

## Chapter 10 Summary

- Jem and Scout think their father is super uncool, not to mention old. He can't even play football, like the other kids' fathers do. Plus, kids at school are giving them grief about the Tom Robinson case, and Scout can't even fight now that she's promised her dad not to. *And* Atticus refuses to teach Scout and Jem how to shoot their shiny new air rifles. Luckily, Uncle Jack steps up.
- Atticus tells Jem that "it's a sin to kill a mockingbird". Although apparently blue jays are okay. (This is where the book gets its name!)
- Scout grumps about how their neighborhood is all old people, and Miss Maudie acknowledges that there aren't any 20- or 30-somethings around to be role models.
- Miss Maudie tries to defend Atticus (he's a checkers grand master! he can play the Jew's Harp!), but Scout is not impressed.
- *"Your father's right," she said. "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."*
- Then Jem is all depressed when his father refuses to join in on the town's Methodists vs. Baptists football game. Seriously, worst dad ever. Right?
- One day Jem and Scout go off to find local wildlife to kill when they see a dog acting kind of strange. Calpurnia dashes for the phone to tell Atticus that there's a mad dog (i.e., [rabid](#)) on the loose.
- Then she talks to Miss Eula May, the town telephone operator, to tell her to let everyone else on the street know that they should stay out of the way of the rabid animal.
- The Radleys don't have a phone, so Calpurnia runs over to their place, bangs on their front door, and shouts, "Mad dog's comin'!" (10.72). Everyone hunkers down inside to watch the dog.
- The dog finally gets within range of Heck Tate's rifle, but he wants Atticus to make the shot. See, if he misses, the bullet will hit the Radley Place. And Mr. Tate knows he can't shoot that well. Atticus reluctantly takes the weapon, walks to the middle of the street, aims, fires, and kills the dog.
- Jem is flabbergasted. This is apparently like all of a sudden seeing your dad make a perfect three-point jump shot or make it through the Expert level of a Guitar Hero song you've been failing. Miss Maudie tells Jem and Scout that Atticus "was the deadest shot in Maycomb County in his time" and his nickname was "Ol' One-Shot" (10.137). So why have Scout and Jem never heard their dad talk about it?
- Well, Atticus feels that his marksmanship is a God-given talent that gives him an unfair advantage over other living creatures, and that he shouldn't use it unless he has to. Scout wants to brag to everyone at school about her father's shooting skill, but Jem tells her not to, because he thinks Atticus wouldn't want her to, since he's never mentioned it before.
- Jem says that he wouldn't care if Atticus couldn't do anything, because, as he says, "Atticus is a gentleman, just like me!" (10.152). Sounds like someone (Jem) has learned a valuable lesson.

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- Now that Scout's a grown-up second-grader, tormenting Boo Radley seems like little kid stuff. She's setting her sights beyond the neighborhood to the metropolis of downtown Maycomb. Getting downtown, however, requires getting past the house of Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose. The old woman hurls insults at them every time they pass her house, no matter how nice they are to her. But Atticus makes polite conversation with Mrs. Dubose, so Scout think he's incredibly brave.
- The day after Jem turns twelve, he's got a load of birthday cash to spend. They head down to town for him to lighten his pockets. On the list of purchases: a toy steam engine for Jem and a baton for Scout.

- As they pass Mrs. Dubose, she accuses them of playing hooky, even though it's Saturday. Jem and Scout can put up with that, but when she attacks their father for defending Tom Robinson, Scout has to drag Jem away. They make their purchases and head home, passing by Mrs. Dubose's house again. She's not on the front porch, and Jem snaps. He grabs Scout's new baton, and uses it to destroy Mrs. Dubose's [camellias](#), finally breaking the baton over his knee. Atticus comes home, and he's not happy.
- He tells his son that no matter what she said, those poor flowers never did anyone any harm, and Jem needs to go apologize—right now.
- Meanwhile, Scout finally speaks her mind. No, her dad says, it's not fair. But things are only going to get worse as the Tom Robinson case gets closer. When they're older, they'll understand why he's doing what he's doing.
- But isn't Atticus wrong, because most of the townspeople think he is? Nope, Atticus says. Personal conscience isn't a democracy.
- Finally, Jem's back. He cleaned up the yard and apologized (even though he didn't mean it), and now Mrs. Dubose wants him to come over every day except Sunday to read to her. Atticus says he has to do it. There's no point in apologizing unless it's sincere. As a sick old lady Mrs. Dubose can't be held responsible for her actions. Atticus is a lot more forgiving than we are.
- Anyway, Jem heads over to Mrs. Dubose's house for his first round of reading. Scout goes with him. They find her in bed, and she gets in a few sharp words before Jem starts reading. Her face is disgusting—wrinkled, spotty, toothless, and drooling—so Scout tries to find something else to look at.
- After a while, the kids notice that Mrs. Dubose's frequent corrections of his mistakes had dropped off, and she doesn't even notice when he stops mid-sentence. Huh. She appears to be in some sort of fit. The kids ask if she's all right, but she doesn't answer. Then an alarm clock goes off, and Mrs. Dubose's servant Jessie shoos them out of the house, saying it's time for Mrs. Dubose's medicine. Reading to Mrs. Dubose becomes part of their daily schedule.
- One evening Scout asks Atticus what exactly a "nigger-lover" is, since that's what Mrs. Dubose frequently calls him, and it's also what Francis said. Is that why she jumped Francis? Yes. Atticus asks why Scout's asking for a definition if she understood it well enough to make it the reason for a fight, and Scout says that it was the way Francis said it that got on her nerves.
- Atticus tells her that the term doesn't mean anything, but it's something "ignorant, trashy people use [...] when they think somebody's favoring Negroes over and above themselves", and that even higher-class people use it sometimes when they want to put someone down. It's not actually an insult; it just shows you how "poor" the person using it is.
- One afternoon while Jem is plugging away at reading aloud to Mrs. Dubose, Atticus surprises them by coming in. It turns out he's just left work—Mrs. Dubose has been setting the alarm clock later and later each day, so Jem and Scout have been staying longer and longer without realizing it. Mrs. Dubose says that Jem has to come for a week longer, even though the original month is up, and Atticus says he has to do it. Finally the last day of reading is over. Hooray! Now Jem can turn to more important things, like college football.
- One evening, Mrs. Dubose dies. Atticus comes home with a box and an explanation: Mrs. Dubose was a [morphine](#) addict and wanted to kick the habit before she died as a matter of personal pride. Her fits were caused by withdrawal, and the reading helped keep her mind off the cravings till the alarm clock went off and she could have a dose (which also explains why the reading periods got longer and longer). By the end of the reading afternoons, she was free of the drug habit. The box Atticus brought home is for Jem. When he opens it he finds a camellia.
- Jem is angry at this needling from beyond the grave, but Atticus tells him that he thinks it's a message that everything's all right. If Jem hadn't gone on an anti-camellia rampage, Atticus might have made his son go read to Mrs. Dubose anyway, in order "to see what real courage is" -- not using a gun, but fighting for a cause you believe in even if you know you probably won't win.

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- Scout grumps about how their neighborhood is all old people, and Miss Maudie acknowledges that there aren't any 20- or 30-somethings around to be role models.
- Miss Maudie tries to defend Atticus (he's a checkers grand master! he can play the \_\_\_\_\_!), but Scout is not impressed.
- *"Your father's right," she said. "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird."* Why does the author want us as readers to learn this lesson?

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- One day Jem and Scout go off to find local wildlife to kill when they see a dog acting kind of strange. Calpurnia dashes for the phone to tell Atticus that there's a mad dog (i.e., \_\_\_\_\_) on the loose. Then she talks to Miss Eula May, the town telephone operator, to tell her to let everyone else on the street know that they should stay out of the way of the rabid animal.
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  - He tells his son that no matter what she said, those poor flowers never did anyone any harm, and Jem needs to go apologize—right now. Meanwhile, Scout finally speaks her mind. No, her dad says, it's not fair. But things are only going to get worse as the Tom Robinson case gets closer. When they're older, they'll understand why he's \_\_\_\_\_.
  - But isn't Atticus wrong, because most of the townspeople think he is? Nope, Atticus says. \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Finally, Jem's back. He cleaned up the yard and apologized (even though he didn't mean it), and now Mrs. Dubose wants him to come over every day except Sunday to read to her. Atticus says he has to do it. There's no point in \_\_\_\_\_ unless it's sincere. As a sick old lady Mrs. Dubose can't be held responsible for her actions. Atticus is a lot more forgiving than we are.
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- Why is it important to fight for a good cause, even if you know you won't win?
-