



Author profile: Nelle Harper Lee

Born: 28 April 1926

Place of birth: Monroeville, Alabama, USA

Studies: Studied Law at university, but didn't graduate

Themes in novel: Racial prejudice; a call for tolerance; religion and sin, the difference between right and wrong

Other works: *Go Set a Watchman*, published in 2015, 55 years after her first novel

Other achievements: The book was made into a film in 1962 and starred Gregory Peck

Prizes: Pulitzer Prize in 1961

Presidential Medal of Freedom for her contribution to literature

Synopsis: *To Kill a Mocking Bird*

This novel is a modern American classic in its own right, and it won the Pulitzer Prize the year after its publication in 1960. The novel is set in the Deep South (Southern USA) during the Great Depression of the 1930s. It tells the story of a black man, Tom Robinson, who is accused of raping a young white woman, and his lawyer Atticus Finch (a character based on the author's own father).

Harper Lee tells of Atticus Finch's struggle for justice from the point of view of Scout and Jem Finch (Atticus' children). Racial tension and prejudice are at the heart of the novel along with the intolerance and social injustice prevalent in the Deep South.

The author wrote the story at a time when racial issues were emerging in the USA. However, the book is set in a time of economic crisis, when equality between sexes and races was not something people considered.



Web quest

1 Are the following statements true (T) or false (F)? Use the exact words from the text to justify your answer.

1 Nelle Harper Lee is a qualified lawyer. ____

2 She has only ever written one book. ____

3 She has won two prizes. ____

2 Answer the questions according to the information in the text. Use your own words.

1 Where does the story take place?

2 What is the story about?

3 Who are the main characters?

4 What are the problems in society that the novel addresses?

5 What issues were present in the 1960s?

3 Type 'harperlee biography' in your web browser and find the answers to the questions.

1 Where was Nelle Harper Lee living when she wrote *To Kill a Mocking Bird*?

2 When was *To Kill a Mocking Bird* first published as an e-book?

4 Type 'Alabama facts' in your web browser and find the answers to the questions.

1 What is the capital of Alabama? What states are its neighbours?

2 What does *Alabama* mean?

Author biography

5 Complete the biography with the correct form of the verbs in brackets.

Nelle Harper Lee **1** _____ (be born) in Alabama in 1926. While she **2** _____ (study) at school, she **3** _____ (become) interested in English literature.

After Nelle Harper Lee **4** _____ (complete) her first year of Law at university she **5** _____ (realise) that she wanted to be a writer. Eventually, she **6** _____ (decide) to follow her dreams, leave university and write a book. Since the publication of *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, it **7** _____ (sell) millions of copies. It **8** _____ (read) by thousands of students in schools around the world every year. Despite its popularity, Lee **9** _____ (not want) to talk about the book.