given earlier by Maurice Crain. The good discussion continued with Harper Lee as we walked down the hotel corridor. Passing a row of public phones I had an irrational wish that I could call my father and tell him that I'd met with Harper Lee myself and the meeting had gone very well.

A taxi stopped in front and I opened the door for Harper Lee. She embraced me and was gone. I've never seen her again.

Perhaps the essence of what I believe she does better than any writer I know is captured in a brief response Atticus makes to a question from his daughter Scout. In the book as in the play, Tom Robinson, a black man, is wrongly convicted of a crime he did not commit and is later shot down by prison guards as he tries to escape. In anguish Scout asks her father how such a thing could be done to Tom. Atticus replies, "Because he wasn't 'Tom' to them." The special beauty of Harper Lee's work is that she takes us inside the people in her book, and in their various ways, each becomes "Tom" to us.

ACTIVITIES

COURTROOM ROLE-PLAY ACTIVITY

To Kill a Mockingbird and Courtroom Procedures III: The Mock Trial

By Courtney Lubs

(Courtney Lubs is a teacher at Malcolm Price Laboratory School in Cedar Falls, Iowa.)

Student Objectives

Students will:

- Synthesize information from two previous lessons in order to conduct classroom courtroom
- Gain a better understanding of the trial in *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Practice utilizing research sources
- Demonstrate understanding of trial procedures
- Role play a possible trial situation

Skills attained:

- Use of research source(s)
- Speech communication/presentation practice
- Analytical/evaluation practice
- Cooperative group work/collaboration experience

Materials Needed

Many materials specified for this lesson are optional; use as many as you see fit or have

available. I have found that as much as your classroom looks like a courtroom, students will absorb the atmosphere and behave more professionally. Invite parents, administrators, and other students and teachers to authenticate audience.

- Copies of *To Kill a Mockingbird* for all
- Copies of trial handouts for each student
- Roles, Evaluations and rubric handouts
- Three tables: one for judge, one each for attorney
- Chairs for all participants
- Book on which to swear in (*To Kill a Mockingbird* seems fitting)
- Pens, paper, other office supplies for note-taking and authenticity
- VCR and TV, if you wish to tape mock trial(s)
- Overhead projector, transparencies, markers
- Member of class to serve in each courtroom position
- Black robe for judge
- Gavel
- Laptop computer for court reporter (AlphaSmarts also work well)
- Any other prop that makes trial seem authentic

The Lesson

Anticipatory Set

For the next three or more days (choose timing depending on class size and schedule), we will begin to organize ourselves so that we may conduct a mock trial. This means that all students must be assigned roles in the court (draw or assign duties, ask for volunteers, or other means that suit your classroom and teaching style) and prepare cases. Some students may need to assume more than one smaller responsibility (i.e. bailiff is also witness).

Procedures

1. As a large group, brainstorm/recall questions students have had from the novel that they could argue in mock court. Effective examples include:

Should Aunt Alexandra stay in Atticus's home?

Should the jury have come to a guilty verdict?

Did Boo Radley really stab someone in the leg with scissors?

Should you kill a mockingbird? (This is advanced due to its abstraction)

Should Tom have run from the "crime scene"?

Should Calpurnia have taken Scout and Jem to church with her?

2. After a brief session of brainstorming, have students vote on which they could most effectively argue. Remind them that there are two sides to each case, and that they will be using passages the novel as their main source of evidence. Some students will also role-play characters from the novel and serve as witnesses. Following the case decision, students should assume roles (choose appropriate method) so that they can begin preparations. Make sure you have the following roles assigned:

Prosecuting attorney

Defending attorney

Plaintiff (character role-play)

Defendant (character role-play)

Court reporter

Judge

Bailiff

Jury members (may not be able to have 12)

Audience members (may also serve as character role players)

3. Hand out evaluation checklists so students know what is expected of them. Discuss briefly; answer any questions.
4. Provide 3+ class periods for research and preparation. Students should have their copies of the novel on hand. They may choose to use the To Kill a Mockingbird Student Survival Guide for assistance, at: http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/Belmont_HS/tkm. As they develop their cases for and against their question, they will need teacher assistance. Decide what is best for your class; I tell students to first brainstorm parts of the text that could help their case, and then form an outline of how they will argue it. They should try to have three main points and support for each. A review or brief lesson of the Keyhole Essay model may be useful to get students started.
5. When students have completed their outline and collection of pertinent passages, the next step is to recruit witnesses. The plaintiff and defendant have already been assigned, but others need to be "trained." Students should use their interviewing skills to come up with questions to ask their witnesses when they take the stand. Remind students that whatever is presented or stated in the mock trial MUST follow with the logic of the novel, though interpretation is encouraged.
6. If there is time, provide students with a day to practice with witnesses. If available, allow students to word process their cases and outlines so that they are neat and organized. Tell them to "dress for their parts" and be ready to present the following day. Answer any late questions.
7. On trial day, first arrange the room to look like a courtroom. Place table serving as judge's bench in the front and center of the classroom, with a chair to the left for witnesses. Place twelve chairs on the side of the classroom for jury members. A chair or desk should be directly in front of the judge's bench for the court reporter. In front of the judge's bench, one on the right side and one on the left, tables should be placed for attorney teams. Behind attorneys' tables should be chairs for those attending/viewing the trial. Bailiff's chair should be off to one side. Provide students with a few minutes to prepare. Make sure students are aware of time constraints, that the bailiff will rest cases at the halfway point of the class if attorney has not already done so. Depending on your situation, you may arrange for extra time. Or, you may choose to have the plaintiff's case one day and the defendant's the next.
8. Commence the mock trial; sit back and enjoy. Try not to interrupt, allowing students a real experience as much as possible. Videotape for future evaluation. Remind students to fill out evaluation for homework tomorrow.
9. Following the mock trial, collect evaluations. Discuss what worked and what did not. If it has not already occurred, ask jury for verdict.

Assessment

Evaluation checklists provided below.

Evaluation Checklist for students:

Checklist: ensure that you have completed all of the following that apply to you.

- I know what my duty in the courtroom is and I understand how I will perform my duty
- I understand the trial question
- I have carefully considered my reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and know what passages will help my case
- I have helped my team construct an outline of our case
- I have helped my team prepare questions to ask our witnesses
- I have helped my team to prepare our witnesses to answer questions
- I have practiced with my team so that our presentation is professional and organized: I know what to do, when to do it, and how to behave when I do it
- I have helped my team to prepare a list of possible rebuttal questions for when it is our turn to cross examine witnesses
- I remembered to bring any props for which I am responsible
- I will remember to complete my self evaluation for tomorrow

Self Evaluation: Please respond to the following.

- Describe the process your team went through to prepare for your mock trial.
- What did your team do especially well? What could you improve if you were to do this again?
- Did each member of the team contribute equally and with vigor to your presentation? Explain.
- Explain your own participation in this project. What did you do that helped your team?
- In your opinion, why did the jury reach the decision it did?
- How did this activity enhance your understanding of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and criminal trials?
- Any other comments?

Teacher Evaluation Rubric:

___ points: Student understood trial role and performed in an authentic manner

___ points: Student demonstrated comprehension of trial question, using appropriate and effective passages for support/refutation

___ points: Student's work in group was equal and vigorous

___ points: Self evaluation completed and submitted on time

___ points: Other

Assign points and other measures as you deem necessary.

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD ROLE-PLAY: A MAYCOMB PIG PICKIN'

Somewhere near the middle of reading the novel, students start to become confused about characters. This fun role-play activity works especially well just after Chapter 21 and allows students to get to know characters beyond Jem and Scout. It also can be a springboard into further discussions of point of view, theme, and stereotypes.

A lesson plan for Grade 9 English I
by David Ansbacher

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Materials/resources

To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee
small Post-It Notes (ten per student)
3×5 note cards and tape (one card per student)

Pre-activities

Students should have read through Chapter 21. The lesson could work at other times, but after the trial is ideal.

Students might generally discuss the verdict and the trial before entering into this activity.

Using the list of characters on page 2 of the handout, cut up names to draw and allow students to select randomly a character. Some can be used more than once depending on class size.

Activities

All student directions are included on the handout.

Distribute a few Post-it notes to each student. They should use these Post-its to “Search through your book and place at least seven post-its on pages that highlight different aspects of your character. On that Post-it, write a sentence explaining what this passage teaches you about this character” (from the handout). While they are working, you can distribute a notecard and tape to each student to make nametags.

Once the students have researched the characters, they should “Write two diary entries from this character (200 words each). One should come from any part of the novel before the trial and one should be written immediately after the trial verdict” (from the handout).

Finally, students should “Prepare a series of questions you would like to ask other characters in the novel. If you had a chance to talk one on one with these people, what would you want to know? You should come up with at least ten questions” (from the handout).

Next, brainstorm together on the board topics of conversation beyond the trial that might come up at this event — what is Maycomb talking about these days?

Go over the ground rules for the pig pickin' (from the handout):

You should only have one-on-one conversations.

When I say “mingle” you should shift to speak to another person at the pig pickin'.

You must ALWAYS stay in character.

Keep in mind basic Southern rules of politeness; even mortal enemies wouldn't make a big scene at a pig-pickin'.

Have fun — it's a pig pickin'!

Let them go at it! I think 2–3 minutes for each “mingle” is fine, and you can let it go as long as you'd like. I found with a class of 28 students that 15–20 minutes was enough.

Debrief the experience with the kids. You can ask questions like these:

Whose characters were most difficult to play?

Were there tense moments between certain characters?

Were there any surprises today?

Who played their character with the most accuracy?

It is important not to skip this part. If you run out of time, come back to it the next day.

Assessment

This rubric is also included on the handout:

___/15 points. Did your Post-its and comments focus on key developments in character?

___/15 points. Were your diary entries realistic representations of what that character was thinking?

___/10 points. Did you accurately represent your character?

___/10 points. Did you stay in character throughout the pig pickin'?

___/50 points TOTAL

I found it useful to enlist a couple of students as evaluators. These students did not have a role but simply were “ghosts” listening in and reporting back to me their observations.

Supplemental information

Comments

It is most important that students stay in character. I'd suggest visibly taking the first student who doesn't follow through out of the role-play. Others will choose to have fun with the roles instead.

If you really want to go all out with this, you could make it a Southern food day and incorporate a mess into the whole thing!

We also had an Academy Award vote at the end for best actor and actress.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Why does Atticus choose not to reveal to his children that Judge Taylor appointed him to Tom's case? How does his decision affect Scout's perception of her father?
2. Do you think that the adult Jean Louise telling the story through Scout's eyes may have added any embellishments to the story? Think of an event from your own life that occurred at least five years ago. Do you see the event differently now? How does memory and education affect your perception of the event?
3. Read *Snow Falling on Cedars* by David Guterson. How are the stories alike? How are they different? Compare Atticus Finch and Tom Robinson with Nels Gudmundsson and Kabuo Miyamoto. Compare Scout's and Hatsue's understanding of their place in their communities.
4. If Scout and Jem's mother were still alive, how might the following people be different: Atticus, Scout, Jem, Calpurnia, and Aunt Alexandra?
5. Would Heck Tate have filed charges against Tom Robinson so quickly if Tom were white? Why or why not? Would Sheriff Tate have been so unwilling to file charges against Boo Radley if Boo was black? Why or why not?
6. Read the play *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Christopher Sergel. What elements in the story are different? What limitations does the book have that the stage doesn't? What limitations does the stage have that the book doesn't? Does Sergel tell the same story that Harper Lee does? What events does Sergel highlight as important? Why do you think he made those choices? Do you agree with his choices?
7. Compare and contrast the relationship between Jem and Scout with the relationship between Atticus and Aunt Alexandra.
8. Based on what you know about Scout, describe the adult Jean Louise Finch.

9. Suppose that Mayella had admitted that she was lying when she testified against Tom. What would have happened to her? What would've happened to Tom? How would Scout, Jem, and Dill perceive the situation differently? Would the town have been willing to accept Tom's innocence? Why or why not?

10. What significance do the items that Boo leaves for the children have? What do they tell you about Boo? Why does his brother object so strongly to his leaving items for the children?

11. Read Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. Capote based the character of Idabel on Harper Lee, his childhood friend, just as she based the character of Dill on him. Compare Idabel and Scout. Do the two characterizations give you any insight to Harper Lee? How are the characters different from each other? Compare Joel and Idabel's relationship to Dill and Scout's. What role does friendship play in each of these stories? Compare and contrast the setting in the two stories.

12. Harper Lee uses language and grammar that mirrors how the characters actually speak. Is this technique helpful in understanding the characters? Is it distracting? Could Lee have told the same story with the same impact if she'd used proper grammar throughout?

13. Read Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. Compare the lessons Scout learns with those that Huck learns. How is Jim like or unlike Tom Robinson? *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Huckleberry Finn* are both novels that have undergone many censorship attempts, especially in schools and public libraries. Why do you think people would want to censor these stories? Is censorship ever appropriate? Why or why not?

14. Compare the way Miss Caroline treats Scout on her first day of school with the way the town treats Mayella Ewell.

15. What, if any, prejudices do African Americans face in today's world? Have the issues that Lee discusses in *To Kill a Mockingbird* been resolved or are they ongoing? What forms of prejudice can you identify in your own community? Have you ever been the victim of prejudice? Did the situation end justly? Explain.

16. Why does Boo Radley stay inside all the time?

INTERNET SITES

A Study Guide by David Claudon

<http://www.davidclaudon.com/Mockingbird/mockingbird2.html>

To Kill a Mockingbird: Growing up in the 1930s

<http://www.slc.k12.ut.us/webweavers/jillc/mbird.html>

Study Guide:

<http://www.enotes.com/mockingbird/>

General Information:

http://www.harperacademic.com/catalog/instructors_guide_xml.asp?isbn=0060935464

On Harper Lee: <http://www.teenreads.com/authors/au-lee-harper.asp>