

To Kill A Mockingbird

by Harper Lee

Background Notes

- Fill in the blanks as we go along. . .

Notes

- During the 1920s there was a huge increase in the production of consumer goods. This extra production created many jobs and additional wealth for the new, urban workers who took those jobs. In an attempt to make their extra income even more valuable, people began investing more heavily in the Stock Market.

- Many even took out loans to purchase stocks. They would repay the loans once the stocks' values increased beyond their original selling prices. As a result, an awful lot of stock in circulation had no cash behind it, except for a ten percent loan fee paid up front. It was as if the entire financial world had made loans backed by potentially worthless collateral.

Notes

- The era's increased productions of consumer goods quickly became an overproduction of goods, because eventually, even the urban workers' increased salaries could not help them buy up all of the available products. Companies soon had more products than they could sell.

Notes

- Farmers, too, overproduced, which decreased the price of food. With less money, farmers, therefore, could no longer contribute to the buying of all those products that were flooding the stores' shelves.

Notes

- The delicate, loan-based financial market and the overproduction of goods led to the Stock Market Crash of 1929. On a series of days called Black Thursday, Black Monday and Black Tuesday, people panicked and sold off, dumped, or traded huge numbers of stocks, ultimately leaving the stocks worthless. Those who had borrowed money could not pay it back, and many banks closed.

Notes

- Industries shut down, millions of people lost their jobs, and 750,000 farmers lost their land. Even professionals, like lawyers, had a difficult time because many clients could no longer afford to pay them. This became the time known as The Great Depression.

Notes

- President Herbert Hoover's plans for helping the country out of this mess failed; he refused to fund any assistance programs with federal money. However, the next president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, introduced a plan in 1933 called the New Deal, which developed federally funded programs to give assistance to the needy and to create new jobs.

- The author of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Harper Lee, was born in Monroeville, Alabama, in 1926, just three years before the stock market crash. Like Atticus Finch in her novel, Lee's father was also a lawyer. In 1931, in the nearby town of Monroeville, Alabama nine young black men were *wrongly* accused and convicted of raping two white women. The trial was highly publicized.

Notes:

- These things seem to have served as inspiration for Lee's novel, though she claims she was not trying to recreate her own childhood story, but the story of any small Southern town where such events could take place. Lee published the novel in 1960, just before the height of the Civil Rights Movement. She won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1961. This was the only book Lee ever published.

Notes

- *To Kill A Mockingbird* is a coming-of-age novel in which the main character matures. She will change from having a child-like view of the world to a more adult-like, and in this change she will lose some of her innocence. The plot covers three years in the lives of Scout and her brother Jem. Scout narrates the novel in first person point of view through adult eyes; that is, she tells the story of her childhood experiences after she is grown up.

Notes

- Through her narration, however, we often hear her child's voice. The title comes from a passage in the novel in which Miss Maudie explains that it is a sin to kill a mockingbird, because they only give us joy. This idea becomes a symbol, in the novel, and we see many examples of “mockingbirds” and witness the world's cruel behavior against their innocence.