**Chapters 9–11**

page 2 of 2

The occasion for the adult world to intrude on [Scout](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/scout-finch/)’s life is the trial of Tom Robinson. Because Robinson is a black man accused of raping a white woman, the white residents of Maycomb are furious that [Atticus](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/atticus-finch/), the town’s best lawyer, would choose to help his cause. The townspeople are unwilling to limit their displays of anger to Atticus himself; Scout and [Jem](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/jem-finch/) become targets as well. The town of Maycomb, whose inhabitants have been presented thus far in a largely positive light, suddenly turns against the Finches, as the ugly, racist underbelly of Southern life exposes itself. Even members of Atticus’s own family—Alexandra and her obnoxious grandson—condemn his decision to defend Tom Robinson. Chapter 9 marks Alexandra’s first appearance in the story, and her portrayal is mostly negative; only later will she develop into a sympathetic character.

The adversity faced by the family reveals Atticus’s parenting style, his focus on instilling moral values in Jem and Scout. Particularly important to Atticus are justice, restraint, and honesty. He tells his children to avoid getting in fights, even if they are verbally abused, and to practice quiet courage instead. When he gives Jem and Scout air rifles as presents, he advises them that it is a sin to kill a mockingbird. This idea is, of course, the source of the novel’s title, and it reflects the book’s preoccupation with injustices inflicted upon innocents. In different ways, Jem and Scout, Boo Radley, and Tom Robinson are all “mockingbirds.”

The incident with the mad dog demonstrates Atticus’s courage and symbolizes the town’s dependence upon his protection from both the rabid animal and the worst evil within themselves. That Scout, in particular, is so impressed with the masculine prowess with which she associates his marksmanship symbolizes how much she has to learn about courage. For, in Atticus’s mind, true bravery has nothing to do with weapons. The subsequent events surrounding Mrs. Dubose give him an opportunity to show Jem what he considers real courage. Mrs. Dubose, in many ways, represents everything wrong with Maycomb: she is unforgivably racist, raining curses on the children and denigrating Atticus for representing a black man. Yet the darkness in her is balanced by her bravery and determination, and just as Atticus loves Maycomb despite its flaws, he respects Mrs. Dubose for possessing “real courage,” which he explains as “when you know you’re licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what.” This attitude, of course, fittingly describes Atticus’s approach to the Tom Robinson case. Atticus puts into practice every moral idea that he espouses, which is the key to his importance in Maycomb and his heroism in the novel.

The camellia that Mrs. Dubose leaves Jem constitutes a distillation of what Atticus considers her essential goodness. She has sloughed off her mortal persona, one that is racist and irritable, and the whiteness of the flower symbolizes the purity of soul that Atticus attributes to everyone. Jem’s initial rejection of the gift symbolizes his inability to see this goodness. Although Mrs. Dubose’s gesture seems to imply an appreciation of Jem, Jem has not yet matured enough to realize that good and evil can coexist within the same person; he thus remains unwilling to accept that Mrs. Dubose could represent anything good.