

what does scout learn  
about maycomb and  
its inhabitants during  
the trial?



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Through witnessing the trial, Scout learns a lot about Maycomb and its inhabitants, particularly Bob Ewell, Mayella Ewell, Tom Robinson, Dolphus Raymond and her own father, Atticus.

Bob Ewell is the villain of the 'To Kill A Mockingbird' and, as a result of the trial, he attempts to get revenge on Atticus and his family. However, in the trial itself he is depicted as a very unpleasant person, not only by his appearance, "a little bantam cock of a man" but also by his conduct. Scout learns that he drinks and sometimes leaves his family for days, he is violent and he may even be committing incest with Mayella. Atticus establishes that he is left-handed and that Mayella was probably beaten up by a left-handed man - it seems that he, and not Tom Robinson, beat up Mayella after he saw Mayella trying to kiss Tom.

Bob therefore lies during the trial and is prepared to sacrifice the life of an innocent man for the sake of his daughter's reputation. His abominable behaviour during the trial and his assumption that everybody will be on his side against a black man convince the reader that he is a thoroughly loathsome character. Mayella Ewell also lies in court but for different reasons to her father. She is the only responsible member of one of the poorest families in Maycomb.

She looks after herself and her brothers and sisters and even tries to bring some beauty into their lives by growing geraniums. Her family is so poor that white people will have nothing to do with her and, at that time, it was not possible for her to be friendly with black people. Hence Scout coming to the conclusion that she is "the loneliest person in the world". Tom Robinson

passed her house every day on his way to work and, according to Scout; he was probably the only person who was ever nice to her.

Tom's evidence at the trial implies that she had planned to make a pass at him for a long time. It took her nearly a year to save enough money to send all her brothers and sisters into town to get ice creams. When she and Tom were alone together she tried to kiss him but she was interrupted by the arrival of her father. At that time in the 1930s there was a very strong prejudice against white women being involved with black men and if the fact that she had kissed Tom of her own accord emerged, she would have been shunned by everyone. She would rather let Tom die than let this happen.

The trial also helps Scout gain a further insight into the character of Tom Robinson, who is the innocent victim of Mayella's loneliness and is often perceived to be the "mockingbird" of the novel. He assisted Mayella over a long period of time and always behaved courteously and respectfully around her. When Mayella tried to kiss him he didn't know what to do. He couldn't hit a white woman to keep her away from him nor could he allow her to kiss him - he ran away when Bob Ewell arrived knowing that whatever he did would get him into trouble.

In the trial Tom's innocence is proved by the fact that only his right arm is useable. It becomes evident that he couldn't have held Mayella and raped her in the way that she described, and her injuries were the result of a beating from a left-handed man. He is honest and labours strenuously but he offends the jury by saying that the reason why he did all the work for Mayella is because he "felt right sorry for her." Tom oversteps some societal

boundaries and his admission of sympathy of Mayella - a white woman - is considered impertinent due to the lower status of black people at the time.

In spite of his obvious innocence and the persuasive arguments presented by Atticus, Tom is convicted of the crime as racial prejudice is still too strong and society is not yet able to deal with such a case fairly. Prior to the trial, Scout only knows Dolphus Raymond through the rumours that revolve around him: he always drinks whisky out of a sack which supposedly provides an explanation for why he's got a "coloured woman and all sorts of mixed chillum"; he "owns all one side of a river bank...and he's from a real old family to boot."

But through meeting Dolphus with Dill, Scout is informed that he pretends to be an alcoholic because it was the only way the Maycomb would accept him. He says this was so because they could not grasp a sane white person ever living with coloured folks. This interlude with Dolphus Raymond at the beginning of chapter 20 foreshadows Atticus's views, expressed later, that black people are people like everyone else. Scout and the readers learn that we shouldn't judge people by appearances.

Although she judges Dolphus by his reputation, her opinion changes after she has met him - something that sadly the white jury of the trial is incapable of doing regarding Tom Robinson. This scene underlines the prejudices of the white community, with hints that if a white person loves a black person they have to have an excuse for it and with Scout discovers more about the "simple hell people give other people." The trial reveals a lot of hidden traits of Atticus, even the littlest things seeming abnormal to Scout and Jem.

<https://assignbuster.com/what-does-scout-learn-about-maycomb-and-its-inhabitants-during-the-trial/>

"...Atticus did something I never saw him do before or since, in public or in private: he unbuttoned his vest, unbuttoned his collar, loosened his tie, and took off his coat. He never loosened a scrap of clothing until he undressed at bedtime, and to Jem and me, this was the equivalent of him standing before us stark naked. We exchanged horrified glances. " This ' first' is symbolic that he's done everything he's could.

It also suggests that the trial is taking a toll on Atticus and he is beginning to feel the strain of it. This may seem unusual, as Atticus has always remained quite relaxed and calm about the case, however by doing this he gives the impression that he's nervous and is feeling tense. Furthermore, Mayella, who is not used to being treated decently, sees his politeness as offensive and it is clear that he takes no pleasure in revealing the true nature of Mayella's actions.

Whilst making his concluding speech, Atticus tries to defend the idea that all men are equal before the law, but he is unable to overcome the basic prejudices of the jury. The only mark of his success is that they take an unusual length of time to come to their decision. Atticus was appointed to defend Tom and he upset people merely by doing his job. In spite of the verdict, the black people of the town appreciated his efforts and on the day after the trial they sent large amounts of food to his house in gratitude.