

Chapter 17 Summary

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- Mr. Tate says that on the night of November 21st Bob Ewell brought him to the Ewell house, where he found Mr. Ewell's daughter, who had been badly beaten. When Mr. Tate asked her who did it, she said Tom Robinson, and when he asked her if Robinson had raped her, she said yes. Mr. Tate went and got Robinson, had the Ewell girl identify him, and then arrested him.
- Next, it's Atticus's turn to question the witness. He asks (three times) if Mr. Tate called a doctor to tend to the Ewell girl's injuries, and (all three times) Tate says no. Then he asks Tate to describe those injuries, and he says she had bruises and a black eye. Atticus asks which eye was the black one, and Tate, after giving him a what-kind-of-stupid-question-is-this look, says it was her left. Atticus gets him to clarify that it was the left from his perspective, which means it was the girl's own right. Tate, after another question from Atticus, goes on to describe her injuries further: the right side of her face (where the black eye was) was heavily bruised, and there were finger marks all around her throat. That ends Mr. Tate's testimony, and he leaves the witness stand.
- Scout thinks it's all rather boring and dry, not at all the high drama, *Law and Order* lawyering she had expected. Now it's Bob Ewell's turn for the witness stand. Scout gives us some facts about the Ewells: they're always on welfare and they live near an African-American settlement in a shack behind the dump. Which they scavenge. It's a pretty grim life. Beside the trash and the old cars in their front yard, there's one thing that stands out, or rather six: a set of chipped jars holding Mayella's well-tended bright red geraniums. Scout remembers that the nearby African-American houses are clean and inviting, but the Ewell residence is filthy. The point? "All the little man on the witness stand had that made him any better than his nearest neighbors was, that if scrubbed with lye soap in very hot water, his skin was white"
- Mr. Ewell gives his version: he came home to hear Mayella screaming inside the house, ran to the window and saw Tom Robinson raping her. At his last words the crowd explodes, and Judge Taylor has to bang his gavel for a full five minutes before they calm down. Mr. Ewell is pleased with the effect he has had on his audience, but Judge Taylor is not. The judge says that there's been a request to clear the court, or at least to save the tender ears of the women and children by kicking them out, but that he'll let everyone stay—unless they misbehave, in which case, he'll have them up for contempt of court. More testimony: he ran to get into the house, but the man ran out before he could catch him, so he ran for Mr. Tate. Mr. Ewell is so eager to get off the witness stand that he collides with Atticus. Not so fast. Atticus is just ready to question him. Hm, it looks like Mr. Ewell didn't expect to get [cross-examined](#). Did Ewell call a doctor? Nope. He's never called a doctor for any of his family, as it would cost five dollars. Atticus continues by asking Ewell about his daughter's injuries, and he confirms that the sheriff's description was correct.
- The next question is whether Ewell can read and write. Ewell answers yes, with a joke about signing his welfare checks that seems to go over well with the crowd. Scout is getting nervous, since she doesn't see where Atticus is heading with these questions. Atticus has Ewell write his name, and then states what that action demonstrated: Ewell is left-handed. Scout notices that Jem is excited, and he whispers that they've got him now, but Scout doesn't get it; Tom Robinson might be left-handed, too, and from where she's sitting he certainly looks strong enough to have beaten up Mayella.

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Why does it matter if Mr. Ewell is left handed?
