**Chapters 16–17**

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**Summary: Chapter 16**

The trial begins the next day. People from all over the county flood the town. Everyone makes an appearance in the courtroom, from Miss Stephanie Crawford to Mr. Dolphus Raymond, a wealthy eccentric who owns land on a river bank, lives near the county line, is involved with a black woman, and has mulatto children. Only Miss Maudie refuses to go, saying that watching someone on trial for his life is like attending a Roman carnival.

The vast crowd camps in the town square to eat lunch. Afterward, [Jem](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/jem-finch/), [Scout](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/scout-finch/), and Dill wait for most of the crowd to enter the courthouse so that they can slip in at the back and thus prevent[Atticus](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/atticus-finch/) from noticing them. However, because they wait too long, they succeed in getting seats only when Reverend Sykes lets them sit in the balcony where black people are required to sit in order to watch the trial. From these seats, they can see the whole courtroom. Judge Taylor, a white-haired old man with a reputation for running his court in an informal fashion, presides over the case.

**Summary: Chapter 17**

The prosecutor, Mr. Gilmer, questions Heck Tate, who recounts how, on the night of November 21, Bob Ewell urged him to go to the Ewell house and told him that his daughter Mayella had been raped. When Tate got there, he found Mayella bruised and beaten, and she told him that Tom Robinson had raped her. Atticus cross-examines the witness, who admits that no doctor was summoned, and tells Atticus that Mayella’s bruises were concentrated on the right side of her face. Tate leaves the stand, and Bob Ewell is called.

Bob Ewell and his children live behind the town garbage dump in a tin-roofed cabin with a yard full of trash. No one is sure how many children Ewell has, and the only orderly corner of the yard is planted with well-tended geraniums rumored to belong to Mayella. An extremely rude little man, Ewell testifies that on the evening in question he was coming out of the woods with a load of kindling when he heard his daughter yelling. When he reached the house, he looked in the window and saw Tom Robinson raping her. Robinson fled, and Ewell went into the house, saw that his daughter was all right, and ran for the sheriff. Atticus’s cross-examination is brief: he asks Mr. Ewell why no doctor was called (it was too expensive and there was no need), and then has the witness write his name. Bob Ewell, the jury sees, is left-handed—and a left-handed man would be more likely to leave bruises on the right side of a girl’s face.

**Analysis: Chapters 16–17**

The trial is the most gripping, and in some ways the most important, dramatic sequence in *To Kill a Mockingbird*; the testimony and deliberations cover about five chapters with almost no digression. (Additionally, the courtroom scene, with Atticus picking apart the Ewells as the whole town watches, is the most cinematic portion of the narrative, and it is the centerpiece of the 1962 film version of the novel.) Though the trial targets Tom Robinson, in another sense it is Maycomb that is on trial, and while Atticus eventually loses the court case, he successfully reveals the injustice of a stratified society that confines blacks to the “colored balcony” and allows the word of a despicable, ignorant man like Bob Ewell to prevail without question over the word of a man who happens to be black. In the trial conducted in the courtroom, Atticus loses. In the trial conducted in the mind of the reader, it is the white community, wallowing in prejudice and hatred, that loses.

It is fitting that the children end up sitting in the “colored section” of the courthouse, just as it is fitting that Miss Maudie refuses to attend the trial. All three lack the racism that the crowd of white faces in the courtroom propagates. Jem, Scout, and Dill are segregated even from the other children, who have taunted Jem and Scout with cries of “nigger-lover” in the schoolyard.