**Chapters 2–3**

**Summary: Chapter 2**

September arrives, and Dill leaves Maycomb to return to the town of Meridian. [Scout](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/scout-finch/), meanwhile, prepares to go to school for the first time, an event that she has been eagerly anticipating. Once she is finally at school, however, she finds that her teacher, Miss Caroline Fisher, deals poorly with children. When Miss Caroline concludes that [Atticus](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/atticus-finch/) must have taught Scout to read, she becomes very displeased and makes Scout feel guilty for being educated. At recess, Scout complains to [Jem](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/jem-finch/), but Jem says that Miss Caroline is just trying out a new method of teaching.

Miss Caroline and Scout get along badly in the afternoon as well. Walter Cunningham, a boy in Scout’s class, has not brought a lunch. Miss Caroline offers him a quarter to buy lunch, telling him that he can pay her back tomorrow. Walter’s family is large and poor—so poor that they pay Atticus with hickory nuts, turnip greens, or other goods when they need legal help—and Walter will never be able to pay the teacher back or bring a lunch to school. When Scout attempts to explain these circumstances, however, Miss Caroline fails to understand and grows so frustrated that she slaps Scout’s hand with a ruler.

**Summary: Chapter 3**

At lunch, Scout rubs Walter’s nose in the dirt for getting her in trouble, but Jem intervenes and invites Walter to lunch (in the novel, as in certain regions of the country, the midday meal is called “dinner”). At the Finch house, Walter and Atticus discuss farm conditions “like two men,” and Walter puts molasses all over his meat and vegetables, to Scout’s horror. When she criticizes Walter, however, Calpurnia calls her into the kitchen to scold her and slaps her as she returns to the dining room, telling her to be a better hostess. Back at school, Miss Caroline becomes terrified when a tiny bug, or “cootie,” crawls out of a boy’s hair. The boy is Burris Ewell, a member of the Ewell clan, which is even poorer and less respectable than the Cunningham clan. In fact, Burris only comes to school the first day of every school year, making a token appearance to avoid trouble with the law. He leaves the classroom, making enough vicious remarks to cause the teacher to cry.

At home, Atticus follows Scout outside to ask her if something is wrong, to which she responds that she is not feeling well. She tells him that she does not think she will go to school anymore and suggests that he could teach her himself. Atticus replies that the law demands that she go to school, but he promises to keep reading to her, as long as she does not tell her teacher about it.

*You never really understand a person until you . . . climb into his skin and walk around in it.*

**Analysis: Chapters 2–3**

Scout’s unpleasant first day of school has a threefold purpose: it locates the reader’s sympathies firmly with the narrator; it offers a further introduction to Maycomb’s tortured social ladder; and it provides sharp social commentary on the theme of children and education, one of the book’s most important themes. In her interactions with Miss Caroline, Scout is victimized by her teacher’s inexperience; Scout means well but receives only punishment in return. The rigid, impersonal protocols demanded by the law and by Miss Caroline’s method of teaching are shown to be insufficient and irrational—Burris Ewell can keep the law happy by coming to school only one day a year, while Scout incurs her teacher’s wrath simply by learning to read at an early age. This topsy-turvy educational outlook fails catastrophically to meet the needs of either student. Scout, who is commonsensical enough to perceive this failure immediately, is frustrated by her inability to understand why her teacher acts as she does, and why she, Scout, continually incurs disfavor for well-intentioned actions.

Throughout these chapters, Scout’s well-meaning missteps (telling the teacher about Walter’s poverty, criticizing Walter for putting molasses on his meat and vegetables) earn harsh rebukes from the adult world, emphasizing the contrast between the comfortable, imaginative childhood world that Scout occupies in Chapter 1 and the more grown-up world she is now expected to occupy. This interaction sets a pattern for the book and for the basic development of Scout as a character: whether dealing with adults or with other children, Scout always means well, and her nature is essentially good. Her mistakes are honest mistakes, and while there is evil all around her in the novel, it does not infect her, nor does injustice disillusion her, as it does Jem. At the end of Chapter 2, Scout, acting on her best intentions (as always), tries to explain the Cunninghams to Miss Caroline.