**Key Facts**

**full title** ·  *To Kill a Mockingbird*

**author** · Harper Lee

**type of work** · Novel

**genre** · Coming-of-age story; social drama; courtroom drama; Southern drama

**language** · English

**time and place written** · Mid-1950s; New York City

**date of first publication** · 1960

**publisher** · J. B. Lippincott

**narrator** · [Scout](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/scout-finch/) narrates the story herself, looking back in retrospect an unspecified number of years after the events of the novel take place.

**point of view** · Scout narrates in the first person, telling what she saw and heard at the time and augmenting this narration with thoughts and assessments of her experiences in retrospect. Although she is by no means an omniscient narrator, she has matured considerably over the intervening years and often implicitly and humorously comments on the naïveté she displayed in her thoughts and actions as a young girl. Scout mostly tells of her own thoughts but also devotes considerable time to recounting and analyzing [Jem](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/jem-finch/)’s thoughts and actions.

**tone** · Childlike, humorous, nostalgic, innocent; as the novel progresses, increasingly dark, foreboding, and critical of society

**tense** · Past

**setting (time)** · 1933–1935

**setting (place)** · The fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama

**protagonist** · [Scout Finch](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/scout-finch/)

**major conflict** · The childhood innocence with which Scout and Jem begin the novel is threatened by numerous incidents that expose the evil side of human nature, most notably the guilty verdict in Tom Robinson’s trial and the vengefulness of Bob Ewell. As the novel progresses, Scout and Jem struggle to maintain faith in the human capacity for good in light of these recurring instances of human evil.

**rising action** · Scout, Jem, and Dill become fascinated with their mysterious neighbor Boo Radley and have an escalating series of encounters with him. Meanwhile, [Atticus](http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/character/atticus-finch/) is assigned to defend a black man, Tom Robinson against the spurious rape charges Bob Ewell has brought against him. Watching the trial, Scout, and especially Jem, cannot understand how a jury could possibly convict Tom Robinson based on the Ewells’ clearly fabricated story.

**climax** · Despite Atticus’s capable and impassioned defense, the jury finds Tom Robinson guilty. The verdict forces Scout and Jem to confront the fact that the morals Atticus has taught them cannot always be reconciled with the reality of the world and the evils of human nature.

**falling action** · When word spreads that Tom Robinson has been shot while trying to escape from prison, Jem struggles to come to terms with the injustice of the trial and of Tom Robinson’s fate. After making a variety of threats against Atticus and others connected with the trial, Bob Ewell assaults Scout and Jem as they walk home one night, but Boo Radley saves the children and fatally stabs Ewell. The sheriff, knowing that Boo, like Tom Robinson, would be misunderstood and likely convicted in a trial, protects Boo by saying that Ewell tripped and fell on his own knife. After sitting and talking with Scout briefly, Boo retreats into his house, and Scout never sees him again.

**themes** · The coexistence of good and evil; the importance of moral education; social class

**motifs** · Gothic details; small-town life

**symbols** · Mockingbirds; Boo Radley

**foreshadowing** · The Gothic elements of the novel (the fire, the mad dog) build tension that subtly foreshadows Tom Robinson’s trial and tragic death; Burris Ewell’s appearance in school foreshadows the nastiness of Bob Ewell; the presents Jem and Scout find in the oak tree foreshadow the eventual discovery of Boo Radley’s good-heartedness; Bob Ewell’s threats and suspicious behavior after the trial foreshadow his attack on the children.