

## **Why the Mockingbird Died: Examining Gender, Race and Justice in Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird***

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### **Synopsis**

This unit connects the themes of gender, race, and justice with similar themes and motifs in Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Lee's novel examines these ideas as it pairs the real and the fictional in a plot loosely based on the historical Scottsboro Boys trial. The Tom Robinson case is a fictional version of this trial and within its story are the inescapable ramifications of gender and racial discrimination and the failure of the American justice system to overcome these prejudices. The issue of gender is explored by two primary characters, Scout Finch and Mayella Ewell, and furthered on a smaller scale by the secondary characters of Aunt Alexandra and Calpurnia. The issue of race and justice is explored within the context of the trial and through the characters of Tom Robinson, Atticus Finch, and Bob Ewell. Students will analyze the characters mentioned above within the context of the novel and its historical setting, then read case studies of different characters in modern society facing similar struggles, and compare and contrast the evolution of gender, race, and justice and their influences on character's motivation and behavior. This unit will cover the course of a month during which time students will read and study *To Kill A Mockingbird* in conjunction with reading and studying nonfiction texts documenting the evolution of the American justice system in regard to the influence of gender and race on justice.