

# Focus ON READING

*Vocabulary*

READING  
COMPREHENSION

## To Kill a Mockingbird

Harper Lee

**ACTIVATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE**

**Reproducible Activities**

## *Focus Your Reading*

### *Questions to Think About*

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The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. Why do you think Scout and Jem are friends with Dill? What does Dill bring to the friendship?
2. How is school different in the book for the children of Maycomb County from what it is today? How do different characters in the book feel about education?
3. How do you think Scout feels about Calpurnia?
4. Why are the children so interested in Boo Radley?
5. How do Scout and Jem feel about their father? Do they respect his wishes?

## Check Your Understanding

### Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

- Where do Atticus, Scout, and Jem Finch live?
  - Maycomb, Alabama
  - Meridian, Mississippi
  - Montgomery, Alabama
- Who is Calpurnia?
  - a kind neighbor
  - the Finches' cook
  - Scout's grade-school teacher
- What happened to Scout and Jem's mother?
  - She died of a heart attack.
  - She's in a mental institution.
  - She left Maycomb to live with her sister in Montgomery.
- Who taught Scout how to read?
  - her father
  - Miss Maudie
  - her brother, Jem
- How do the Ewell children feel about school?
  - School is a waste of time, and they do not attend.
  - They attend school just like the other children in the town.
  - They are home-schooled and learn to read and write from their father.
- Jem and Scout look forward to summer, to sleeping on the porch and in the tree house. Who do they look forward to spending time with in the summer?
  - Dill
  - Uncle Jack
  - Boo Radley
- What do Jem and Scout find in the knot-hole of an oak tree at the Radley place?
  - a silver bell
  - a prayer book
  - Indian-head pennies
- How do Scout and Jem feel about their neighbor, Miss Maudie?
  - They are afraid of her.
  - They consider her a friend.
  - They don't pay much attention to her.
- What do the children want Boo Radley to do?
  - to move out of town
  - to come out of the house
  - to send the children a letter
- How does Atticus feel about the children disturbing the Radleys?
  - He finds it amusing.
  - He isn't aware of the children's activities.
  - He wants them to leave the Radleys alone.

## Focus Your Reading

### Vocabulary Words to Know

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Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

**malignant**—showing great ill will; evil

**desolate**—dreary; dismal; sad

**provocation**—the act of deliberately angering someone

**deportment**—a manner of personal conduct; behavior

**obstreperous**—noisily and stubbornly defiant

**wrathful**—fiercely angry

**umbrage**—offense; resentment

**interdict**—to forbid authoritatively

**palliation**—making something (an offense or a crime) seem less serious

**propensities**—natural inclinations; tendencies

### Things to Know

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Here is some background information about this section of the book.

**Strip poker** is a poker card game in which the losing players in each hand must remove an article of clothing.

The **Rosetta Stone** is a basalt tablet with inscriptions that gave the first clue to the meaning of Egyptian hieroglyphics. It was discovered in 1799 near Rosetta, a town in northern Egypt in the Nile River delta.

The **Missouri Compromise** was an 1820 measure worked out between the North and the South and passed by the U.S. Congress that allowed for admission of Missouri as the 24th state (1821). It marked the beginning of the prolonged sectional conflict over the extension of slavery that, along with other issues, led to the American Civil War.

A **hookah** is an Eastern smoking pipe. It has a long tube passing through an urn of water that cools the smoke as it is drawn through.

An **Add-A-Pearl necklace** is a traditional gift for a young girl that begins with one, three, or five pearls on a 14-karat gold chain. As the years go by, the necklace may grow into a full strand of pearls as friends and family add gifts of pearls.

*Build Your Vocabulary*

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

- “Every night-sound I heard from my cot on the back porch was magnified three-fold; . . . insects splashing against the screen were Boo Radley’s insane fingers picking the wire to pieces; the chinaberry trees were **malignant**, hovering, alive.”  
malignant: \_\_\_\_\_
- “The night-crawlers had retired, but ripe chinaberries drummed on the roof when the wind stirred, and the darkness was **desolate** with the barking of distant dogs.”  
desolate: \_\_\_\_\_
- “‘You like words like damn and hell now, don’t you?’ I said I reckoned so. ‘Well I don’t,’ said Uncle Jack, ‘not unless there’s extreme **provocation** connected with ’em. . . .’”  
provocation: \_\_\_\_\_
- “Aunt Alexandra’s vision of my **deportment** involved playing with small stoves, tea sets, and wearing the Add-A-Pearl necklace she gave me when I was born. . . .”  
deportment: \_\_\_\_\_
- “‘Such conduct as yours required little understanding. It was **obstreperous**, disorderly and abusive—’”  
obstreperous: \_\_\_\_\_
- “If she was on the porch when we passed, we would be raked by her **wrathful** gaze, subjected to ruthless interrogation regarding our behavior, and given a melancholy prediction on what we would amount to when we grew up, which was always nothing.”  
wrathful: \_\_\_\_\_
- “I wasn’t sure what Jem resented most, but I took **umbrage** at Mrs. Dubose’s assessment of the family’s mental hygiene.”  
umbrage: \_\_\_\_\_
- “What Jem did was something I’d do as a matter of course had I not been under Atticus’s **interdict**, which I assumed included not fighting horrible old ladies.”  
interdict: \_\_\_\_\_
- “She was a less than satisfactory source of **palliation**, but she did give Jem a hot biscuit-and-butter which he tore in half and shared with me.”  
palliation: \_\_\_\_\_
- “. . . that is, Mrs. Dubose would hound Jem for a while on her favorite subjects, her camellias and our father’s nigger-loving **propensities**; . . .”  
propensities: \_\_\_\_\_

## Check Your Understanding

### Short Answer

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Write a short answer for each question.

1. Who sealed up the knot-hole in the oak tree, and why?
2. Why does Scout feel she may be partially responsible for the unusual snowstorm?
3. How does Miss Maudie react when her house burns down?
4. Why does Atticus agree to defend Tom Robinson despite the negative reaction of the townspeople?
5. Why does Scout tell her Uncle Jack that he doesn't understand children?
6. Why do Scout and Jem think of their father as old and weak before the Tom Robinson case?
7. According to Miss Maudie, why is it a sin to kill a mockingbird?
8. Why are Scout and Jem so surprised when Atticus shoots Tim Johnson?
9. Mrs. Dubose criticizes Atticus for two reasons. What are they?
10. Why do Jem and Scout have to read to Mrs. Dubose for longer and longer each day?



## Focus Your Reading

### Vocabulary Words to Know

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Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

**altercation**—a loud quarrel

**melancholy**—sad; depressed; thoughtful

**denunciation**—a public announcement of disapproval

**formidable**—inspiring awe, admiration, or wonder

**prerogative**—an exclusive right or privilege held by a person or group

**caste**—a social class separated from others by distinctions of hereditary rank, profession, or wealth

**futility**—uselessness

**morbid**—psychologically unhealthy

**elucidate**—to make clear or plain; to clarify

**unobtrusive**—not noticeable; inconspicuous

### Things to Know

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Here is some background information about this section of the book.

During the Great Depression, **sit-down strikes** became a real force in labor relations in the United States. These are nonviolent strikes in which protesters sit down at the site of an injustice and refuse to move for a specified period of time or until goals are achieved. A famous example is the Flint (Michigan) sit-down strike of 1936–1937, in which auto workers sat down on the job for forty-four days in protest for union recognition.

**Octagon Soap** was a harsh lye soap intended primarily for laundry, but often used as an all-purpose soap.

The **Garden of Gethsemane** was where Jesus went to pray on the night before his crucifixion. It was in this garden that he was arrested by Roman soldiers.

**Prohibition** was the period (1920–1933) during which the 18th Amendment forbidding the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages was in force in the United States.

**Bootleggers** are people who make, sell, and/or transport alcoholic liquor for sale illegally.

The **War Between the States** was the American Civil War (1861–1865).

## Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “After one **altercation** when Jem hollered, “t’s time you started bein’ a girl and acting right!” I burst into tears and fled to Calpurnia.”  
altercation: \_\_\_\_\_
2. “Line for line, voices followed in simple harmony until the hymn ended in a **melancholy** murmur.”  
melancholy: \_\_\_\_\_
3. “His sermon was a forthright **denunciation** of sin. . . .”  
denunciation: \_\_\_\_\_
4. “. . . Aunt Alexandra’s was once an hour-glass figure. From any angle, it was **formidable**.”  
formidable: \_\_\_\_\_
5. “She was never bored, and given the slightest chance she would exercise her royal **prerogative**: she would arrange, advise, caution, and warn.”  
prerogative: \_\_\_\_\_
6. “There was indeed a **caste** system in Maycomb, but to my mind it worked this way: the older citizens, the present generation of people who had lived side by side for years, were utterly predictable to one another. . . .”  
caste: \_\_\_\_\_
7. “I began to sense the **futility** one feels when unacknowledged by a chance acquaintance.”  
futility: \_\_\_\_\_
8. “‘t’s **morbid**, watching a poor devil on trial for his life. Look at all those fools, it’s like a Roman carnival.”  
morbid: \_\_\_\_\_
9. “We asked Miss Maudie to **elucidate**: she said Miss Stephanie seemed to know so much about the case she might as well be called on to testify.”  
elucidate: \_\_\_\_\_
10. “I found myself in the middle of the Idlers’ Club and made myself as **unobtrusive** as possible.”  
unobtrusive: \_\_\_\_\_



## Check Your Understanding

### Short Answer

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Write a short answer for each question.

1. What do Aunt Alexandra and Atticus argue about?
2. What does Jem do when Dill runs away from home and turns up in Scout's bedroom? Why does Scout feel that Jem "broke the remaining code of our childhood"?
3. Dill explains to Scout the real reason he ran away from home. What does he say? How does Scout feel about his reason?
4. Why does Dill think Boo Radley has never tried to run away?
5. Why do Scout and Jem follow Atticus the night he goes to the Maycomb County jail?
6. Scout runs to her father as he faces the group of men outside of the jail. She expects him to be happy to see her, but what is Atticus's reaction?
7. Scout tries to distract the men outside of the jail. What does she talk to Mr. Cunningham about?
8. How does Dill show his respect for Atticus after the scene outside of the jail?
9. After the mob breaks up, is Atticus angry with Jem for disobeying?
10. Jem says, "... around here, once you have a drop of Negro blood, that makes you all black." What does he mean by this statement? What issue is he referring to?

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**acrimonious**—bitter and sharp in language or tone

**benignly**—showing gentleness and mildness; kindly

**complacently**—in a self-satisfied and unconcerned manner

**articulate**—expressing oneself easily in clear and effective language

**volition**—a conscious choice or decision

**collective**—made by a number of people acting as a group

**predicament**—a situation that is difficult to get out of; a dilemma

**perpetrate**—to be responsible for; to commit

**corroborative**—supporting (evidence)

**temerity**—foolhardy disregard of danger; recklessness

### Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

Before the invention of refrigerators, people used **iceboxes**, large wood cabinets kept cold on the inside by blocks of ice that were delivered to the home.

**Model-T Ford** (also known as a “tin Lizzie” or a “flivver”) was Henry Ford’s first popular success. Originally produced in 1909, it was an affordable and relatively reliable automobile.

A **chiffarobe** is a dresser or portable closet with drawers on the side.

A **cotton gin** is a machine used to separate seed and other debris from cotton.

**Mr. Jingle** is a character in Charles Dickens’s novel *The Pickwick Papers*. Mr. Jingle usually expresses himself in sentence fragments.

**Ex cathedra** remarks are statements made with the authority derived from one’s office or position.

The “**distaff side of the Executive branch**” is a reference to Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt (the Executive branch is the President, and distaff, in this case, means “wife”). Eleanor Roosevelt was often criticized, especially in the South, for her views on civil rights.