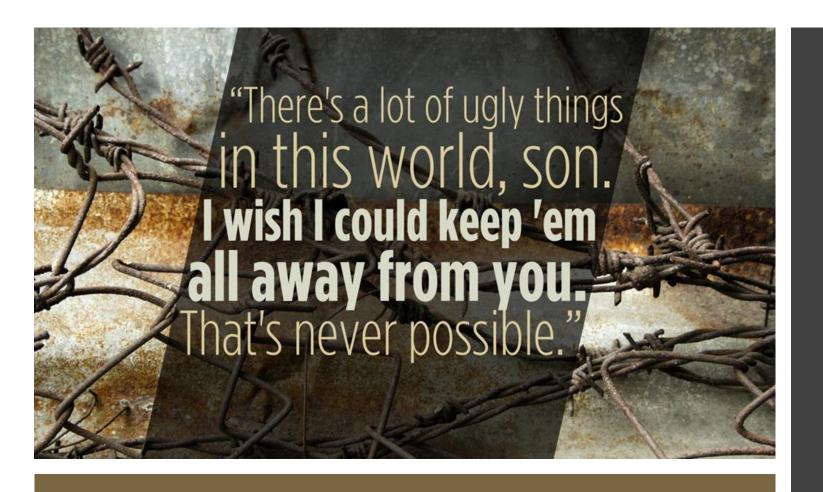
"The unforgettable novel of a childhood in a sleepy Southern town and the crisis of conscience that rocked it, To Kill A Mockingbird became both an instant bestseller and a critical success when it was first published in 1960. It went on to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1961 and was later made into an Academy Award-winning film, also a classic." - Goodreads Synopsis





Pre-Reading Questions



How do you define innocence?

Are we ever innocent?

And if we are, how and when is innocence lost?

Describe someone you know who is innocent.

## What does it mean to be an adult?

✓ What is lost and gained when someone becomes an adult?

✓ When will *you* consider yourself an adult?

✓ When will society consider you an adult?





How do you define justice?

✓ Do we live in a just world?

✓ Do we live in a just country?

✓ What is the most unjust occurrence you've ever heard about?

Some essential questions at the center of To Kill a Mockingbird:

What factors influence our moral growth? What kinds of experiences help us learn how to judge right from wrong?

✓ What is real courage?

Who decides who belongs and who doesn't in "normal" or mainstream society?



"Harper Lee includes the word "nigger" deliberately to illustrate the society she writes about. Therefore, when quoting the text of *To Kill a Mockingbird...*, we have chosen to let the word remain as it originally appeared, without any substitution" ("Teaching Mockingbird").

The dehumanizing power of this term and the ease with which some Americans have used it to describe their fellow human beings is central to understanding the themes of identity and human behavior at the heart of the book.

#### The N-Word

Randall Kennedy, an African-American law professor, says we need to interrogate our use of the word. In his book *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*, he discusses its importance:

Nigger describes how courts have handled the word, as well as the pitfalls that can accompany efforts to ban, censor, or suppress its use. Kennedy's premise here, as elsewhere, is that Americans are better off dragging the troublesome word out into daylight and exploring how it really functions in discourse—as a racist slur, to be sure, but also as a term fraught with irony or, among some blacks, as a jocular expression of solidarity, even affection. For Kennedy, nigger does not mean only one thing; a word's meaning, he says, always depends on the context and manner of its use, the speaker, and the speaker's intentions.

WHITE

COLORED

What is the **SETTING** of *To Kill a Mockingbird?* 

## The SETTING of To Kill a Mockingbird:

time: 1933-1935 (during the Great Depression, 1929-1939)

"Maycomb County had recently been told it had nothing to fear but fear itself" (Lee 6). This is a reference to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's inaugural address which took place in March 1933.

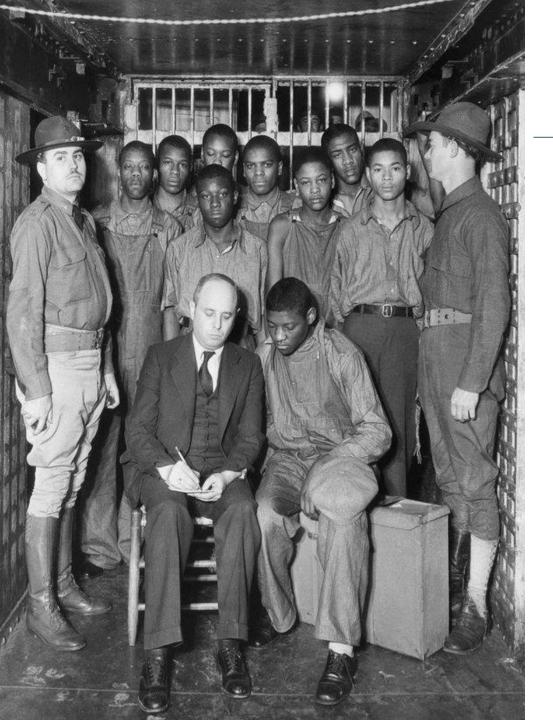
place: Maycomb, Alabama (a fictional town)

**environment: The Jim Crow South** was the era during which local and state laws enforced the legal segregation of white and black citizens from the 1870s into the 1960s.



#### **The Jim Crow South**

- ✓ Jim Crow is most likely a reference to a blackface performer from the 1890s.
- ✓ Jim Crow laws were state and local laws enforcing racial segregation in the Southern United States.
- ✓ The mandated *de jure* (legal) discrimination against African-Americans, who were treated as second class citizens after Reconstruction ended and the Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) case permitted the existence of facilities that were "separate but equal."
- ✓ Jim Crow laws were so pervasive that they were even written into state constitutions in the South.
- ✓ The Civil Rights laws of the 1960s ended the practice of de jure discrimination, though de facto discrimination and segregation still exists in the U.S.



### The Scottsboro Boys Case

- ✓ No crime in American history-- let alone a crime that never occurred-- produced as many trials, convictions, reversals, and retrials as did an alleged gang rape of two white girls by nine black teenagers on the Southern Railroad freight run from Chattanooga to Memphis on March 25, 1931.
- ✓ Nine African-American kids (aged 13-20) were falsely accused of raping two white women. They faced a potential lynch mob, all-white juries, racist judges, and hostile crowds.
- ✓ After many trials and appeals, all but two ended up serving jail time, one was shot by police, and one, sentenced to death, escape.
- ✓ All of the Scottsboro Boys were eventually pardoned, and the case is widely seen as an example of racist injustice.

#### **General Information About the Depression**

- ✓ The Depression began in 1929, when the collapse of the stock market undermined the entire U.S. economy.
- ✓ In the US, the average family's income dropped by 40% during the Depression and the stock market lost 90% of its value between 1929 and 1933.
- ✓ Scholars estimate that nearly 50% of children during the Great Depression did not have adequate food, shelter, or medical care. Many suffered rickets.
- ✓ By the 1930s, thousands of schools were operating on reduced hours or were closed down entirely. Some three million children had left school, and at least 200,000 took to riding the rails.



# Do we develop our social identity or is it developed for us by society?

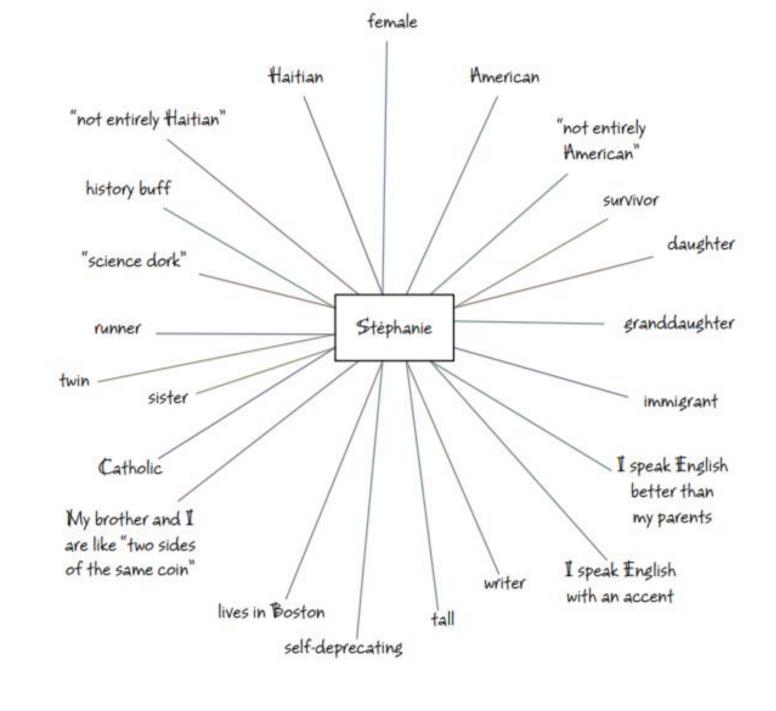
 "Social identities reflect the way individuals and groups internalize established social categories within their societies, such as their cultural (or ethnic) identities, gender identities, class identities, and so on. These social categories shape our ideas about who we think we are, how we want to be seen by others, and the groups to which we belong."

- Sociologist Zuleyka Zevallos

# **Identity Chart**

Create an identity chart for yourself.

others see you as well as how you see yourself!



As you read, pay attention to:

- 1) Acts of courage
- 2) Acts of injustice (in overall society or a specific act)
- Moments when Scout, Jem, and Dill learn something new about Maycomb and its residents.
- 4) The "other" people who don't fit in or aren't accepted members of society.

