

# The end of innocence

***To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee has been hailed for teaching tolerance and compassion to children**

**H**ARPER Lee based the story on past experiences and the unfair trials accused African-Americans used to have. This novel has been celebrated for teaching morals to children, but US libraries once tried to ban the book because of the racist words that appear frequently in it.



## Synopsis

THE story is told from the perspective of Scout, a bright young girl who lives with brother Jem and father Atticus Finch in Maycomb, a US town in the southern state of Alabama. She is a tomboy and likes to act out stories with her brother and friend Dill.

They are curious about the creepy house in their neighbourhood and its owner, the mysterious Boo Radley whom they have never seen before. There are rumours Boo is crazy because his father **imprisoned** him in the house for being a naughty boy. The trio tries to lure him out but they fail. They later become less afraid of him when they suspect Boo is leaving gifts for them as an act of friendship.

Atticus is a respected lawyer and teaches his kids right from wrong. When Scout has trouble with a poor kid, Atticus tells her to “climb into his skin and walk around in it”: to see things from a different perspective.

Atticus demonstrates this when he decides to **defend** Tom Robinson, a black farm worker accused of raping a white girl. The white folks of Maycomb do not like this and verbally abuse Atticus and his family. At the trial, Atticus offers

convincing arguments that Robinson did not rape Mayella Ewell, a naïve girl who comes from a very poor family. It was, he says, to cover up the fact she tried to make an advance on Robinson and was caught by her father Bob, a drunk who later beat her.

Despite Atticus’ solid arguments, the jury, all made up of white folk, find Robinson guilty and he is sentenced to death. Scout and Jem have been watching the court proceedings and cannot understand why an **innocent** man was wronged.

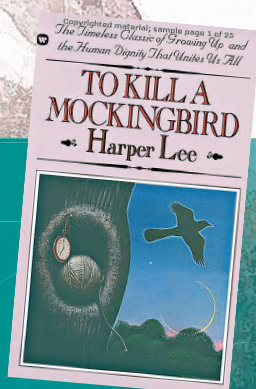
However, Bob Ewell is still not happy because he thinks Atticus made a fool of him, and seeks revenge. When Jem and Scout walk home after a Halloween party they are attacked by Ewell but are saved by a mysterious person.

Bob Ewell is killed and the injured Jem is carried home by his saviour.

## Ideas

ATTICUS teaches his children to show **compassion** towards others and to see things from different perspectives. He tells them that people have good and bad qualities and that they must always see their good side and not lose faith in human nature. This is tested when the children observe racial **prejudice** and social inequality.

Harper Lee also comments on the end of innocence. The children witness the injustices that happen in the adult world and are troubled by it. Lee uses the mockingbird to **symbolise** innocence. Boo Radley and Tom Robinson are mockingbirds – innocent men who are harmed by evil people. 🔄



## About the book

Author: Harper Lee

Publishing year: 1960

Genre: coming-of-age novel