**Part One, Chapter 1**

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**Summary**

The story is narrated by a young girl named Jean Louise Finch, who is almost always called by her nickname, [Scout](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/scout-finch/). Scout starts to explain the circumstances that led to the broken arm that her older brother, [Jem](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/jem-finch/), sustained many years earlier; she begins by recounting her family history. The first of her ancestors to come to America was a fur-trader and apothecary named Simon Finch, who fled England to escape religious persecution and established a successful farm on the banks of the Alabama River. The farm, called Finch’s Landing, supported the family for many years. The first Finches to make a living away from the farm were Scout’s father, [Atticus Finch](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/atticus-finch/), who became a lawyer in the nearby town of Maycomb, and his brother, Jack Finch, who went to medical school in Boston. Their sister, Alexandra Finch, stayed to run the Landing.

A successful lawyer, Atticus makes a solid living in Maycomb, a tired, poor, old town in the grips of the Great Depression. He lives with Jem and Scout on Maycomb’s main residential street. Their cook, an old black woman named Calpurnia, helps to raise the children and keep the house. Atticus’s wife died when Scout was two, so she does not remember her mother well. But Jem, four years older than Scout, has memories of their mother that sometimes make him unhappy.

In the summer of 1933, when Jem is nearly ten and Scout almost six, a peculiar boy named Charles Baker Harris moves in next door. The boy, who calls himself Dill, stays for the summer with his aunt, Miss Rachel Haverford, who owns the house next to the Finches’. Dill doesn’t like to discuss his father’s absence from his life, but he is otherwise a talkative and extremely intelligent boy who quickly becomes the Finch children’s chief playmate. All summer, the three act out various stories that they have read. When they grow bored of this activity, Dill suggests that they attempt to lure Boo Radley, a mysterious neighbor, out of his house.

Arthur “Boo” Radley lives in the run-down Radley Place, and no one has seen him outside it in years. Scout recounts how, as a boy, Boo got in trouble with the law and his father imprisoned him in the house as punishment. He was not heard from until fifteen years later, when he stabbed his father with a pair of scissors. Although people suggested that Boo was crazy, old Mr. Radley refused to have his son committed to an asylum. When the old man died, Boo’s brother, Nathan, came to live in the house with Boo. Nevertheless, Boo continued to stay inside.

Dill is fascinated by Boo and tries to convince the Finch children to help him lure this phantom of Maycomb outside. Eventually, he dares Jem to run over and touch the house. Jem does so, sprinting back hastily; there is no sign of movement at the Radley Place, although Scout thinks that she sees a shutter move slightly, as if someone were peeking out.

**Analysis**

*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.*

*(See*[*Important Quotations Explained*](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/quotes.html#CHDIFAHG)*)*

The story that constitutes almost the entirety of *To Kill a Mockingbird*is set in the time between [Scout Finch](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/scout-finch/)’s fifth and ninth birthdays, but Scout presumably commences the first-person narrative that opens the novel much later in her life. As a result, the narrative voice fluctuates between the child’s point of view, chronicling the events as they happen, and the adult voice, looking back on her childhood many years later. The child’s naïve voice dominates the central plot, allowing the reader to make connections and understand events in a way that the young Scout does not. At the same time, the narrative often digresses into anecdotes or descriptions presented retrospectively, like Scout’s depiction of Maycomb in the first chapter: “Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. . . . Somehow, it was hotter then . . . [p]eople moved slowly then.” Here, Lee’s language indicates an adult’s recollection rather than a girl’s experience.