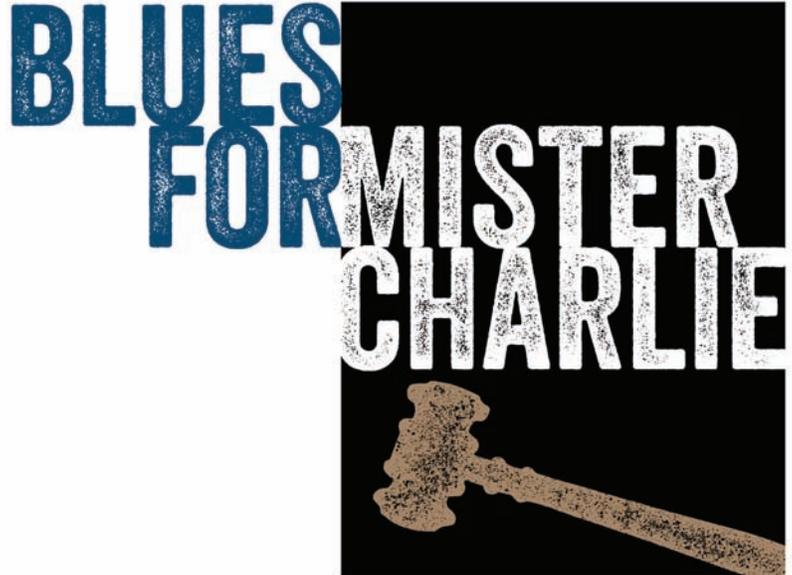
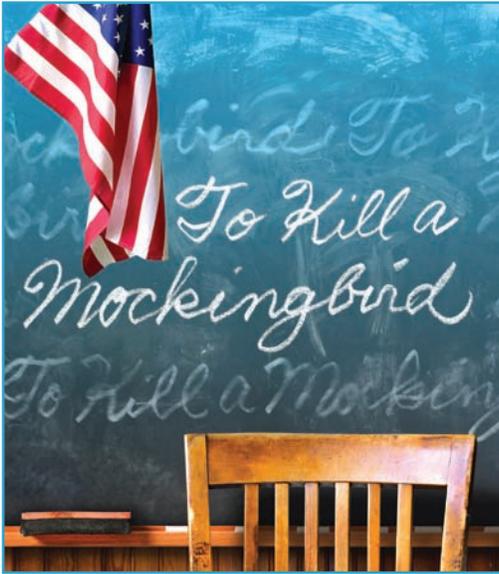


## PROJECT DISCOVERY STUDY GUIDE



*To Kill a Mockingbird* by **Harper Lee** • *Blues for Mister Charlie* by **James Baldwin**  
Directed by **Brian McEleney** • In the **Dowling Theater**

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Prepared by Catherine Braxton, Tenara Calem and Trinity Rep's Education Department



PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903

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# THEATER AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE & DISCUSSION

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY AND GO OVER WITH YOUR CLASSES BEFORE THE SHOW

## TEACHERS:

Speaking to your students about theater etiquette is ESSENTIAL. Students should be aware that this is a live performance and that they should not talk during the show. If you do nothing else to prepare your students to see the play, please take some time to talk to them about theater etiquette in an effort to help the students better appreciate their experience. It will enhance their enjoyment of the show and allow other audience members to enjoy the experience. The questions below can help guide the discussions. Thank you for your help and enjoy the show!

## ETIQUETTE:

What is the role of the audience in a live performance? What is its role in a film? Why can't you chew gum or eat popcorn at a live theater performance? Why can't you talk? What can happen in live theater that cannot happen in cinema?

Reiterate that students may not chew gum, eat, or talk during the performance. If there is a disturbance, they will be asked to leave and the class will not be invited back to the theater. Students may not leave the building during intermission.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BEFORE SEEING THE SHOW AT TRINITY REP:

What are the differences between live theater and cinema? (Two dimensional vs. three dimensional; larger than life on the screen vs. life-size; recorded vs. live, etc.) Discuss the nature of film as mass-produced, versus the one-time only nature of live performances. Talk about original art works versus posters. Which do they feel is more valuable? Why?

Observation #1 — When you get into the theater, look around. What do you see? Observe the lighting instruments around the room and on the ceiling. Look at the set. Does it look realistic or abstract? Try to guess how the set will be used during the show.

Observation #2 — Discuss the elements that go into producing a live performance: the lights, set, props, costumes, and stage direction. All the people involved in the "behind the scenes" elements of the theater are working backstage as the play unfolds before the students' eyes. Tell them to be aware of this as they watch the show. Observe the lighting cues. How do special effects work? How do the actors change costumes so fast? Actors in a live performance are very attuned to the audience and are interested in the students' reactions to the play.

Ask the students to write letters to the actors about the characters they played and to ask questions of the actors. Send these letters to: Trinity Repertory Company, c/o Education, 201 Washington St., Providence, RI 02903 or email to: [education@trinityrep.com](mailto:education@trinityrep.com).



Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch

# USING THIS STUDY GUIDE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

A LETTER FROM SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER, MATTTIBBS

Welcome to Trinity Rep and the 49th season of Project Discovery! The education staff at Trinity Rep had a lot of fun preparing this study guide, and hope that the activities included will help you incorporate the play into your academic study. It is also structured to help you to introduce performance into your classroom through the

- Community Building in Your Classroom
- Inspiration and Background on the Artist
- Entering and Comprehending Text
- Creating Text for Performance
- Performing in Your Class
- Reflecting on Your Performance



*Resident acting company member, Angela Brazil, leading an in-school workshop*

Further, the Rhode Island Department of Education has developed Grade Span Expectations for the fine arts in content, knowledge and skills that will be used to assess all students (available at <http://www.ride.ri.gov/instructionassessment/othersubjects.aspx>). Trinity Rep's Project Discovery student matinees help high school students in the following GSE and common core areas:

- Analyzing and evaluating a theatrical performance for its effective use of music, dance, or visual arts (T1-3b)
- Evaluating major and minor themes and characters and their symbolic representation (i.e., cultural references) (T3-2a)
- Evaluating techniques for their effectiveness and craft (e.g., critiquing actor's performance and the playwright's dialog) (T3-2b)
- Evaluating a play or performances based on analysis of what is seen, heard, and known to judge its value and contribution to humanity (T4-1a)
- Evaluating character's objectives and motivations based on what is seen, heard, and known to explain character's behavior (T4-1b)
- Evaluating technical elements of theatrical production (T4-1c)
- Evaluating dramatic elements of a plot for their effectiveness and cohesiveness (T4-1d)
- Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme (CCSS.RL.9-10.3)

## UNIT ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*: HARPER LEE

Harper Lee was born Nelle Harper Lee on April 28, 1926 in Monroeville, Alabama, and died on February 19, 2016. The youngest of four children (sisters Alice Finch and Louise, and her brother Edwin), Lee was raised by her mother, Frances, and her father, Amasa Coleman (known commonly as A.C.). Harper Lee attended college at Huntingdon in Montgomery in 1944 before transferring to the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, and spent a summer studying English history and literature at Oxford. Lee was primed to graduate Tuscaloosa with a law degree, but she left a semester before she could finish. "She had an itch to write," said her sister Alice. Harper moved to New York and worked as an airline reservations clerk until Christmas of 1956, when family friends gave her the funds and means to quit her job and take a year off to write. It was while she lived in the city that her mother died unexpectedly of an advanced stage of cancer. Harper was only twenty-five. Six weeks later, her brother Ed also died, at the age of thirty.

Harper Lee was an intensely private person, so there is much of her life about which we can only look to anecdotal sources. Lee's father A.C. was a lawyer, and at one point in his career defended a black father and son accused of killing a white storekeeper. They lost the case, and the father and son were hanged. People say Harper used to love to watch him in court as a small child. Many also widely believe that Truman Capote (Lee's next door neighbor for a while), was the inspiration for the character Dill.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* was published when Ms. Lee was thirty-four (the first title was simply *Atticus*). As we have discovered in the past year, *Mockingbird* was not actually her first novel, nor her first attempt at telling a story about Scout or Maycomb, Alabama. According to some reports, *Go Set a Watchman*, Lee's second book, published in July of 2015, was the manuscript she first turned into publishers, telling the story of Scout's disillusionment with her picturesque childhood when she discovers the bigotry and prejudice around her. Lee's editor, Tay Hohoff, asked her to consider a different approach to this story. And



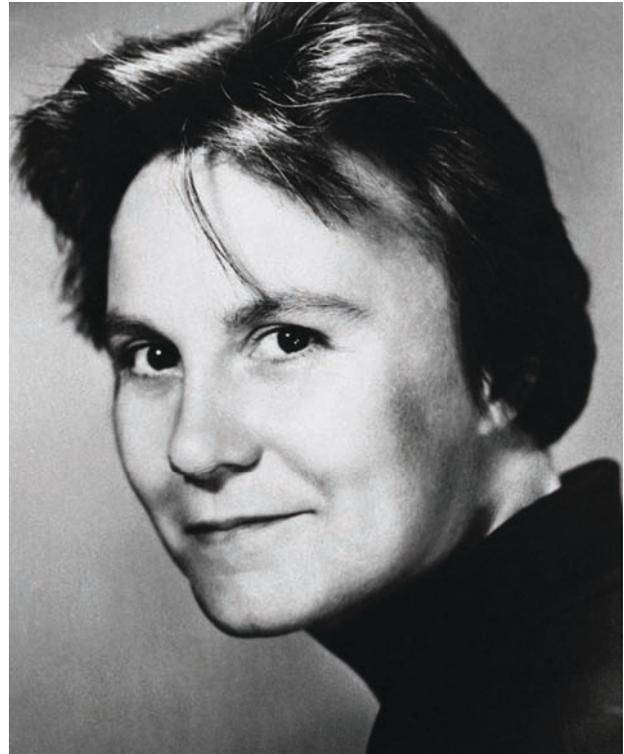
so Lee returned to her typewriter, laboring for a number of years on the classic we know and love.

Not long after *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published in 1960, Ms. Lee began to decline interviews, stepping out of the spotlight. Since then *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been translated into almost three dozen languages, is required reading for 70 percent of American high school students, and has been ranked as the second most influential book in the United States (the first being the Bible). It won the 1961 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and an Academy Award for the movie adaptation. And in the 1970s, Christopher Sergel began the long, twenty-year process of adapting the book into the stage version, which was officially copyrighted in 1990.

Lee was very particular about who handled her work, which is what made the recent publication of her first draft of *Mockingbird* so divisive. *Watchman* has managed to alienate some of her devoted fans. Many people were shocked to read that the Atticus Finch Lee had originally written was not the pillar of moral justice and dignity depicted in *Mockingbird*; but a flawed, more closed-minded man. *Watchman* also made a controversial entrance into the literary world

due to the circumstances surrounding its publication. Ms. Lee's sister Alice had acted as the guardian of her estate. Not long after Alice's death in November 2014, the publishing company HarperCollins announced the discovery of this "new" manuscript. Tonja Carter, a lawyer who worked in Alice Lee's law office and who took over Harper's affairs after Alice died, claimed she discovered the novel just before Alice's death, and brought it to HarperCollins' attention.

Harper Lee lived the last years of her life in a retirement community until her death this past February. She was in basic good health when she died, though she did suffer from significant hearing and sight loss after a stroke in 2007. She is survived by her extended family.



## UNIT ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT OF *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*: CHRISTOPHER SERGEL

Christopher Sergel was born in Iowa City, Iowa in 1918. Multiple accounts speak of him as an “adventurer.” After graduating from the University of Chicago, Sergel served in WWII as a lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Marines, where he developed his wilderness survival skills and celestial navigation. After the war ended, he worked as a captain of a *schooner* in the South Pacific, and then lived in the African bush reporting for *Sports Afield* magazine.

Christopher’s great-uncle, Charles Sergel founded Dramatists Publishing Services, a play-publishing company, in 1885, and despite all of Christopher’s adventuring around the world, his greatest love was for dramatic publishing and adaptation. In 1970, the same year that he began working on the adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird* alongside Harper Lee, Sergel became president of Dramatists Publishing Services. His work with DPS attracted a number of playwrights to the company, like Timberlake Wertenbaker, Arthur Miller, Roald Dahl, E.B. White, and C.P. Taylor. Today, DPS is one of the primary licensing and publishing companies for playwrights and theater organizations.

During his work with DPS, Sergel adapted *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Cheaper by the Dozen*, *Black Elk Speaks*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *Winesburg, Ohio*, and many more. His attention to detail, sensitivity to the source material, and artistic voice was probably what attracted Harper Lee to his vision of the staged adaptation of her book. Lee was quite clear that she wanted to approve the only licensed adaptation of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and so Sergel labored with her for twenty years. He even took her notes and revised the script after its initial premiere, so it was until 1991 that the play was officially copyrighted.

Christopher Sergel had five children, seven grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren by the time he died in 1993 of a heart failure. He remained the president of DPS up until his death. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, though intended for younger audiences, now enjoys incredible success at regional theaters around the country. There is even an annual production in Harper Lee’s hometown of Monroeville, Alabama. While many reviewers have critiqued the Sergel adaptation as a flat reproduction of Lee’s beautifully poetic novel, it was only Sergel that was granted permission to adapt the story by the author herself. Knowing this, we might infer that Lee was at least in some way satisfied with Sergel’s version.



# UNIT ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND 1933 VS. 1961

*To Kill a Mockingbird* takes place in the three-year span between 1933 and 1936 in the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama. Lee based it on memories of her own childhood in Monroeville, Alabama when she wrote it in the early 1960s. Both time periods were pivotal eras in the Civil Rights movement. What was happening in the country in 1933? What about in 1961?

### The United States in 1933

In the decades leading up to the 1930s, and indeed all the way up to the 1960s, one of the most prescient issues of the civil rights movement was lynching, in which white supremacists sought out black men and women in the community and hung them in public places. The NAACP (The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) was founded in February of 1909 in response to lynching. A group of 60 people, horrified at the persisting and increasing violence against black Americans, met to discuss a course of action. Of those 60 people, only 7 were black (including W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells-Burnett, and Mary Church Terrell). The written purpose of the NAACP was to pursue full protection of black communities under the 13th (an end to slavery), 14th (equal protection of the law), and 15th amendments (voting rights for men) of the constitution. At the time of the NAACP's foundation, W.E.B. Du Bois was the only black American included in the organization's leadership, when he was made Director of Publications and Research.

The NAACP began an anti-lynching campaign almost as soon as it was established, that focused on developing legislature to outlaw and monitor the practice. In the 1930s, after a change of leadership in the organization, Secretary of the NAACP Walter F. White (pictured right) was able to use the intelligence he gathered after infiltrating white supremacy groups to push the anti-lynching movement forward by leaps and bounds. White was able to participate in this way because he was an extremely light-skinned black man, and could pass for white in the supremacy's spaces. By 1938, due to a national consensus against lynching

the NAACP pushed in the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, the number of lynchings declined, though they were still a prevalent threat to black America.

In 1929, the United States stock market crashed, sending America into one of the longest and most dramatic economic depressions in the Western industrialized world. Millions of investors withdrew and panicked, and by 1933, 13 to 15 million Americans were unemployed and starving. Roosevelt's administration instituted relief tactics that did some measure of good, but it wasn't until the second world war started in 1939 that the American economy turned around, bolstered by the production needs of the war. However, up until that point, the depression disproportionately affected black Americans, who had already suffered economically in comparison to their white counterparts.



Walter F. White

Furthermore, the effect of the depression on the agricultural industry in the south and Midwest made for over-farming practices, in which soil was mined and re-used to try and farm as much food as possible. This produced the dust bowl, in which strong, naturally occurring winds picked up the loose soil on top of the fields and crops and sent it up in the air, producing enormous dust storms that could reach from Oklahoma to Washington, D.C.

All of these cultural, economic, and environmental elements drove frustrations and desperation to a high pitch. While the NAACP and other black activists were paving the way for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s, the United States was still a deeply unsafe and angry place for black Americans to live in. Years of ingrained prejudices informed legal and social situations, as we can see in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It was highly uncommon for authority figures to believe a black man over a white man, which Bob Ewell co-opted in order to sabotage Tom Robinson's life. As Miss Maudie says in the play, "Atticus Finch won't win, he can't win, but he's the only man in these parts who can keep a jury out so long in a case like this."

### **The United States in 1960**

By the time HarperCollins published Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* in 1960, the Civil Rights Movement had moved forward exponentially since the events in the 1933 story. Throughout the 40s, black activists had made a concerted effort to address educational inequities in the United States. The NAACP and other organizers used a careful strategy of initiating suits against school boards that they knew they could win,

and then building upon the success of each suit to take on the next law. By the 1950s, the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (led by Thurgood Marshall) won their lawsuit against the Federal Board of Education (*Brown vs. Board of Education*), which effectively outlawed segregation in schools in 1954. The increased media attention on the subsequent violence against black children as the desegregation process began in the United States increased the pressure many felt in fighting for their civil rights. A number of activists then rose to the public eye, like Martin Luther King Jr., a Baptist minister who believed that non-violent, passive resistance was the most effective direct action towards civil rights. At the same time, Malcolm X was pushing for black actualization through his association with the Nation of Islam. Known to be a more radical and virulent activist than Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X believed that equality should be achieved through "any means necessary".

There were also a number of women fighting for Civil Rights in the 1960s. Amelia Boynton, who became the first African American and first female Democrat to run for a congressional seat in Alabama in 1964, was instrumental in achieving voting rights from black Americans. Marva Collins, born in Monroeville ten years after Harper Lee, fought for universal education and even opened her own school in Chicago in 1975. Mildred Loving attracted attention after violating the state of Virginia's Racial Integrity Act by marrying Richard Loving, a white man. Their case, in 1967, successfully struck down the law.



The time period of the early 60s was characterized by the Cold War; a diplomatic freeze between the Soviet Union of Russia and its allies and the United States and the rest of Western Europe. In 1961, John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as the 35th President of the United States. This was also the same year that a family in Massachusetts spent a weekend in a fallout shelter to test their radiation protection equipment in preparation for nuclear warfare. It was the fear of Soviet Communism getting anywhere near American soil that put most Americans on edge in the year 1961; Cuba, under the direction of Prime Minister Fidel Castro, was getting increasingly more communist. In April of that year, Kennedy's administration launched an attempt to sabotage and overthrow Castro's government (known as the Bay of Pigs Invasion). This failed when, after three days, the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces defeated the CIA. Almost a year and a half after Bay of Pigs, Kennedy's government would once more go head-to-head with Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis, which was the closest the United States ever got to engaging in active warfare with a neighboring country.

In 1960, the United States was also leaving a decade of internal paranoia and investigation from the House Un-American Activities Committee, known best by its affiliation in the 50s with Senator Joseph McCarthy. HUAC was a United States government committee created in the late 30s to monitor Nazi activity happening on American soil, but in the 50s, at the start of the Cold War, it turned its focus on Communist Party activity. It is most famous for establishing a Hollywood Blacklist, where any artist suspected of being a Communist was blacklisted from working in Hollywood by all major studios. While its prevalence and reputation had declined by the year 1960, the inner turmoil it caused — along with the subsequent popular rejection and skepticism of American political authority — paved the way for some of the civil disobedience work civil rights activists were able to do in protest.

1960 was a year full of social upheaval, geopolitical uncertainty, and economic development in the United States. In the decade to come, increased attention at the United States' involvement in Vietnam would come to the forefront of many student activist

groups, that would begin working towards dismantling the mandatory draft in the United States. It is the late 1950s and early 60s that can be characterized by the different organizations working at various degrees of radicality for a more democratic, equal America: the NAACP, the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Weathermen Underground, the Black Panther Party, and the Yippies. Each organization and group was fighting against some element of oppression — racial, gendered, geopolitical, or democratic. It is no wonder then, that when Harper Lee's novel came out, it struck a very deep chord with most Americans. It touched on the themes still prevalent in their lives, while turning the clock backwards thirty years.



*Mildred Loving*



*Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee*

# UNIT TWO: THE PLAY AND PRODUCTION

## A SYNOPSIS OF *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

### Act One

Jean Louise “Scout” Finch, a six-year-old girl who lives with her older brother Jem and their father Atticus, a lawyer, in the sleepy town of Maycomb, Alabama. Scout and Jem befriend a young boy named Dill, who’s visiting his Aunt Rachel in Maycomb for the summer. The three children are both terrified and enthralled with their neighbor, Arthur “Boo” Radley, who they believe is trapped in his house because of violent, monstrous behavior.

At the beginning of the play, the audience is introduced to other characters who live in Scout’s world: her neighbors Miss Maudie and Miss Stephanie are two women who enjoy gabbing and gossiping about the people who live in Maycomb. Scout is governed by a strict but loving black woman named Calpurnia, who works in the house while Atticus works. Maycomb is a town of middle class, and very poor residents, including white farmers like Bob Ewell or Walter Cunningham, who have little money and no empathy for the black members of their community.

Scout, Jem, and Dill spend their summer idyllically, until turmoil in the town of Maycomb reaches the children’s ears. Their father has been hired to defend Tom Robinson, a black man, against the accusation he has raped Mayella, Bob Ewell’s daughter. The processes this news, publically and loudly in front of the children, who begin to piece together the racial prejudice that courses through their town.

As two children who believe their father is old and boring, Jem and Scout discover something surprising about Atticus after Jem runs home one day saying he’s spotted a “mad dog” (a dog with rabies) coming down the street. Calpurnia calls the sheriff and Atticus, and both arrive in time before the dog harms anyone. Sheriff Heck Tate pleads with Atticus to take care of the situation, insisting that Atticus is a better shot than he is. Begrudgingly, Atticus shoots the dog from down the street, duly impressing his son and daughter. He quietly explains that he does not like guns, and that his natural proclivity for shooting should

not be heralded.

As the trial of Tom Robinson approaches, the town of Maycomb grows embroiled in conversations about race. Mrs. Dubose, a white woman living on Jem and Scout’s street angers Jem after shouting a racial expletive after their father. Meanwhile, Mr. Cunningham, Ewell, and a number of other farmers, try to break into the town’s holding cell to get at Tom Robinson. It is Atticus’s protection, and ultimately Scout’s interjection with kindness and compassion, that turn the men away.

When the trial starts, Jem, Scout, and Dill sneak into the courtroom and sit with the Reverend Sykes from the black church in Maycomb. Sheriff Heck Tate, Bob Ewell, and Mayella Ewell are all called to testify. Through his interrogation of the first two men, Atticus establishes that Mayella Ewell, during the attack, was punched in the right eye. During Bob Ewell’s testimony, he tells the story of coming upon the house and seeing Tom Robinson attacking his daughter. His vitriolic language and anger shocks Jem and Scout, but they insist, despite Reverend Sykes protests, that they will stay for the rest of the trial.

### Act Two

When Atticus begins to cross-examine Bob Ewell, he politely asks him to write out his name, and the court discovers that Bob Ewell is left-handed. This is important, because it establishes that Bob Ewell’s dominant hand would be the hand an aggressor would use to punch Mayella. When Mayella Ewell comes up on the stand. Atticus questions not only the nature of the attack she was describing, but why no one else in the household, which included a number of other children came to her aid. Mayella, terrified to be treated with so much respect by a man her father’s age, repeats that Tom Robinson raped her. Yet when Atticus calls Tom Robinson to the stand, he recounts that Mayella asked him to come into the house to help her move an old armoire. Having sent her brothers and sisters to get

a treat in town, she tries to kiss Tom. As he protests, Bob Ewell sees the scene from the outside window and threatens to kill Mayella.

As Tom swore his oath, he put his left hand on the bible and the court saw that the hand he would have used to punch Mayella was shrivelled and crippled, effectively limiting him from being able to do any real damage. When Tom finished giving his testimony, Atticus makes his case to the court. He argues that what Tom Robinson is actually being put on trial for is that he is a black man who showed kindness to a poor white woman because he pitied her situation.

Despite showing that Tom Robinson could not have punched Mayella in the face, thereby casting enough reasonable doubt on Bob Ewell's story, Atticus and Tom do not win the case. The jury, having spent an entire afternoon deliberating, come back into the courtroom and announce that they find Tom Robinson guilty. In the subsequent fall-out, Bob Ewell promises Atticus that he will enact retribution for the harm Atticus did in defending Tom Robinson's innocence. Shortly thereafter, word arrives that Tom Robinson has been shot attempting to escape prison.

At the end of summer, when life appears to have gone back to normal, Jem and Scout are on their way one night to their school for a performance when they are attacked by someone in the woods between their home and school. When the dust settles, Bob Ewell lies dead in the field with a knife in his ribs, Jem has a broken arm, and a man that neither Jem nor Scout have ever seen before stands protectively nearby. When Sheriff Tate and Atticus arrive, they introduce Scout and Jem to Boo Radley, the man who helped fight off Bob Ewell. Atticus gets nervous that it was Scout who accidentally killed Bob Ewell, but Sheriff Tate assures him that Mr. Ewell fell on his knife (despite an implicit understanding that it was actually Boo Radley who killed him). At the play's end, Atticus asks Scout to accompany Boo Radley home, and Scout says "Didn't have to stand in Boo Radley's shoes to know him. Just standing on his porch was enough."



*Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch and Brock Peters as Tom Robinson*

# UNIT TWO: THE PLAY AND PRODUCTION

## THE CHARACTERS



**Jean Louise "Scout" Finch** - a young girl



**Jeremy "Jem" Finch** - her older brother



**Atticus Finch** - their father, a lawyer



**Calpurnia** - the Finch's housekeeper



**Maudie Atkinson** - a neighbor



**Stephanie Crawford** - a neighbor



**Mrs. Dubose** - a neighbor



**Arthur "Boo" Radley** - a neighbor



**Charles "Dill" Baker Harris** - a young boy



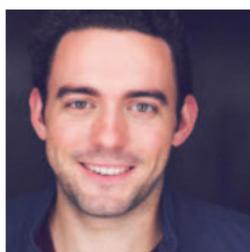
**Bob Ewell** - a farmer, and Mayella Ewell's father



**Tom Robinson** - a young black man



**Mayella Ewell** - a poor young woman



**Walter Cunningham** - a farmer

### OTHER CHARACTERS

**Judge Taylor** - the Judge in Maycomb

**Reverend Sykes** - a minister

**Sheriff Heck Tate** - Maycomb County's sheriff

**Mr. Gilmer** - the public prosecutor

**Clerk** - working at the court

## UNIT TWO: THE PLAY AND PRODUCTION

### TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD AND BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE

In the summer of 2015, Brian McEleney directed *Blues for Mister Charlie* by James Baldwin and *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the Bread Loaf School of English in Vermont. His desire was to produce these two plays in rep to more fully engage in a conversation about race. Information and a synopsis about *Blues for Mister Charlie* follow the *To Kill a Mockingbird* exercise information.

#### A Word from Trinity Rep's Artistic Director on these productions:

**Curt Columbus:** When Brian brought me the idea for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I said, "I've seen that, it's boring, and I'm not interested in it." And he said, well, we'll do it differently. So the challenge right from the beginning was how do we take *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which is a narrative that makes people feel comfortable — particularly white people feel comfortable around race — and make it something that discomferts them enough to make them look at it in a new way.

#### An interview with director Brian McEleney

Rebecca Noon, Trinity's community engagement Coordinator, sat down with director Brian McEleney and asked him a few questions about his productions of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Blues for Mister Charlie*.

**Rebecca Noon:** What is your history with this project?

**Brian McEleney:** I run the theater program at the Breadloaf School of English and so I'm charged with picking the plays. I'd done a lot of Shakespeare plays, but I'd wanted to do an American play and a play that addressed the African American experience. *Blues for Mister Charlie* is a play that I have always admired and taught in acting classes though I've never seen a production, so I said, this would be a play I'd love to work on. However, because Bread Loaf is a very specific community, (it's not a theater, it's a school where a lot of high school teachers come for the summer) I said, it's not quite the right thing. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is

something that's incredibly relevant to a lot of high school teachers, and so then I said, 'ooh, I should do both, because they work together really, really well.'

So aside from Trinity Rep, my vision for *To Kill a Mockingbird* was to do it as a companion piece with *Blues for Mister Charlie*. That they were one and the same event, with two perspectives and casts, all that stuff. It has morphed into something a little different here at Trinity Rep. I love both plays, they both stand really well on their own. I think it will be a very provocative, interesting, and moving event. We have been devoting equal amounts of time on both plays. Even though *Blues* only has three performances, we have been rehearsing it exactly the same amount of time and energy as we've been rehearsing *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

**Rebecca Noon:** That'll be interesting for people to know, that this cast is actually working in rep. So can you describe, from a production standpoint, the look and feel of these shows? What is the set? When we walk into the theater, what are we going to see?

**Brian McEleney:** Sure. So, I'm not that interested in presenting realism on the stage. I think film does that much better, and our great strength in theater is that we're all in the same room looking at an imaginative experience that the audience gets to invest in with us. It has always been my feeling that presenting pure realism on the stage with a porch and a swing and a dog and a gun and a courtroom really allows the audience just to kind of sit back and number one let the play wash over them and number two kind of make their entire critical experience remain in 'do I believe this or not, is this realistic or not', and that doesn't seem the best way to be in the theater to me. We're asking audiences to invest imaginatively with us, and in doing that to become part of the experience we're creating here. So I'm always looking for ways to be unrealistic, and to create an environment in which the story can be told.

Most people encounter *To Kill a Mockingbird* in a high school classroom, and that seemed like a good, potential way of telling the story. My advice to the actors was to imagine that thirteen Trinity Rep actors are going to a high school classroom and are putting on a production of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. What would that look like? What would we need, what would we not need, how could it be all about the acting, all about the story-telling, all about those thirteen people, telling that story to a group of students? That is the look and feel of it. Hopefully it will allow us and the audience to ask why has *To Kill a Mockingbird* become one of the most taught novels in the American canon? What is it teaching, what is it leaving out? I don't have the answer to that, I'm hoping to pose those questions.

**Rebecca Noon:** Can you tell us about those desks?

**Brian McElaney:** Oh, those desks. I rescued those desks from Bread Loaf. They have been the desks in those classrooms from time immemorial, back when I was there when dinosaurs ruled the earth. The summer before I directed these plays, they replaced them all with high-tech chairs that looked like somebody had spent a million dollars on them and these were going in the dumpster, so I rescued them.

**Rebecca Noon:** And then, in the show — your work, as you often say, asks us to take imaginative leaps, since there's a lot of transformative objects. So how do those desks work?

**Brian McElaney:** Well, they're our only scenery — the desk chairs, and the desks. You know, they are the architecture in which the actors tell the play. In my directing universe, the set should be architecture, a platform on which actors can tell the story. A set shouldn't be telling its own story. Eugene Lee (Trinity Rep's resident sound designer) has said often that when you walk into a theater, you should look at the set and say, "what's happening here?" It should not look finished until the actors are on it. And it's my feeling that if you walk into a theater and see a beautiful set, then something's awry. The set should look completely unfinished until the actors come on and we say, "oh I get what this is." And I hope that's what their experience is like with me.

**Rebecca Noon:** Can you talk a little bit about the personal stories that are going to be woven in?

**Brian McElaney:** The play, to me, is very much — I'm going to say something that sounds dismissive — it's a young adult novel. It's about a young girl coming into her adulthood, seeing the world for the first time, growing from a place of childhood innocence to adulthood experience, and that is what the book is to me. It's not about race, race is certainly part of that, it is certainly a part of her world that she suddenly sees and experiences for the first time, but the story is about the awakening of Scout to the world around her. This includes a lot of things — it includes the understanding of her father. The first lines of the book are about how her father is nothing — that he's not impressive in any way. She learns that he is a hero. She sees the world around her as something that's very complicated, she experiences injustice — especially racial injustice for the first time. She sees that horrible Mrs. Dubose as a human being. She sees finally, Boo Radley, who everyone in town dismissed as a word we can't even use in 2016 — as a complicated, heroic human being. So it's a series of awakenings, a series of going from innocence to experiences. I wanted that to be the central core of the action, so I asked the actors to come in with a personal story from their lives in which they went from innocence to experience. Some of them are about race, some of them are not, and they will all be telling those stories. I am hoping that the audience will use those stories as a helpful way to look at the play, as a way to look at the actors as people rather than merely as representations of the characters they're playing, but they actually get to encounter the actors on a personal level as story-tellers.

**Rebecca Noon:** What's the editing and curating process of those stories? Who decides where they slot in? Is that all work that you're doing?

**Brian McElaney:** That is the work that I did. We all told our stories on the second day of rehearsal. It was a very emotional hour and a half. And then I went home and decided what order they should be in. They work in transitionally in the play. Some of them happen at

the beginning, some of them happen between scenes. That's really all the editing I did. I told the actors to edit their stories down to their bare essentials. We're in the process of each actor editing their stories right now.

**Rebecca Noon:** What element of both of these shows are you most excited about? This could be small, or a big concept.

**Brian McElaney:** Well, right at the moment, we're at the place where the actors are really starting to take ownership of the play. They're in a steep curve of learning what the play is and learning their lines, and the moment that we're in now — that thrilling, magical moment when the actors really start acting. The thing that's amazing to me is how extraordinary it is — when I say we don't have sets, we don't have sound, we don't have a lot of things, it's because I believe in an actor's theater, it's one of the reasons why I've been here all these years. I believe very, very strongly that actors should be the one who are contacting the audience. The story shouldn't be told through sets and lights and hues and technology and spectacle, but that it's the actors actually telling the story that is at the heart of the experience. And that sounds great, but when you say that, then the acting has to be phenomenal, because when it's all you got, then it has to be great. And I believe that the acting here is pretty great.

**Rebecca Noon:** Is there something right now that's nerve-wracking about the whole thing?

**Brian McElaney:** Well, time's nerve-wracking. You know, it sounds great to say we're rehearsing two plays, but we're rehearsing two plays in the space of one, which means we get three days a week to rehearse each play. That's not much, and the actors are trying to memorize and learn, and work on two, three, four characters at once, do two plays, it's — stressful is the wrong word, it's challenging. But everybody seems to be up to the challenge. But, I mean, we're pushing. It's not luxurious.

**Rebecca Noon:** So we should talk about the casting.

**Brian McElaney:** Absolutely. Now, I just want to say before we start that I don't want to assert on any level that Trinity Repertory Company has any answers to all of the racial issues that are going on in the United States at the moment. This is a play. Now, most of us are familiar with this book, play, or movie. What I'm trying to do is take a very familiar piece of art and get us to look at it differently.

**Rebecca Noon:** When did you first know that, if you were going to do this show, you weren't going to cast it traditionally?

**Brian McElaney:** Well, this is not a new idea, Trinity Rep has been doing this for decades. However, we're all prisoners of history. This started at Breadloaf, where I was doing both *Blues for Mister Charlie* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. *Blues for Mister Charlie* demands the presence of six African American actors, so I had to find within the cast of *To Kill a Mockingbird* six parts for African American actors. That's where it all started. And so I was casting for who would be good in that role? And that's what it is, it's how I always think about casting. In this context at Trinity Rep, I could not possibly — I tend to speak hyperbolically — I couldn't stand behind a production of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in which there was no nontraditional casting, which would leave me with a cast of white people telling a white story, in which the black actors were only playing Calpurnia the maid, Reverend Sykes, the very submissive reverend, and Tom Robinson, the impossibly innocent victim. That's not of interest to me at all. I don't even know that we could justify doing that production.

So much of our job is how do we take the classic stories of Western literature from Shakespeare to American and assert that everyone can own them? That's my opinion. It's not everyone's opinion. August Wilson has very famously said that we should not be producing Shakespeare, that it's an assertion of white cultural imperialism. I respect that opinion, it's not my opinion. It's also my opinion that everyone in our company, in our MFA acting body, in our audiences, both adult and student, should be able to own, claim,

and respond to the classic stories of the American canon — whatever that means. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is an essential text in American literature. I don't want it only owned by white people.

**Rebecca Noon:** So it's my understanding that, in this form of nontraditional casting, these are black actors playing white characters, as opposed to, for example, Mia Ellis, a black actress, last year playing Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*, and playing her as a black woman. So the actors playing Mrs. Dubose, Jem, and Mayella — these are black actors playing white people.

**Brian McElaney:** We've been selling *A Christmas Carol* for years, and I know people who say, "I will never come see *A Christmas Carol* again since Ed Hall (an African-American actor) played the role. I will never see it again if they're going to have to a girl Scrooge." I mean, I respect that opinion, but I don't agree with it. Why would we do *A Christmas Carol* with an all-white cast, just because that's what Dickens' society looked like? What's the point?

I have no children in this play. The three leading characters in this play, aside from Atticus, are children, and I have adults playing them. The audience has to look at this play and say, 'oh, these are thirteen actors doing this play'. And that's what I see.

**Rebecca Noon:** This conversation is very valuable, since race is a conversation that we're all having right now, it's not gone away, and in some ways it's come up more to the surface in different industries — theater not being exempt from it, nor should it be. So what do you think is going to be the thing that our audiences are going to want to talk about the most?

**Brian McElaney:** The personal stories. Because they force the actors and the audience to personalize the play. I mean, that's my whole point.



*Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch in the film version*

## UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

### ON ADAPTATION

Up until this year, it was widely accepted that Christopher Sergel was the only person given express permission by Harper Lee to adapt her novel. Recently, however, the theater world is abuzz with the news that Aaron Sorkin, the acclaimed writer of such TV shows and movies as *The West Wing*, *Studio 60*, *Newsroom*, *A Few Good Men*, and *The Social Network*, will be adapting Lee's novel into another staged version. None of the recent publications on the story have divulged the nature of Sorkin's licensing right to adapt the story.

The issue of adaptation, especially when it comes to licensing, is complex and involved. For many works of art, adapting it into another medium (for example, like in the case of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, from a novel into a play) requires chief consent given by the original artist. This is called intellectual property rights, or the legal acknowledgement that a piece of art or an invention (or even, sometimes, an idea) belongs exclusively to the person who created it. To adapt something without violating intellectual property rights, the adaptor either must abstract it enough so it makes no official reference to the inspiration, or be in direct contact with the creator themselves. This process has the potential to be the roadblock that stops the adaptation entirely. On the other hand, some works exist in the public domain. This means that its creator or author no longer has intellectual property rights. Usually this is because a significant amount of time has passed since the author's death. When a work is



in the public domain, adaptors can work freely without limitations. For example, Timberlake Wertenbaker's play *The Love of the Nightingale* is an adaptation of the Greek myth of the Rape of Philomele, a source material so ancient that it's in the public domain (pictured).

Adaptations' complexity goes beyond just the legal ramifications. People who adapt work have to think about their source material through a number of different lenses. At the heart of this process is the question of what to adapt. For example, in Christopher Sergel's adaptation, the primary element of adaptation seems simply to be the medium. Just like the 1962 movie version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, it is possible that Christopher Sergel's adaptation meant only to translate Harper Lee's novel into a theatrical form.

Medium, however, is not the only element Sergel could have chosen to adapt. There are number of different elements (also known as surfaces) through which an artist can enter the source material in order to adapt it. Below is a list of the different surfaces in a work. This list is by no means complete.

- Medium (book into play)
- Plot (changing something about the plot)
- Theme (same plot with a different focus)
- Voice/perspective (telling the same story from a different character)
- Character (changing some nature of one particular character)
- Structure (changing the way the story is told)

Adaptations are not strictly limited to text-driven work, however. While Sergel's version is an adaptation of the original story, we can look at Brian McEleney's production as an adaptation of Sergel's script. In a production, there are many times that directors, designers, and actors are faced with choices about the work that inform the final product. Some of these choices might seem small, but end up affecting the play in a very large way. They can range from how big the plates on stage will be to the color of a character's

shirt. Actors also make choices about their character in specific moments — how they interpret certain things, in what ways they will respond. For example, the actor playing Boo Radley may make a choice to act as if Boo is curious about the world around him, which may then lead the audience to believe that he has rarely seen Maycomb. Or, the actor may choose that Boo is quite familiar with Maycomb, which then might prompt the conclusion that he has retreated to his house after spending quite a bit of time in the outside world.

Directors face choices as well. Their choices are integrated with every element of the production. They help the actors make choices that serve their vision of the play, and they help designers make choices that look the best onstage. One of the most important choices that a director faces is in casting their production. It is one of the first in a long line of decisions they have to make. Who will play what role determines so much about the final product.

In this production, as you have read above in Brian McEleney's interview, McEleney has chosen to do cross-racial casting (for more detailed information about the concept of cross-racial casting, see below).

He has cast two black women in the roles of Mayella and Mrs. Dubose, and a black man in the role of Jem (all three are white characters). McEleney's reasoning for this choice is, as he said before, to explode the way we talk about race.

As you can see, a production can be an adaptation as well. Sergel certainly did not specify in his play that Mayella, Mrs. Dubose, and Jem were meant to be played by black actors. He also did not set the play in a classroom, as McEleney has done, nor ask that the actors playing Scout, Jem, and Dill be adults. The choices that a director makes about their version of the play can be seen as an adaptation of the source material. In this case, the source material is itself an adaptation of something else.

We want to encourage you to look at any play you see as some manner of adaptation. Even if it is presented exactly the way the playwright has intended, there are still a series of choices that take any production up to its feet. As audience members, you get to ask questions about these choices. Do you agree with them? How do they make you feel? How would you do it?



*Robert Duvall as Boo Radley and Mary Badham as Scout in the film version*

## UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

### ON NONTRADITIONAL CASTING

What is nontraditional casting? In its essence, nontraditional casting is placing a non-white or non-male actor in a role that is most likely designated for white men. For example, in an upcoming production of *King Lear* at the Old Vic in London, 79 year old Glenda Jackson (pictured below) will be playing the titular King. That a woman of that age would be cast in the male role is certainly an example of “nontraditional” casting. And yet, for many, nontraditional casting is a way of asking directors and casting agents to look at hiring more racially diverse actors. This can be by looking at the social ramifications of a non-white actor playing a role traditionally dominated by white men, or as a way of participating in the moral obligation to make theater and the media a more racially inclusive place.

Nontraditional casting is different than cross-racial casting. Cross-racial casting is looking to cast white roles specifically with non-white actors, and vice versa, just as cross-gender casting (or gender-bent casting) looks to cast women in the male roles and men in the female roles. Oftentimes these two concepts (nontraditional and cross-racial/gender) can be conflated with each other, but they are not always the same thing. For example, casting a production of *Hamlet* with a female Hamlet and a male Ophelia is cross-gendered casting, while a production of *Romeo and Juliet* with a female Romeo and Juliet would be non-traditional, since the cross-gendered aspect of the casting decisions is not consistent across the board. Additionally, there is color blind casting, which is casting a role with the actor who best fits it, regardless of their race. A good example of color blind casting is in *The Sound of Music* production depicted in the book *Surviving the Applewhites* by Stephanie S. Tolan. In that production, because of the limited number of actors that came out for the auditions, the director cast a Vietnamese woman as Maria, and a racially diverse group of Von Trappe children. He did this regardless of any confusion in the continuity of the story. Color blind casting has become a highly contentious issue, however, just as saying that you are “color blind” is

no longer politically correct. Many people of color do not want white people to completely erase their racial identities by saying that they are “color-blind,” but rather to recognize, acknowledge, and celebrate them.

Many theater artists have varying feelings of support and dissent on nontraditional and cross-racial casting. For example, August Wilson, a notable black playwright, author of plays like *Fences*, *The Piano Lesson*, and *Radio Golf*, dismisses nontraditional casting entirely, even in favor of casting black actors in white roles. “An all-black production of *Death of a Salesman*, or any other play conceived for white actors, is to deny us (black people) our own humanity, our own history, and the need to make our own investigations from the cultural ground on which we stand as black Americans.” His primary objection is that plays written by white authors were not meant to speak to the non-white experience. Casting black or non-white actors in those roles then does a disservice not only to the intention of the playwright, but to the desire to see artists of color generating their own work about their experiences.

However, others might disagree with that. While casting *Death of a Salesman* with an all black cast may not make sense, older plays from antiquity into the renaissance have been traditionally cast with white men, even in female roles, up until a relatively recent period of time in history. Casting actors of color in these roles (especially in Shakespeare) is a nontraditional way of broadening the diversity in theater. Because these plays are so old and therefore are boiled down to their most essential thematic messages, many theater artists believe that they speak to more universal truths than what contemporary plays do today.

The question regarding nontraditional, cross-racial, or color blind casting is all about intent. What is the intention behind the casting choices? If it is to cast the best actor possible, does it do service to the play to ask the audience to suspend their disbelief regarding racial continuity (a white mother and a black father and a Chinese son)? If the intention is to open

up roles that are traditionally dominated by white men to other actors, how does the play's message change when it is forced out of the white, male experience, and — most importantly — does that new message then make sense? And finally, if the intention is to provoke a conversation about issues such as race, gender, and privilege, what role does the original story play in that conversation?

These questions — infinitely complex — have prompted conversations that have also developed what is called color conscious casting. Color conscious casting asks artists to consider the race of both the actor and the character, and then look at whether the casting is supported by the text. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the character Mercutio is an outsider beloved by all, and yet, he does not belong with the Capulets nor the Montagues (despite being Romeo's best friend). His point of view on love, marriage, war, and Verona differs greatly from the Montagues and the Capulets. Casting Mercutio as a non-white man is supported by this story and position (on the right is Harold Perrineau, the actor who played Mercutio in Baz Luhrman's *Romeo + Juliet* movie). So if the Montagues and Capulets were all white, but Mercutio was played by an Asian man, or a Hispanic woman, for example, the story would support the casting. Color conscious casting makes the director or artist identify which roles must be played by the races they were designated, and which roles can be cast more nontraditionally.



Glenda Jackson



Harold Perrineau as Mercutio in *Romeo + Juliet*

## UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

### EXERCISE 1: ADAPTING HARPER LEE'S NOVEL

Below is the scene where Atticus shoots the mad dog. The first excerpt is from Harper Lee's original book. The second is from Sergel's play. Compare and contrast them.

#### Primary questions:

1. What are the surfaces that Sergel has decided to adapt?
2. What is the point of this scene in the book? Why do you think Sergel chose to include it in his adaptation?
3. In your opinion, was Sergel's adaptation successful?

Split the class into groups of three. Have each group adapt this same scene from Harper Lee's original novel, using the surfaces that Sergel did not include (these adaptations do not have to be in a theatrical format, although they can be). Then, share the students' work.

#### From the book

"Stay inside, son," said Atticus. "Where is he, Cal?"

"He oughta be here by now," said Calpurnia, pointing down the street.

"Not runnin', is he?" asked Mr. Tate.

"Naw sir, he's in the twitchin' stage, Mr. Heck."

"Should we go after him, Heck?" asked Atticus.

"We better wait, Mr. Finch. They usually go in a straight line, but you never can tell. He might follow the curve — hope he does or he'll go straight in the Radley back yard. Let's wait a minute."

"Don't think he'll get in the Radley yard," said Atticus. "Fence'll stop him. He'll probably follow the road..."

I thought mad dogs foamed at the mouth, galloped, leaped and lunged at throats, and I thought they did it in August. Had Tim Johnson behaved thus, I would have been less frightened.

Nothing is more deadly than a deserted, waiting street. The trees were still, the mockingbirds were silent, the carpenters at Miss Maudie's house had

vanished. I heard Mr. Tate sniff, then blow his nose. I saw him shift his gun to the crook of his arm. I saw Miss Stephanie Crawford's face framed in the glass window of her front door. Miss Maudie appeared and stood beside her. Atticus put his foot in the rung of a chair and rubbed his hand slowly down the side of his thigh.

"There he is," he said softly.

Tim Johnson came into sight, walking dazedly in the inner rim of the curve parallel to the Radley house.

"Look at him," whispered Jem. "Mr. Heck said they walked in a straight line. He can't even stay in the road."

"He looks more sick than anything," I said.

"Let anything get in front of him and he'll come straight at it."

Mr. Tate put his hand to his forehead and leaned forward. "He's got it all right, Mr. Finch."

Tim Johnson was advancing at a snail's pace, but he was not playing or sniffing at foliage: he seemed dedicated to one course and motivated by an invisible force that was inching him toward us. We could see him shiver like a horse shedding flies; his jaw opened and shut; he was alert, but he was being pulled gradually toward us.

"He's lookin' for a place to die," said Jem.

Mr. Tate turned around. "He's far from dead, Jem, he hasn't got started yet."

Tim Johnson reached the side street that ran in front of the Radley Place, and what remained of his poor mind made him pause and seem to consider which road he would take. He made a few hesitant steps and stopped in front of the Radley gate; then he tried to turn around, but was having difficulty.

Atticus said, "He's within range, Heck. You better get him before he goes down the side street — Lord knows who's around the corner. Go inside, Cal."

Calpurnia opened the screen door, latched it behind her, then unlatched it and held onto the hook. She tried to block Jem and me with her body, but we looked out from beneath her arms.

"Take him, Mr. Finch." Mr. Tate handed the rifle to Atticus; Jem and I nearly fainted.

"Don't waste time, Heck," said Atticus. "Go on."

"Mr. Finch, this is a one-shot job."

Atticus shook his head vehemently: "Don't just stand there, Heck! He won't wait all day for you!"

"For God's sake, Mr. Finch, look where he is! Miss and you'll go straight into the Radley house! I can't shoot that well and you know it!"

"I haven't shot a gun in thirty years —"

Mr. Tate almost threw the rifle at Atticus. "I'd feel mighty comfortable if you did now," he said.

In a fog, Jem and I watched our father take the gun and walk out into the middle of the street. He walked quickly, but I thought he moved like an underwater swimmer: time had slowed to a nauseating crawl.

When Atticus raised his glasses Calpurnia murmured, "Sweet Jesus help him," and put her hands to her cheeks.

Atticus pushed his glasses to his forehead; they slipped down, and he dropped them in the street. In the silence, I heard them crack. Atticus rubbed his eyes and chin; we saw him blink hard.

In front of the Radley gate, Tim Johnson had made up what was left of his mind. He had finally turned himself around, to pursue his original course up our street. He made two steps forward, then stopped and raised his head. We saw his body go rigid.

With movements so swift they seemed simultaneous, Atticus's hand yanked a ball-tipped lever as he brought the gun to his shoulder.

The rifle cracked. Tim Johnson leaped, flopped over and crumpled to the sidewalk in a brown-and-white heap. He didn't know what hit him.

Mr. Tate jumped off the porch and ran to the Radley Place. He stopped in front of the dog, squatted, turned around and tapped his finger on his forehead above his left eye. "You were a little to the right, Mr. Finch," he called.

"Always was," answered Atticus. "if I had my 'druthers I'd take a shotgun."

### **From the play**

ATTICUS: Stay on the porch, Son.

CALPURNIA: Back behind the Radley pecan trees.

HECK: Not runnin', is he, Cal?

CALPURNIA: He's in the twitchin' stage, Mr. Heck.

(Heck watches carefully as he advances a few steps.)

HECK: Usually they go in a straight line, but you never can tell.

ATTICUS (following behind Heck): The slope will probably bring him back onto the road.

SCOUT (to Calpurnia): I thought mad dogs foamed at the mouth and jumped at your throat.

CALPURNIA: Hush.

ATTICUS (softly); There he is.

SCOUT: He just looks sick.

HECK (aside to Atticus): He's got it all right, Mr. Finch.

JEM (calling): Is he looking for a place to die, Mr. Heck?

HECK (over his shoulder); Far from dead, Jem. He hasn't got started yet.

ATTICUS: He's within range, Heck. You better get him before he goes down a side street. Lord knows who's around the corner. Cal —

CALPURNIA (understanding; to Jem and Scout): Inside the house, both of you.

JEM (temporizing): If he gets closer...

SCOUT (clutching the porch rail tightly with both hands): I don't go in till he goes in.

JEM: I wanna watch the sheriff!

HECK (turns and offers the rifle to Atticus): You take him, Mr. Finch. You do it.

ATTICUS (urgently): Don't waste time, Heck! Go on!

HECK: Mr. Finch, this is a one-shot job.

ATTICUS (vehemently): Don't just stand there, Heck!

HECK (frantic): Look where he is! For God's sake, Mr. Finch! I can't shoot that well and you know it!

ATTICUS: I haven't shot a gun in thirty years.

HECK (shoves the rifle to Atticus' hands): I'd feel mighty comfortable if you did now.

(Holding the rifle, Atticus decides to accept the responsibility and, watching carefully, he moves forward several steps.)

SCOUT (bewildered); What's he gonna do with the rifle?

JEM (concerned, calling): Mr. Heck —

(Heck gestures Jem away. Atticus has taken off his glasses, and still keeping watch, he drops them on the street. He rubs one eye and blinks. Then his body goes tense as he focuses totally on the mad dog offstage.)

CALPURNIA (her hands to her cheeks): Sweet Jesus, help us.

(Atticus works the bolt action, apparently slamming a cartridge into the chamber, raises the rifle quickly, and fires.)

HECK (a shout): Got him!

**Reflection questions:**

1. What surfaces did you chose to adapt in your version? What did you focus on? What did you let go?

2. What is the essence of *To Kill a Mockingbird*? What does the process of adaptation do to the story, to the essence?

3. What are other ways you could adapt this scene?



*Mary Badham as Scout in the film version*

## UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

### EXERCISE 2: STATUS AND HIERARCHY

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, different characters have different social statuses. Social status is described as the relative rank an individual holds in their society. This affects their rights, expectations, and lifestyle. For example, Scout wonders why Walter Cunningham pays Atticus with food and services, as opposed to money. Atticus explains that the Cunninghams, being poor farmers, cannot afford to engage in the economic world at the same status as he can, as a lawyer. Meanwhile, Walter Cunningham and Bob Ewell believe that, though they are very poor, they have a higher status than Tom Robinson and the black community of Maycomb because they are white.

#### Primary questions:

1. What is the hierarchy of social status in Maycomb, Alabama in 1933?
2. How is this different from our current hierarchy in Rhode Island in 2016? How is it the same?
3. What happens to a society when you rank individuals?

Ask each student to make their hierarchy of the *To Kill a Mockingbird* characters from the story, going from the people with the highest status to the people with the lowest status. Then, make another list, but keeping in mind the race of the actors who played each of those characters. When they are finished, ask them to share their work with a student next to them, and then the class as a whole.

#### Reflection questions:

1. How are your two lists different? Did they change when you considered the race of the actors playing these characters?
2. What role does race play in status?
3. How did ranking these characters make you feel?
4. Do we still rank people today? In what ways do we see that happen?



Gregory Peck as Atticus and Mary Badham as Scout from the film version

## UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

### EXERCISE 3: DIARY ENTRY

One of the ways to adapt a story is to switch the perspective of the storyteller. In the book of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the storyteller is Scout. In the play, it is Miss Maudie. Changing who tells the story oftentimes then changes the way the audience enters the events. For example, the introduction to the trial scene is very different in the play than it is in the book. In the book, we see the children of the story begin to understand race and racism. In the play, Miss Maudie introduces us straight to the action of the trial.

#### From the book

The courthouse square was covered with picnic parties sitting on newspapers, washing down biscuit and syrup with warm milk from fruit jars. Some people were gnawing on cold chicken and cold fried pork chops. The more affluent chased their food with drugstore Coca-Cola in bulb-shaped soda glasses. Greasy-faced children popped-the-whip through the crowd, and babies lunched at their mothers' breasts.

In a far corner of the square, the Negroes sat quietly in the sun, dining on sardines, crackers, and the more vivid flavors of Nehi Cola. Mr. Dolphus Raymond sat with them.

"Jem," said Dill, "he's drinkin' out of a sack."

Mr. Dolphus Raymond seemed to be so doing: two yellow drugstore straws ran from his mouth to the depths of a brown paper bag.

"Ain't ever seen anybody do that," murmured Dill.

"How does he keep what's in it in it?"

Jem giggled. "He's got a Co-Cola bottle full of whiskey in there. That's so's not to upset the ladies. You'll see him sip it all afternoon, he'll step out for a while and fill it back up."

"Why's he sittin' with the colored folks?"

"Always does. He likes 'em better'n he likes us, I reckon. Lives by himself way down near the county line. He's got a colored woman and all sorts of mixed chillun. Show you some of 'em if we see 'em."

"He doesn't look like trash," said Dill.

"He's not, he owns all one side of the riverbank

down there, and he's from a real old family to boot."

"Then why does he do like that?"

"That's just his way," said Jem. "They say he never got over his weddin'. He was supposed to marry one of the - the Spencer ladies, I think. They were gonna have a huge weddin', but they didn't - after the rehearsal the bride went upstairs and blew her head off. Shotgun. She pulled the trigger with her toes."

"Did they ever know why?"

"No," said Jem, "nobody ever knew quite why but Mr. Dolphus. They said it was because she found out about his colored woman, he reckoned he could keep her and get married too. He's been sorta drunk ever since. You know, though, he's real good to those chillun —"

"Jem," I asked, "what's a mixed child?"

"Half white, half colored. You've seen 'em, Scout. You know that red-kinky-headed one that delivers for the drugstore. He's half white. They're real sad."

"Sad, how come?"

"They don't belong anywhere. Colored folks won't have 'em because they're half white; white folks won't have 'em 'cause they're colored, so they're just in-betweens, don't belong anywhere. But Mr. Dolphus, now, they say he's shipped two of his up north. They don't mind 'em up north. Yonder's one of 'em."

#### From the play

MISS MAUDIE: When I reached the courthouse square, it was covered with picnic parties. Apparently the trial was to be a gala occasion. There was no room at the public hitching rail — mules and wagons were parked under every available tree. People were washing down biscuits and syrup with warm milk from fruit jars. In the far corner of the square, Negroes sat in the sun — very quiet. At some invisible signal, they all got up and started into the courthouse.

**Primary questions:**

1. What is happening in the book at the beginning of the trial? What is happening in the play?
2. Does the set-up for the trial serve a different function in each medium?
3. Would the story be the same if you saw Maycomb before the trial through Heck Tate's eyes? Or Walter Cunningham's? Or Mayella's?

Have the students write a diary entry of the moments leading up to the trial from the perspective of a character other than Scout or Miss Maudie. They could choose to be Jem, Tom Robinson, Mayella Ewell, Atticus. They could even choose to be Boo Radley. Write about what the town feels like, and what they expect to happen in

the trial. Do they believe that Atticus and Tom Robinson have a shot at winning? What do these other characters want to happen in the trial? When they're finished, ask them to share their work with a small group.

**Reflection questions:**

1. How is this trial affecting the town? Why is this such an important event?
2. What does it feel like to look at this moment from another person's eyes? What changes? What stays the same?
3. What is the essence of this moment? Does the essence change when you change the perspective?



*John Megna as Dill Harris from the film version*

## UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

### EXERCISE 4: YOUR OWN STORY

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus says Mayella is suffering from guilt at breaking a “rigid code of society”. Part of Brian McEleney’s artistic design is to personalize the characters by asking the actors to share personal stories of times when they went from a place of innocence to experience. The point of these stories are to share a moment when the actors understood the world, and these rigid codes, with more depth.

#### Primary questions:

1. What are some moments in the play where characters other than Scout learn more intimately from the world?
2. What issues are still prevalent in our country that Alabama was dealing with in the 1930s?
3. What are some moments in the play where the characters understand the world with a more nuanced perspective?

Ask the students to share their own moments where they understand the world with more depth. You can either pair students together or ask them to share in front of the class. Start by sharing your own story to create a safe space.

#### Reflection questions:

1. What do all of these moments have in common? What’s different about them?
2. What can we learn from each other’s personal experiences?
3. What are the rigid codes of our contemporary society? What are the codes of Alabama in the 1930s?



*Phillip Alford as Jem in the film version*

## UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

### EXERCISE 5: NONTRADITIONAL AGES

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Angela Brazil, Mauro Hantman, and Jude Sandy are all adults playing children. This is one of the many nontraditional casting choices in this production.

#### Primary questions:

1. How does the world change when you experience it through the eyes of a child? A teenager? An adult?
2. How do you act like a child? What's involved? What changes are there to your voice, body, outlook?

Have groups of students perform the following scene, first as children, then as teenagers, and then as adults. You'll need four performers for the characters of Miss Stephanie, Miss Maudie, Jem, and Scout. Even though Miss Stephanie and Miss Maudie are adults in this scene, and Jem and Scout children, ask everyone to perform the same age throughout this scene.

#### Reflection questions:

1. In what ways did you change your physicality to play a child? In what ways did you change as a teenager? As an adult?
2. Why do you think Harper Lee chose to write this story through the eyes of a six-year-old girl? What changes when the story is told through Miss Maudie?
3. What matters to children? What is important to an adult? Is there any overlap between the two?

#### The scene

MISS STEPHANIE: Maybe Tim wasn't really mad. Maybe he was just full of fleas — and Atticus Finch shot him dead.

MISS MAUDIE: If that Tim was still comin' up the street, maybe you'd be singing a different tune.

MISS STEPHANIE (agreeing, reluctantly): Maybe I would.

(As she is going back off.)

I'll admit I felt safer when I saw Atticus take the rifle.

JEM (still in shock): Did you see him, Scout? He did it so quick.

MISS MAUDIE (with a wicked smile): Well, now, Miss Scout. Still think your father can't do anything? Still ashamed of him?

SCOUT (meekly): No, ma'am.

MISS MAUDIE: Forgot to mention the other day that he was the deadest shot in Maycomb County.

JEM: Dead shot —

MISS MAUDIE: When he was a boy his nickname was Ol' One-Shot. Something for you to think about, Jem Finch.

JEM: But he never said anything about it.

SCOUT: Wonder why he never goes huntin' now.

MISS MAUDIE: If your father's anything, he's civilized. marksmanship like that's a gift from God. I think maybe he put his gun down when he realized God had given him an unfair advantage.

SCOUT: Looks like he'd be proud of it.

MISS MAUDIE (going): People like your father never bother about pride in their gifts.

(Miss Maudie re-enters her house.)

SCOUT (filled with anticipation): Will I have something to tell 'em at school on Monday!

JEM: Don't know if we should say anything about it.

SCOUT (coming down off the porch): I'd like to find the Cunningham boy right now! Ain't everybody's daddy the deadest shot in Maycomb County.

JEM (following her): I reckon if he'd wanted us to know, he'da told us.

SCOUT: Maybe it just slipped his mind.

JEM: Naw, it's something you wouldn't understand.

(Blazing with this new pride)

We don't have to talk about it any mor'n he does, but we know!

(To the sky)

Am' I don't care if he's a hundred years old!

## UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

### EXERCISE 6: CAST YOUR OWN *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

Put on your directing caps! *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a production that comes out of an endless number of choices. Now it's time for the students to make their own choices.

#### Primary questions:

1. What's involved in putting on a production of a play? What does the director have to think about?
2. When casting, what are the different elements of the character that you look out for? What do you need to see in an actor at the beginning of the process? What can you work on with them in the rehearsal?
3. In what ways does nontraditional casting change the following monologue/scenes?

Ask for three or four student volunteers. These are now the directors. Give the directors their monologues and scenes, and ask them to cast their actors. They should keep in mind race and gender when they cast. Send the directors and actors off and have them work on the monologues/scenes for five minutes. When the fifteen minutes are up, the actors perform. Feel free to repeat the exercise with different excerpts for different scenes.

#### Reflection questions:

1. How did it feel to be wholly responsible for your casting?
2. What were some of the challenges in directing your mini scene? What choices would you make if you had more time?
3. What would your artistic vision of *To Kill a Mockingbird* be if you had Trinity Rep's resources and space?



Phillip Alford as Jem and Mary Badham as Scout in the film version

### Excerpt 1: Monologue

ATTICUS: Gentlemen, this case is not a difficult one, it requires no minute sifting of complicated facts. This case is as simple as black and white. The State has not produced one iota of evidence that the crime Tom Robinson is charged with ever took place. It has relied instead upon the testimony of two witnesses — witnesses whose testimony has not only been called into serious question on cross-examination, but has been flatly contradicted by the defendant. I have nothing but pity in my heart for the chief witness for the state. But my pity does not extend to her putting a man's life at stake. And this is what she's done — done it in an effort to get rid of her guilt! I say guilt, because it was guilt that motivated her. She committed no crime, but she broke a rigid code of our society, a code so severe that whoever breaks it is hounded from our midst as unfit to live with. She's the victim of cruel poverty and ignorance, but she knew full well the enormity of her offense and she persisted in it. She persisted and her subsequent reaction is something every child has done — she tried to put the evidence of her offense away, out of sight. What was the evidence? Not a stolen toy to be hidden. The evidence that must be destroyed is Tom Robinson, a human being. Tom Robinson, a daily reminder of what she did. What did she do? She tempted a Negro. She did something that in our society is unspeakable. She's white and she tempted a Negro. Not an old uncle, but a strong, young black man. No code mattered to her before she broke it — but it came crashing down on her afterwards!

### Excerpt 2: Monologue

SCOUT: Mr. Cunningham, that you? Hey Mr. Cunningham. Don't you remember me? I'm Scout. You brought us a big bag of turnip greens, remember? I go to school with your boy, Walter. Well, he's your boy, ain't he? Ain't he, sir?

(Mr. Cunningham nods)

Knew he was your boy. Maybe he told you about me because I beat him up one time. Tell Walter "hey" for me, won't you? My father was telling me about your entailment. He said they're bad. Atticus, I was just sayin' to Mr. Cunningham that entailments are bad, but I remember you said not to worry — it takes long sometimes, but you'd all ride it out together.

(No one answers.)

What is it? Can't anybody tell me? What's the matter? Mr. Cunningham!



*Gregory Peck as Atticus from the film version*

### Excerpt 3: Scene

Characters: *Scout, Jem, Dill, Calpurnia, Reverend Sykes, Atticus, Miss Maudie, Miss Stephanie*

SCOUT (in shock); We lost! It's all lost!

JEM (heartbroken): How could they find him guilty?

CALPURNIA: Not right you children should see such things! Not right any children should see such things!

DILL (hushed): What happens now? What can we do?

JEM (bitterly): If the evidence don't matter, I don't see there's anything -

DILL (whispered horror): But they're not going to hurt Tom Robinson? Your father'll do something. Mr. Finch won't let 'em. he'll - he -

(At that moment, Atticus begins to walk forward past the proceedings. Dill stops talking and he, Jem, Scout, Reverend Scout, Miss Stephanie, and Miss Maudie all stand still.)

SCOUT (her fists clenched and leaning forward): They c'n shout mean, hateful things at him and find Tom Robinson guilty! But no matter what any of 'em says - Atticus - he's -

REVEREND SYKES (his hand on her shoulder): Miss Jean Louise - Scout.

(Interrupted, Scout turns to see them standing. Miss Maudie is also standing to show her respect.)

REVEREND SYKES: Stand up. Stand up — your father's passing.

(Scout gets to her feet with the others as Atticus starts across.)

JEM (calls): Atticus - wait!

(Atticus stops at the call, looking for them. Jem, Dill, and Scout scramble over to where he is. Jem is close to tears. Speaking with difficulty.)

JEM: Atticus - how could the jury - how could they do it?

ATTICUS (bitter): I don't know how, but they did it. They've done it before, and they did it today, and they'll do it again. (Starts off, then stops.) And when they do it — seems like only children weep. See you at home.

(He exits. Miss Stephanie comes towards them.)

DILL (too much to bear): We can still do something. Can't we? Something?

JEM (bitterly): Looks to me like the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed, Tom Robinson was a dead man!

DILL: Jem!

MISS STEPHANIE: I'm absolutely surprised at you children. Did Atticus give you permission to go to court?

(Jem shrugs in reply.)

MISS STEPHANIE: Why were you sitting over in the colored balcony? Several people mentioned it! Wasn't it right close over there?

MISS MAUDIE: Hush, Stephanie.

MISS STEPHANIE: Do you think it's wise for children to -

MISS MAUDIE: We've made the town this way for them. They might as well learn to cope with it.

MISS STEPHANIE: Least they don't have to wallow in it.

MISS MAUDIE: What happened in court is as much a party of Maycomb as missionary teas.

MISS STEPHANIE: Well - excuse me. Don't suppose they understood anyway.

#### Excerpt 4: Scene

Characters: *Dill, Jem, Scout, Nathan Radley*

SCOUT: Hey -

DILL: Hey, yourself. I'm Charles Baker Harris. I can read.

JEM: So what?

DILL: I just thought you'd like to know. Folks call me Dill. I'm staying with my Aunt Rachel.

SCOUT (critically): You're sort of puny.

DILL (defensively): I'm little, but I'm old.

SCOUT (curious): How old's your father?

DILL: I haven't got one.

SCOUT: Is he dead?

DILL: No.

SCOUT: Then if he's not dead, you've got one, haven't you?

JEM: Never mind her, Dill.

SCOUT (persisting): If his father isn't dead, how can he say he hasn't got one? How...

(She is interrupted by Jem, who grabs her arm.)

JEM: Scout! The Radley Place!

(Scout stops at his tone, and turns to look with him at the Radley door, which is opening. Nathan Radley, a pale, thin, leathery man is coming out.)

SCOUT (with relief): Nathan Radley.

JEM (clearing throat nervously): Hidy-do, Mr. Nathan.

NATHAN (preoccupied): Afternoon.

(He exits.)

SCOUT (to Dill): Boo Radley's older brother. Boo Radley's in there — all by himself — an' he hasn't come out in twenty, thirty years.

DILL: Thirty years!

JEM: When old Mr. Radley died, some folks thought Boo'd have to come out, but Nathan moved in and took his father's place.

DILL: Wonder what he does. Looks like he'd stick his head out the door sometime.

JEM: I think he comes out when it's pitch dark. Azaleas wilt 'cause he breathes on them. Nobody touches a pecan that falls off the Radley pecan tree...it'll kill you. I've seen his tracks in our backyard many a morning, and one night I heard him scratching on the back screen.

DILL: Wonder what he looks like?

JEM: Judging from his tracks, he's about six and a half feet tall, he eats raw squirrels and any cats he can catch. What teeth he has are yellow and rotten. His eyes pop and most of the time he drools.

DILL: Let's make him come out.

SCOUT: Make Boo Radley come out?

JEM: If you want to get yourself killed, all you have to do is go up and knock on that door.

DILL: You're scared — too scared to put your big toe in the front yard.

JEM: Ain't scared, just respectful.

DILL: I dare you.

JEM: You dare me?

SCOUT: Don't go near it, Jem. If you get killed — what with Atticus so old — what would become of me?

## UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

### EXERCISE 7: GAME — THIS IS NOT A DESK

In Trinity Rep's production of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Brian McEleney likes to use non-theatrical objects as architecture for actors to use in the play. This means repurposing regular objects as props in the play. For example: the desks in this production have a number of uses. What else can you repurpose in a play?

#### Primary questions:

1. What does the audience need to do to believe an actor when they work without sets, props, and costumes?
2. What does the actor have to do in this situation?

The students stand in a circle. Hand a student a wooden spoon (or something of that weight and size). The first student to hold the object must say "This is not a spoon", and then pantomime using that spoon as a different object, like a microphone, or a guitar, or a razor. It can be used for anything but its intended purpose. The rest of the students must then guess what it's being used as. Whoever gets it right gets to go next.

#### Reflection questions:

1. What were the most successful examples of repurposing the spoon? Why were they successful?
2. Discuss some other objects — bigger objects that are harder to pick up — and the different ways they can be repurposed in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, just like the desks.



*Gregory Peck as Atticus and Mary Badham as Scout from the film version*

# UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

## GLOSSARY OF SCENES

Here you will find all of the scenes throughout this study guide, as well as three extra. Feel free to distribute these scenes for your students to perform as you see fit! The scenes that are attached to specific exercises have been marked.

### SCENES

#### Scene 1

*(Found in Exercise 1)*

ATTICUS: Stay on the porch, Son.

CALPURNIA: Back behind the Radley pecan trees.

HECK: Not runnin', is he, Cal?

CALPURNIA: He's in the twitchin' stage, Mr. Heck.

*(Heck watches carefully as he advances a few steps.)*

HECK: Usually they go in a straight line, but you never can tell.

ATTICUS (following behind Heck): The slope will probably bring him back onto the road.

SCOUT (to Calpurnia): I thought mad dogs foamed at the mouth and jumped at your throat.

CALPURNIA: Hush.

ATTICUS (softly): There he is.

SCOUT: He just looks sick.

HECK (aside to Atticus): He's got it all right, Mr. Finch.

JEM (calling): Is he looking for a place to die, Mr. Heck?

HECK (over his shoulder): Far from dead, Jem. He hasn't got started yet.

ATTICUS: He's within range, Heck. You better get him before he goes down a side street. Lord knows who's around the corner. Cal -

CALPURNIA (understanding; to Jem and Scout): Inside the house, both of you.

JEM (temporizing): If he gets closer...

SCOUT (clutching the porch rail tightly with both hands): I don't go in till he goes in.

JEM: I wanna watch the sheriff!

HECK (turns and offers the rifle to Atticus): You take him, Mr. Finch. You do it.

ATTICUS (urgently): Don't waste time, Heck! Go on!

HECK: Mr. Finch - this is a one-shot job.

ATTICUS (vehemently): Don't just stand there, Heck!

HECK (frantic): Look where he is! For God's sake, Mr. Finch! I can't shoot that well and you know it!

ATTICUS: I haven't shot a gun in thirty years.

HECK (shoves the rifle to Atticus' hands): I'd feel mighty comfortable if you did now.

*(Holding the rifle, Atticus decides to accept the responsibility and, watching carefully, he moves forward several steps.)*

SCOUT (bewildered); What's he gonna do with the rifle?

JEM (concerned, calling): Mr. Heck -

*(Heck gestures Jem away. Atticus has taken off his glasses, and still keeping watch, he drops them on the street. He rubs one eye and blinks. Then his body goes tense as he focuses totally on the mad dog offstage.)*

CALPURNIA (her hands to her cheeks): Sweet Jesus, help us.

*(Atticus works the bolt action, apparently slamming a cartridge into the chamber, raises the rifle quickly, and fires.)*

HECK (a shout): Got him!

#### Scene 2

*(Found in Exercise 5)*

MISS STEPHANIE: Maybe Tim wasn't really mad. Maybe he was just full of fleas - and Atticus Finch shot him dead.

MISS MAUDIE: If that Tim was still comin' up the street, maybe you'd be singing a different tune.

MISS STEPHANIE (agreeing, reluctantly): Maybe I would.

(As she is going back off.)  
I'll admit I felt safer when I saw Atticus take the rifle.  
JEM (still in shock): Did you see him, Scout? He did it so quick.  
MISS MAUDIE (with a wicked smile): Well, now, Miss Scout. Still think your father can't do anything? Still ashamed of him?  
SCOUT (meekly): No, ma'am.  
MISS MAUDIE: Forgot to mention the other day that he was the deadest shot in Maycomb County.  
JEM: Dead shot -  
MISS MAUDIE: When he was a boy his nickname was Ol' One-Shot. Something for you to think about, Jem Finch.  
JEM: But he never said anything about it.  
SCOUT: Wonder why he never goes huntin' now.  
MISS MAUDIE: If your father's anything, he's civilized. marksmanship like that's a gift from God. I think maybe he put his gun down when he realized God had given him an unfair advantage.  
SCOUT: Looks like he'd be proud of it.  
MISS MAUDIE (going): People like your father never bother about pride in their gifts.  
(Miss Maudie re-enters her house.)  
SCOUT (filled with anticipation): Will I have something to tell 'em at school on Monday!  
JEM: Don't know if we should say anything about it.  
SCOUT (coming down off the porch): I'd like to find the Cunningham boy right now! Ain't everybody's daddy the deadest shot in Maycomb County.  
JEM (following her): I reckon if he'd wanted us to know, he'da told us.  
SCOUT: Maybe it just slipped his mind.  
JEM: Naw, it's something you wouldn't understand.  
(Blazing with this new pride)  
We don't have to talk about it any mor'n he does, but we know!  
(To the sky)  
An' I don't care if he's a hundred years old!

### Scene 3

*(Found in Exercise 6)*

SCOUT (in shock); We lost! It's all lost!  
JEM (heartbroken): How could they find him guilty?  
CALPURNIA: Not right you children should see such things! Not right any children should see such things!  
DILL (hushed): What happens now? What can we do?  
JEM (bitterly): If the evidence don't matter, I don't see there's anything -  
DILL (whispered horror): But they're not going to hurt Tom Robinson? Your father'll do something. Mr. Finch won't let 'em. he'll - he -

*(At that moment, Atticus begins to walk forward past the proceedings. Dill stops talking and he, Jem, Scout, Reverend Scout, Miss Stephanie, and Miss Maudie all stand still.)*

SCOUT (her fists clenched and leaning forward): They c'n shout mean, hateful things at him and find Tom Robinson guilty! But no matter what any of 'em says - Atticus - he's -  
REVEREND SYKES (his hand on her shoulder): Miss Jean Louise — Scout.

*(Interrupted, Scout turns to see them standing. Miss Maudie is also standing to show her respect.)*

REVEREND SYKES: Stand up. Stand up — your father's passing.

*(Scout gets to her feet with the others as Atticus starts across.)*

JEM (calls): Atticus - wait!

(Atticus stops at the call, looking for them. Jem, Dill, and Scout scramble over to where he is. Jem is close to tears. Speaking with difficulty.)

JEM: Atticus — how could the jury — how could they do it?

ATTICUS (bitter): I don't know how, but they did it. They've done it before, and they did it today, and they'll do it again. (Starts off, then stops.) And when they do it — seems like only children weep. See you at home.

(He exits. Miss Stephanie comes towards them.)

DILL (too much to bear): We can still do something. Can't we? Something?

JEM (bitterly): Looks to me like the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed, Tom Robinson was a dead man!

DILL: Jem!

MISS STEPHANIE: I'm absolutely surprised at you children. Did Atticus give you permission to go to court?

(Jem shrugs in reply.)

MISS STEPHANIE: Why were you sitting over in the colored balcony? Several people mentioned it! Wasn't it right close over there?

MISS MAUDIE: Hush, Stephanie.

MISS STEPHANIE: Do you think it's wise for children to -

MISS MAUDIE: We've made the town this way for them. They might as well learn to cope with it.

MISS STEPHANIE: Least they don't have to wallow in it.

MISS MAUDIE: What happened in court is as much a party of Maycomb as missionary teas.

MISS STEPHANIE: Well - excuse me. Don't suppose they understood anyway.

#### Scene 4

(Found in Exercise 6)

SCOUT: Hey -

DILL: Hey, yourself. I'm Charles Baker Harris. I can read.

JEM: So what?

DILL: I just thought you'd like to know. Folks call me Dill. I'm staying with my Aunt Rachel.

SCOUT (critically): You're sort of puny.

DILL (defensively): I'm little, but I'm old.

SCOUT (curious): How old's your father?

DILL: I haven't got one.

SCOUT: Is he dead?

DILL: No.

SCOUT: Then if he's not dead, you've got one, haven't you?

JEM: Never mind her, Dill.

SCOUT (persisting): If his father isn't dead, how can he say he hasn't got one? How...

(She is interrupted by Jem, who grabs her arm.)

JEM: Scout! The Radley Place!

(Scout stops at his tone, and turns to look with him at the Radley door, which is opening. Nathan Radley, a pale, thin, leathery man is coming out.)

SCOUT (with relief): Nathan Radley.

JEM (clearing throat nervously): Hidy-do, Mr. Nathan.

NATHAN (preoccupied): Afternoon.

(He exits.)

SCOUT (to Dill): Boo Radley's older brother. Boo Radley's in there — all by himself — an' he hasn't come out in twenty, thirty years.

DILL: Thirty years!

JEM: When old Mr. Radley died, some folks thought Boo'd have to come out, but Nathan moved in and took his father's place.

DILL: Wonder what he does. Looks like he'd stick his head out the door sometime.

JEM: I think he comes out when it's pitch dark. Azaleas wilt 'cause he breathes on them.

Nobody touches a pecan that falls off the Radley pecan tree...it'll kill you. I've seen his tracks in our backyard many a morning, and one night I heard him scratching on the back screen.

DILL: Wonder what he looks like?

JEM: Judging from his tracks, he's about six and a half feet tall, he eats raw squirrels and any cats he can catch. What teeth he has are yellow and rotten. His eyes pop and most of the time he drools.

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SCOUT: Make Boo Radley come out?

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DILL: You're scared — too scared to put your big toe in the front yard.

JEM: Ain't scared, just respectful.

DILL: I dare you.

JEM: You dare me?

SCOUT: Don't go near it, Jem. If you get killed — what with Atticus so old — what would become of me?

## Scene 5

CALPURNIA (passing Scout on her way in): Change to a clean blouse.

MISS STEPHANIE (In a loud whisper): As for the Radleys —

SCOUT (cutting in): Do you think Boo Radley's still alive?

MISS MAUDIE (calling over): His name's Arthur, and he's still alive.

SCOUT: How do you know?

MISS MAUDIE: What a morbid question. I know because I haven't seen him carried out yet.

SCOUT: Jem says maybe he died an' they stuffed him up the chimney.

MISS MAUDIE: He just stays in the house, that's all. Wouldn't you stay in the house if you didn't want to come out?

SCOUT: But I wanta come out.

MISS STEPHANIE (bursting to get into this): When that boy was in his teens, he took up with some bad ones from Old Sarum — probably drinking stumphole whiskey. They were arrested on charges of disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, and using abusive and profane language in the presence and hearing of a female. Boo Radley was released to his father, who shut him up in that house and he wasn't seen again for fifteen years.

MISS MAUDIE (to Scout): Now she'll tell you what happened fifteen years later.

MISS STEPHANIE: Boo Radley was sitting in the living room cutting some items from *The Maycomb Tribune* to post in his scrap-book. As his father passed by, Boo drove the scissors into his parent's leg, pulled them out, wiped them on his pants and resumed his activities. Boo was then thirty-three. Mr. Radley said no Radley was going to any insane asylum. So he was kept home where he is till this day. (Snippily) Or Miss Maudie would've seen him carried out.

SCOUT: All my life I've never seen him.

MISS STEPHANIE: I saw him. It was stormy, and I woke up in the middle of the night — and there was Boo Radley, his face like a skull — looking in the window, staring at me in my bed!

SCOUT (fascinated): What'd you do?

MISS MAUDIE (helpfully): She scared him away.

(Scout and Miss Stephanie look to Miss Maudie)

SCOUT: How?

MISS MAUDIE: She moved over in the bed to make room for him.

(Miss Stephanie stares at her for an instant, then gasps.)

MISS STEPHANIE (furious): You have a streak, Miss Maudie. A streak I could not properly describe in front of a young lady.

## Scene 6

(Mr. Cunningham, a farmer, carrying a sack, is coming on as Dill runs past him.)

ATTICUS (calling): Afternoon.

(Aside to Jem and Scout, using Dill's confidential tone and nod.)

Regardless of any plans, you're to stay away from that house unless invited.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (holding out a sack): This is for you, Mr. Finch. Turnip Greens.

ATTICUS (accepting the sack gravely): Thank you very much.

MR. CUNNINGHAM: I'd like to pay cash for your services, but between the mortgage and the entailment –

ATTICUS: This is just fine. Jem, please take this sack to Cal.

(Jem takes sack and goes inside.)

I'd say your bill is settled.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (doubtfully): You put in a lot of time.

ATTICUS: Let's see now. You left a load of stove wood in the backyard, then a sack of hickory nuts. At Christmas there was a crate of similax and holly. Now a bag of turnip greens. I'm more than paid.

MR. CUNNINGHAM: If you say so.

SCOUT: Your boy's in my class at school, Mr. Cunningham. (Uneasily, she recalls) We had a disagreement the other day.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (smiling): I have a few with that boy myself, little lady.

SCOUT (concerned): I didn't actually beat him up bad.

MR. CUNNINGHAM (amused): If he can't defend himself against a girl, he'll just have to take it.

(To Atticus as he goes)

Much obliged, Mr. Finch.

ATTICUS (after him): Any time I can be of help.

SCOUT (curious): Why does he pay with stove wood and turnip greens?

ATTICUS: Because that's the only way he can.

SCOUT: Are we poor, Atticus?

ATTICUS: We are indeed.

SCOUT: As poor as the Cunninghams?

ATTICUS: Not exactly. The Cunninghams are country folks and the depression hits them hardest. (Curious) What was your trouble with my client's boy?

SCOUT: He said some things I didn't like. (Shrugs) I rubbed his nose in the dirt.

ATTICUS: That's not very ladylike.



*Gregory Peck as Atticus from the film version*

# UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

## GLOSSARY OF MONOLOGUES

### Monologue 1

*(Found in Exercise 3)*

MISS MAUDIE: When I reached the courthouse square, it was covered with picnic parties. Apparently the trial was to be a gala occasion. There was no room at the public hitching rail — mules and wagons were parked under every available tree. People were washing down biscuits and syrup with warm milk from fruit jars. In the far corner of the square, Negroes sat in the sun — very quiet. At some invisible signal, they all got up and started into the courthouse.

### Monologue 2

*(Found in Exercise 6)*

ATTICUS: Gentlemen, this case is not a difficult one, it requires no minute sifting of complicated facts. This case is as simple as black and white. The State has not produced one iota of evidence that the crime Tom Robinson is charged with ever took place. It has relied instead upon the testimony of two witnesses — witnesses whose testimony has not only been called into serious question on cross-examination, but has been flatly contradicted by the defendant. I have nothing but pity in my heart for the chief witness for the state. But my pity does not extend to her putting a man's life at stake. And this is what she's done — done it in an effort to get rid of her guilt! I say guilt, because it was guilt that motivated her. She committed no crime, but she broke a rigid code of our society, a code so severe that whoever breaks it is hounded from our midst as unfit to live with. She's the victim of cruel poverty and ignorance, but she knew full well the enormity of her offense and she persisted in it. She persisted and her subsequent reaction is something

every child has done — she tried to put the evidence of her offense away, out of sight. What was the evidence? Not a stolen toy to be hidden. The evidence that must be destroyed is Tom Robinson, a human being. Tom Robinson, a daily reminder of what she did. What did she do? She tempted a Negro. She did something that in our society is unspeakable. She's white and she tempted a Negro. Not an old uncle, but a strong, young black man. No code mattered to her before she broke it, but it came crashing down on her afterwards!

### Monologue 3

*(Found in Exercise 6)*

SCOUT: Mr. Cunningham — that you? Hey Mr. Cunningham. Don't you remember me? I'm Scout. You brought us a big bag of turnip greens, remember? I go to school with your boy, Walter. Well, he's your boy, ain't he? Ain't he, sir?

(Mr. Cunningham nods)

Knew he was your boy. Maybe he told you about me — because I beat him up one time. Tell Walter "hey" for me, won't you? My father was telling me about your entailment. He said they're bad. Atticus — I was just sayin' to Mr. Cunningham that entailments are bad — but I remember you said not to worry — it takes long sometimes, but you'd all ride it out together.

(No one answers.)

What is it? Can't anybody tell me? What's the matter? Mr. Cunningham!

## UNIT FOUR: *BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE*

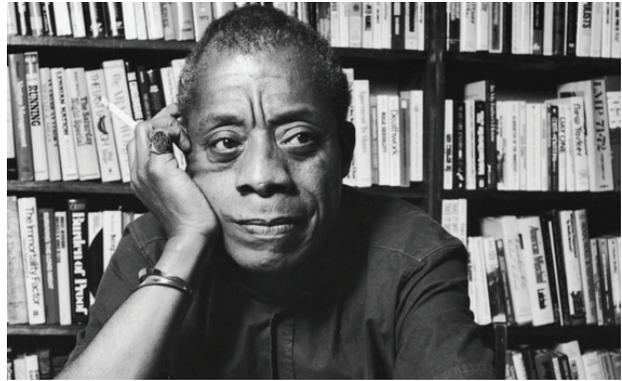
### JAMES BALDWIN: ACTIVIST, WRITER AND VOICE OF A GENERATION

"I am the grandson of a slave, and I am a writer. I must deal with both." – James Baldwin

Though not as widely read as other contemporary authors, James Baldwin, once discovered, is a deeply electrifying voice in American literature. He is a post-humous advocate in the Black Lives Matter movement, quoted liberally by writers, journalists, and leaders who seek to continue the conversations he started as early as the 1950s. His essays are powerful: they detail the painful process of achieving freedom, and critically engage American society in some of its most shameful faults. He is often credited for being the "spokesman" for the American black community, though in his lifetime, whenever he would hear this title, he would counter by calling himself a "witness." "Witness to whence I came, where I am. Witness to what I've seen and the possibilities that I think I see."

Baldwin was born in Harlem in August of 1924 to Emma Jones, then a single mother. Emma, extremely poor and very religious, lived alone with her illegitimate son, working tirelessly despite social isolation and near destitution. Yet not long into James' second year of life, he and his mother met Baptist minister David Baldwin. Emma and David were married soon thereafter in 1927. It wasn't until James was approximately sixteen that he discovered that David Baldwin was not his biological father. James realized that this paternity question had colored his relationship with David growing up. David was a violent, domineering influence in the Baldwin household, and it was through David that James learned that, because he was poor and black and small, much of the world was going to keep him from achieving his goals. Much of the world at that time, however, consisted of only David. And yet, eventually, James' world expanded and his feelings of fear and resentment towards his stepfather evolved into respect and even admiration.

"He formed me, and he raised me, and he did not let me starve. No matter that he was not my biological father. He claimed me as his son. He gave me



myself." After graduating high school, Baldwin worked laying railroad for the United States Army in New Jersey, among many other odd jobs. His written work continued to develop, and yet it wasn't until three years after David Baldwin died (on the same day that Emma gave birth to her eighth child) that James moved to Paris, to escape not only American racism, but also homophobia. In Paris, he was able to explore — explore his writing, sexuality, world, and self. He also began working on his first, autobiographical novel *Go Tell it On a Mountain*, and later *Giovanni's Room*, a story about a former American soldier who falls in love with an Italian barman named Giovanni. Baldwin's depiction of the homosexual romance was frank and unapologetic. With a blunt assertion completely ahead of its time, Baldwin wrote, "if you fall in love with a boy, you fall in love with a boy."

Baldwin's social and literary circle exploded in his years while writing in Paris. It was in Paris where he first met poet Maya Angelou, composer Howard Swanson, painter Beauford Delaney, dancer Bernard Hassell, and writer Ernest Charles Nimmo. Similar to the literary enlightenment of the Left Bank in the 20s and 1930s, Baldwin's Paris was filled with a cast of talented, colorful characters who pushed him to develop his signature voice, both structurally and thematically. After the first visit to Paris, Baldwin became a "transatlantic commuter", splitting most of his time between New York City and Paris. But a play by play of Baldwin's life is not nearly as arresting or moving as the power of his

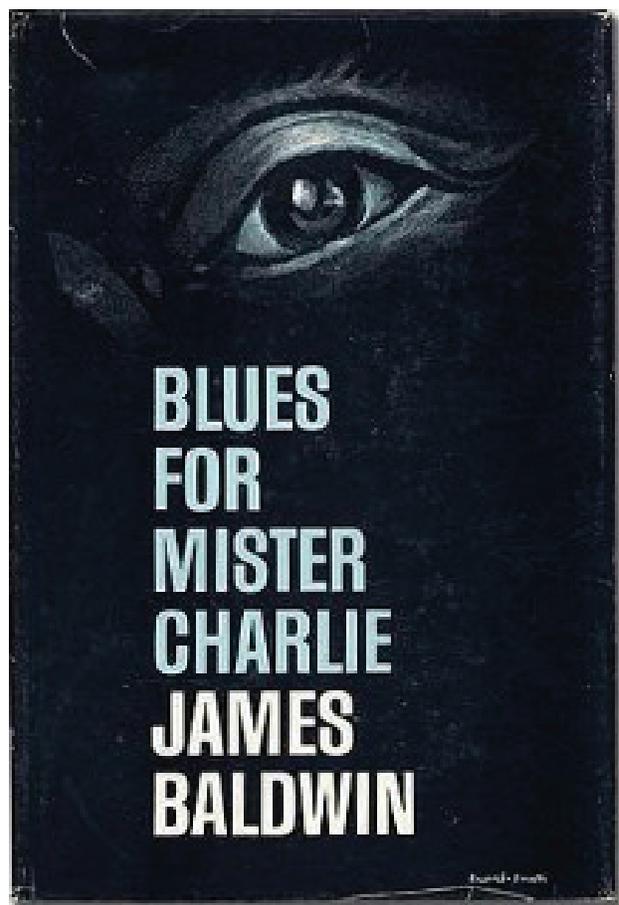
written work. Much of Baldwin's influence and regard comes from the essays he published in the '60s and '70s, just as the Civil Rights Movement in the United States was attracting attention.

In 1963, Baldwin published a collection of essays under the title *The Fire Next Time*; this work sought to educate white Americans on the racial disparity that was soon to fuel the Civil Rights Movement. Called "masterful" by its *New York Times* review, *The Fire Next Time* warned of the danger of ignoring the deep separation between the white and black experiences of America. "The brutality with which Negroes are treated in this country simply cannot be overstated, however unwilling white men may be to hear it." Baldwin left no stone unturned in his examination of the American qualities that contributed to the marginalization and mistreatment of the black community. "In Down at the Cross – Letter from a Region of my Mind" (one of the two essays in *The Fire Next Time*), Baldwin uses his experience as a teenage minister to challenge Christianity. "If [God's] love was so great, and if He loved all His Children, why were we, the blacks cast down so far?" He then explains why it is that Islam attracts so many black Americans: "The white God has not delivered them, perhaps the black God will."

Cultural appropriation. White privilege. Police brutality. Baldwin's examination of each of these subjects is sharp, vitriolic, and insightful, especially considering that our country is still having these conversations today. "[My experience with racism in New Jersey] lives in my mind as though it were the year during which, having an unsuspected predilection for it, I first contracted some dread, chronic disease," Baldwin wrote in his essay *Notes of a Native Son*.

"Once this disease is contracted, one can never be really carefree again, for the fever, without an instant's warning, can recur at any moment. It can wreck more important things than race relations. There is not a Negro alive that does not have this rage in his blood – one has the choice, merely, of living with it

consciously or surrendering to it. As for me, this fever has recurred in me, and will until the day I die." Toni Morrison wrote that James Baldwin gave the world "undecorated truth". Amiri Baraka called him a "man, spirit, voice — old and black and terrible as that first ancestor." Poet Eugene B. Redmond said, "Baldwin, brilliant and unabashed, with his irreverent glow, wrote himself into posterity — into immortality." He was the source of inspiration, guidance, hope, and comfort to those who felt like their experiences were relegated to the margins of society. He gave both broad strokes of counsel and concrete examples of progression to civil rights fighters, of any race. He grew out of obscurity, poor and voiceless, into a space he was able to fill with his complete self. That self, mourned and remembered by many, continues to teach and move audiences and readers as we grapple with a fraught divide in our world.



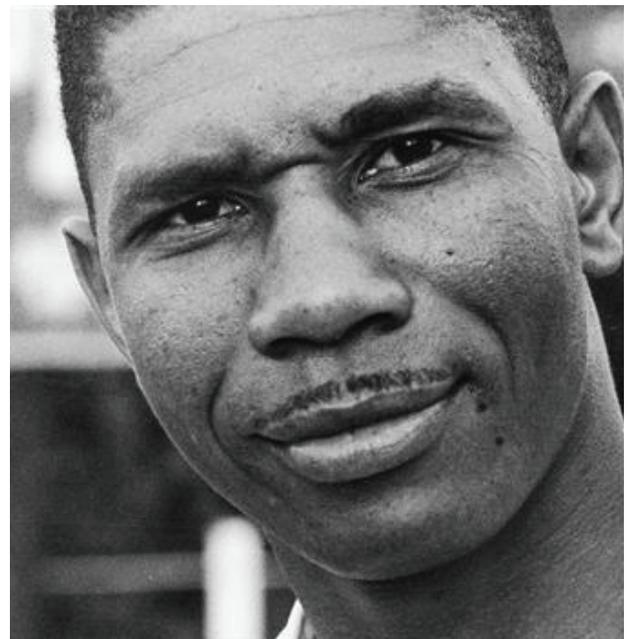
## UNIT FOUR: *BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE*

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*Blues for Mister Charlie* is James Baldwin's second published play, a three act tragedy. The play is very loosely based on the lynching and murder of Emmett Till that occurred in Money, Mississippi in 1955 before the start of the Civil Rights Movement. The play grapples with subjects like, lynching, race relations, and manhood in the black community. Baldwin dedicated the play to "the memory of Medgar Evers, his widow and children and to the dead children in Birmingham." Medgar Evers (1925–1963) was a civil rights activist from Mississippi. He organized voter registration efforts, demonstrations, and boycotts against companies that practiced discrimination in the 60's. He also worked to investigate crimes and lynchings against black people in the South. On June 12, 1963, he was shot and killed outside of his home in Jackson, Mississippi, his wife and children present.

In Birmingham, Alabama in September of 1964, the 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed by members of the Ku Klux Klan, killing four young girls who were attending Sunday school. In many ways, this was a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement and the many actions taken toward integration, specifically in the deep south.

The phrase "Mr. Charlie" is what black people called white men in some places in the south in the 19th and 20th centuries. *Blues for Mister Charlie* also deals with stereotypes of black men in the South during that time. It was thought that black men were "brutish creatures" who lived to take sexual advantage of the white women of the South. Many men were lynched, supposedly because of a sexual involvement or even look at a white woman. Baldwin decided to highlight this as a primary theme in *Blues*.



*Medgar Evers*

# UNIT FOUR: *BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE*

## SYNOPSIS

### Act One

Act I opens up with Reverend Meridian Henry coaching the Negro students through their lines. They are interrupted by Parnell Jones who brings them the news that Lyle Britten will be arrested for the murder of Richard Henry. When he leaves to go tell Britten about his future arrest, the students talk amongst themselves about the struggles they face as Black people. The scene shifts to Lyle and his wife Jo Britten in their store. His wife brings up the death of Richard, fearful that her husband may go to jail because of a past transgression he had with another Black man who died as a result of the confrontation. Lyle defends himself by claiming self-defense. When Parnell Jones arrives, Lyle assures both of them not to worry. The scene shifts into a flashback with Richard and his grandmother, Mother Henry. He confronts her about the death of his mother whom he believes was pushed down the stairs, though Mother Henry claims she fell down by accident. Richard swears that he will protect himself from the white man at all costs, showing her a gun. Before she leaves, his grandmother pleads with him to get rid of it. Soon after, the Negro students, Pete and Juanita, arrive to take Richard out to Pete D's bar. While they're dancing, Richard confides in Juanita about his time up North and how he became a junkie. Lyle arrives on the scene and bumps into Juanita, interrupting her dance with Richard. The two share words before Lyle leaves. Later Richard goes to talk to his father, the reverend, about taking the nonviolent route, handing over his gun. Here the flashback ends and the scene opens with Parnell returning to the church to reassure Reverend Meridian Henry that Lyle will be taken to court; however, he also makes sure to say that the storeowner will not be convicted. Parnell tells the reverend to just let the matter go. The scene ends as he departs.

### Act Two

Act II opens with Jo Britten and the white townspeople in her home. They discuss how frightened they have become of the Black townspeople lately. Soon Parnell Jones arrives and gets into a debate over his paper and his place in the Black community with the white men. Lyle arrives some time later and the others continue to tease

Parnell as he proposes to put Black people in the jury at Lyle's trial. The white townspeople soon leave with only the Brittens and Parnell in the house. Lyle leaves to take a shower and when they are alone, Jo confronts Parnell about her husband sleeping with Willa Mae, the wife of Old Bill — the Black man Lyle killed. She asks Parnell if he had ever loved a Black woman. When he says yes, Jo says that it is possible that Lyle had loved Willa Mae and killed her husband out of spite. She continues, saying that if that is possible then it is possible that he killed Richard. Lyle returns with his son and passes him to Jo. The scene changes to Lyle and Parnell in the store talking about Lyle's relationship with Willa Mae. They also discuss the first time Lyle met Richard. Again, Lyle denies killing him. Jo arrives with their son, ending the discussion. Another flashback occurs, showing Richard and Lorenzo going to the Brittens' store. Richard humiliates Lyle in front of his wife before he runs off with Lorenzo. The flashback ends, going back to Parnell and Lyle talking in the store. Lyle slips up and describes how Richard's body was left face down in high weeds. When Parnell asks how he knew that, Lyle claims to have read it in the newspaper. Parnell leaves soon after to go to Richard's funeral, ending the second act.

### Act Three

Act III opens up with Lyle's trial. It has been two months since Richard's death. A number of people are called up to take the stand as witnesses regarding Richard's character. Jo lies about Richard attempting to sexually assault her in the store. Juanita, Lorenzo, Mother Henry, the Reverend and Parnell Jones defend Richard's character when called up. Papa D, the owner of the bar, takes the stand and tells the court that he witnessed Richard leave with Lyle on a night when he was closing up the bar. A brief flashback shows Lyle threatening to kill Papa D if he were to tell people Lyle didn't kill Old Bill in self-defense. The court rules in Lyle's favor. Another flashback shows Lyle killing an unarmed, nonviolent Richard before disposing his body in the high weeds. The act ends with Lyle telling Reverend Meridian Henry that he will never apologize for the death of Richard.

## UNIT FOUR: *BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE*

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Richard Henry:** The son of Meridian Henry, is an artist and former junkie who lived in New York City for a time before coming back to his home-town in the South

**Meridian Henry:** Father of Richard Henry, a preacher in a southern town

**Mother Henry:** Meridian's mother and grandmother figure to most black people in the church

**Juanita:** A young student and girlfriend of Richard

**Tom:** A young student

**Ken:** A young student

**Lorenzo:** A young student and friend of Richard

**Arthur:** A young student and friend of Richard

**Pete:** A young student

**Lyle Britten:** A white store owner with a rather rough past with the black community in the town

**Jo Britten:** Wife of Lyle Britten

**Parnell James:** A friend of Lyle and Meridian who is editor of the local newspaper

**Papa D:** Owner of a local juke joint

## UNIT FOUR: *BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE*

### JAMES BALDWIN'S WORKS

**Novels** *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953)

*Giovanni's Room* (1956)

*Another Country* (1962)

*If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974)

*Just Above My Head* (1979)

**Essays** *Notes of a Native Son* (1955)

*Nobody Knows My Name:*

*More Notes of a Native Son* (1961)

*A Talk to Teachers* (1963)

*The Fire Next Time* (1963)

*No Name in the Street* (1972)

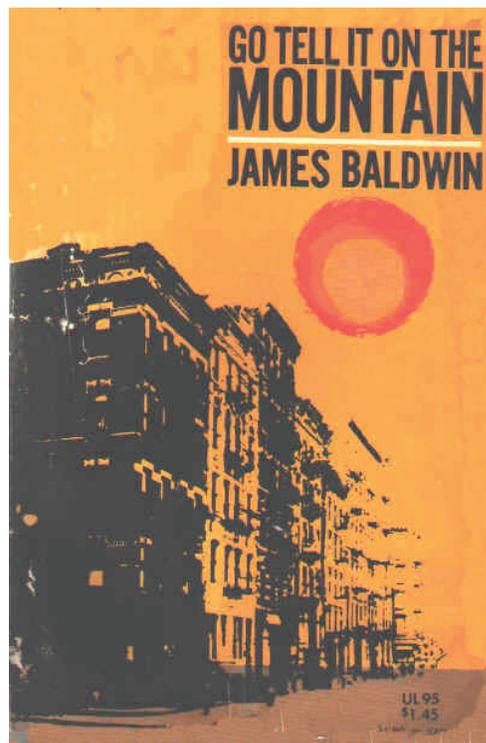
*The Devil Finds Work* (1976)

*The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (1985)

*The Price of the Ticket* (1985)

**Plays** *The Amen Corner* (1954)

*Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964)



## UNIT FOUR: *BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE*

### EMMETT TILL — THE STORY BEHIND THE PLAY

“The murder of my son has shown me that what happens to any of us, anywhere in the world, had better be the business of us all.” — Mamie Till

Emmett Louis Till was born in 1941 in Chicago, Illinois. Emmett was a child of the Great Migration. The Great Migration occurred between the years of 1910 and 1970 when millions of black people, most of whom were the descendants of slaves, fled their homes in the South and moved to industrial cities of the North. New York City, Chicago, Detroit, Boston, and many others became the new hub of life for those who had been living in the oppressive south. Mamie Till emigrated to the Chicago area from Tallahatchie County, Mississippi during the 1930s and married Louis Till, a private in the US Army during World War II. Together, they had Emmett and divorced in 1943, leaving Mamie to raise Emmett as a single mother. At the age of six, Emmett contracted polio, which left him with a consistent stutter. Emmett is often described as being big for his age, standing at over five feet and 150–160 pounds at the age of 14. Till attended segregated schools while living in Chicago, having just finished the seventh grade at McCosh Elementary School that year. It's safe to say that he was well aware of the danger that being young and black in the 1940s and 50's in the North held. Emmett was known by his friends as a self-assured young man who loved humor of all kinds.. In the summer of 1955, Emmett begged his mother to go and visit his cousins in Mississippi. Mamie Till was worried that Mississippi was a very different and overt racism that Emmett wouldn't be used to, but she allowed him to go and stay with her family.

When Emmett reached Mississippi, he quickly realized that he behaved very differently than his cousins. He didn't lower his head or cross the street when a white person walked by, or speak quietly to avoid attention. This made Emmett stand out as a black person who seemed “uppity” or a black person who didn't live under the extensive fear of the Jim Crowe South. Seeming “uppity” could get a black person lynched for any particular reason at all. After

Emmett's arrival, the cousins went out to the grocery store, owned and operated by a white husband and wife. It is said that while in the store, Emmett whistled at the white woman before leaving with his cousins. It is unlikely that we'll ever know what actually took place in that grocery store in August of 1955, but what is clear was that Carolyn Bryant, the white woman owner of the grocery store was scared by Emmett, who despite being only 14 was perceived as being a grown man and a danger.

That night, her husband Roy Bryant and his brother J.W. Milam, went to the house of Till's cousins looking for him. They forced him out and into their truck despite the pleas from his cousin that Emmett was from the North and didn't know better. They made him undress, carry a large discarded mill fan to the Mississippi River, pistol whipped him, shot him in the ear, tied the fan's cord around his neck and threw him in the river. His body was found completely unrecognizable a few days later. The only way to identify that it was

**MASS MEETING**  
**PROTESTING**  
**EMMETT TILL**  
**LYNCHING AND TRIAL**  
**[IN MISSISSIPPI]**  
**8:00 P. M., FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1955**  
... AT ...  
**COMMUNITY A.M.E. CHURCH**  
JAMES AT LOGAN, S. E.  
**SPEAKERS: MRS. MAMIE BRADLEY,**  
**mother of murdered boy and**  
**other witnesses.**  
**HEAR THE FACTS AND REGISTER YOUR PROTEST!**  
**AUSPICES: Grand Rapids N.A.A.C.P.**

him was by a large ring that he always wore on his hand. Mamie Till insisted that his body be flown home and his cousins moved from Mississippi that month. Family and friends were expecting a closed casket and a quiet funeral. However, this was not to be the case. Till insisted on an open casket so that the world could see what was done to Emmett. The media swarmed. To this day, there are still photos of Emmett Till's body. In Mississippi, no black people were registered to vote at the time. This caused the jury system to remain all white. Despite being guilty, Bryant and Milam were acquitted by an all white jury and later admitted to having killed Emmett. Their confessions were not incriminating because the trial was over and the case closed. They were never brought to justice for the death of 14 year old Emmett Till.

The Till murder and trial was the first big racial event in this country post Brown vs. Board of Education outlawing segregation in the public school system. For the first time, people's eyes were opened to the true horror of what was happening in the south. They could no longer sit by and say that they didn't know. Till's death was the beginning of the fight for civil rights in this country.



*Emmett Till*

## UNIT FOUR: *BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE*

### WHAT IS LYNCHING?

**Lynching:** to punish or kill someone without legal authority, sometimes by hanging

Lynching originated as a system of punishment in this country during the Revolutionary War and was named for a man named Colonel Charles Lynch. Charles Lynch created his own system of punishment that involved trials and lynchings of men during the war without any actual legal involvement. Originally, lynching was a form of punishment for both white and black people. However, this changed in the late 1800s after the end of slavery and beginning of Reconstruction in the South. Reconstruction was known as the time when the south was given funds and government aid to help facilitate the rebuilding of cities and newly freed black people were supposed to have aid in establishing life as a free person in society. This all failed dramatically. The South broke into violence with race riots and lynchings spanning the south. Freed blacks attempts at creating separate and fully functional lives were burnt to the ground, women were raped and murdered and men were lynched in high numbers. Lynchings continued to rise in number and are still a part of American culture today. The documentation of lynchings began in 1882. Statistics presented are of the lynchings reported. Hundreds and probably thousands of lynchings went unreported for many years. We will probably never know how many men and women were lynched across the south and continue to be lynched across the United States today.



## UNIT FOUR: *BLUES FOR MISTER CHARLIE*

### WHO IS IDA B. WELLS?

“One had better die fighting against injustice than to die like a dog or a rat in a trap.”

—Ida B. Wells

African American journalist and activist Ida B. Wells is known for her passion in leading an anti-lynching crusade across the country starting in 1890. Born a slave in 1863 in Mississippi, Wells grew up watching her father fight for true equality. Wells came from a family of activists. Her father was integral in attempting to gain the right to vote for newly freed blacks and helped to start a school for newly freed slaves, Shaw University. At 16, Wells was left orphaned when yellow fever struck Mississippi and her father, mother and one of her siblings were left dead. Having some education, Wells journeyed to Memphis, Tennessee with her sisters. While living in Memphis with an aunt, Wells took classes at Fisk University, a notable historically black university.

Wells encountered much racism and inequality during her life in the south. As a teacher in a segregated school in Tennessee, as well as a journalist, Wells was a vocal critic on the mistreatment of black people all over the country. After the brutal lynching of two close friends, she visited various areas of the deep south on numerous occasions, often endangering her own life to do so. In 1882, after speaking out on the lynching of her friends, Wells office was stormed and she was told that she would be killed if she ever returned to Memphis. Wells was visiting New York City at the time and packed her things and moved to Chicago, Illinois. During her life, she documented what she could on the vast numbers of lynchings as well as the reasons why this was happening across the south. Wells was integral in the foundation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the early 1900s.



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