

# *To Kill a Mockingbird* The Scottsboro Boys

## 1. Question & Research Task

“*No justice, no peace!*” is a rallying cry at protests all over the country, as more Americans stand against racism and fight for social justice. Racial disparity is present throughout the American criminal justice system. According to the [NAACP](#), “one out of every three Black boys today can expect to be sentenced to prison, compared [to] one out of six Latino boys, [and] one out of 17 white boys.” In 1960, when Harper Lee’s novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published, [“black men were five times as likely as whites to be incarcerated.”](#)

Though Harper Lee has said that the unfair trial of Tom Robinson “was a composite of all the trials in the world,” it is widely believed to be inspired by the infamous case of The Scottsboro Boys. As you research The Scottsboro Boys today, consider how the case relates to the novel. Does this influence your reaction to the novel?

**In this Slam Dunk, you will conduct brief, focused research to respond to the inquiry question:**

**What impact does historical context have on a novel and on the reaction of readers to it?**

SLIDE NAVIGATION

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The trailer for the 2016 documentary *13th*. Director Ava DuVernay examines how mass incarceration of African Americans allowed slavery to continue in the US after it was officially abolished in the constitution. Your teacher/librarian may show this video for in-school learning.

Image Source: YouTube

## 2. Information Sources

In March of 1931, a crime allegedly occurred on a train in Alabama. This was a famous case during Harper Lee's childhood and is cited as one inspiration for the trial at the center of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Read the resources below to learn more about the incident and its aftermath.

- [Overview of Case](#)
- [Who Were the Scottsboro Boys?](#)
- [Presumed Guilty: 9 Black Teens Faced Bias & Death](#)
- [Primary Source: An appeal](#)
- [Posthumous Pardons in 2013](#)



The Scottsboro Boys

Image Source: Discovery Education, by subscription

### 3. Student Activity

To develop a thorough understanding of The Scottsboro Boys case, you will create a timeline of the events.

**Step 1:** Use the resources on [Slide 2](#) to take notes on the events of the Scottsboro Trial. Think about how race affected the judicial proceedings. Be sure to cite your sources in MLA format.

**Step 2:** Using your notes, construct a digital timeline of the events surrounding the case. You may want to use one of the following digital resources:

- [ScribbleMaps](#)
- [Time Line Editor](#)
- [PowerPoint](#)
- [Google Slides](#)



Eight of the nine Scottsboro defendants

Image Source: Public domain



## 4. Assessment Activity

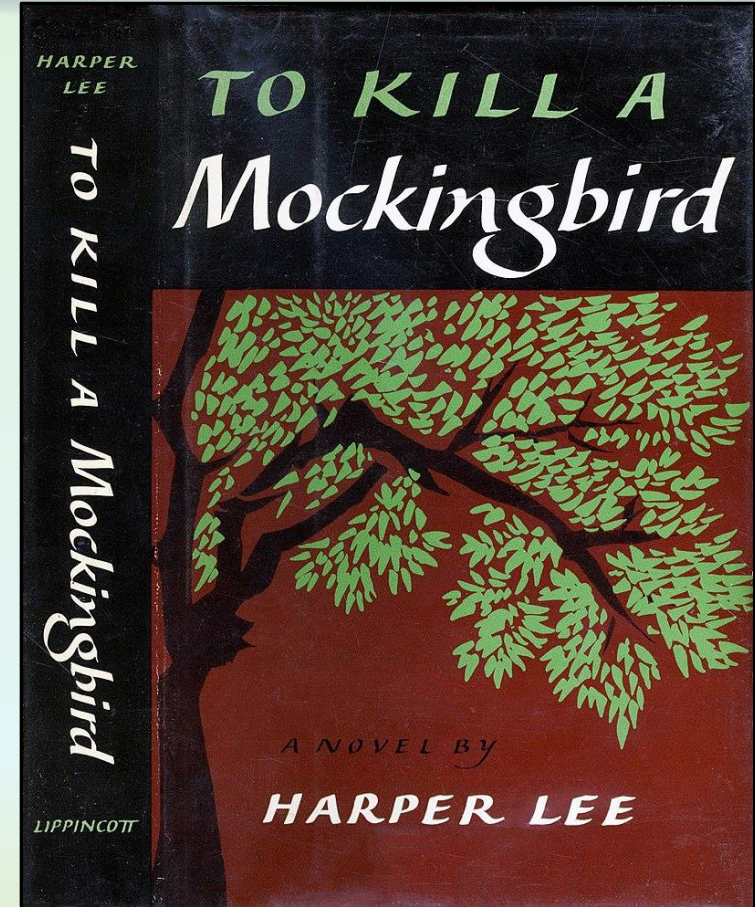
### What impact does historical context have on a novel and on the reaction of readers to it?

Based on your progress in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, answer one of the following prompts. Be sure to use evidence from your timeline to support your answer. Your response should be at least two paragraphs long and include at least three pieces of historical evidence from your research.

Your teacher may grade your response according to this [rubric](#).

**Option A. If you have not read TKAM**, or have read very little so far: how does knowing about The Scottsboro Boys influence your view of the novel? What predictions can you make about the novel based on what you have learned about the time period?

**Option B. If you have read all or most of TKAM**: how does knowing about The Scottsboro Boys influence your view of the novel? Consider the parallels between Tom Robinson's case and The Scottsboro Trial in your answer. Is understanding this piece of history helpful to understanding the novel?



The first edition cover of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, designed by Shirley Smith.

## 5. Enrichment Activities



Watch *The Scottsboro Boys* perform at the 2011 Tony Awards.

Image Source: YouTube

In 2010, a musical called *The Scottsboro Boys* opened on Broadway. It ran for only 29 previews and 49 performances and received mixed reviews. Some critics and theatre-goers thought it was an inappropriate subject for a musical and others protested the show's use of blackface and minstrel elements. The show's creators and fans defended the show, saying those elements were used to point out our country's racist history.

Learn about the musical by exploring some of the links below:

- [Highlights from \*The Scottsboro Boys\*](#)
- ['Scottsboro Boys' Tell Their Own Story on Broadway](#) (listen to hear clips from the show)
- [Blackface and Bigotry, Finely Tuned](#)
- [The Scottsboro Boys: A memorable musical](#)

Now, write a letter to John Kander and Fred Ebb, the creators of this musical. Do you think this is an appropriate topic for a musical? Why or why not? Let them know! Include information you have learned in your research about the real-life Scottsboro Boys and the musical. You might also want to discuss Harper Lee's adaptation of the case and/or the role of race in today's justice system. Be sure to use correct [letter format](#).

# 6. Teacher Resources

<a href="#">1</a>	<a href="#">2</a>	<a href="#">3</a>	<a href="#">4</a>	<a href="#">5</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
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## Learning Standards Alignment

### Content Learning Standards

### Grade Level and Content Area

### BCPS Curriculum : English 9

#### [Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy](#)

Reading: 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Writing: 7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

W 9.3 D Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters

#### [Standards for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learner](#)

1.1.6 Read, view, and listen for information presented in any format (e.g. textual, visual, media, digital) in order to make inferences and gather meaning.

2.1.3 Use strategies to draw conclusions from information and apply knowledge to curricular areas, real-world situations, and further investigations.

#### [ISTE NETS - National Educational Technology Standards for Students](#)

3. Research and Information Fluency: Students apply digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information.  
b. Locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media.

4. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making: Students use critical thinking skills to plan and conduct research, manage projects, solve problems, and make informed decisions using appropriate digital tools and resources. c. Collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions.

## Grade 9 Unit 3

**Time Frame: One 90 minute lesson**

### Differentiation strategies for this lesson:

- Direct students to use learning tools included in our BCPS-licensed databases, such as: audio read-aloud, labeled reading levels/Lexiles, and embedded dictionaries.
- Have students use learning supports provided in BCPS Digital Content found in the [Apps Portal](#). Refer to [Digital Content Snapshot/Support pages](#) as needed.

### [Learning Styles addressed in this lesson:](#)

Field dependent, field independent, global, auditory, visual

### Notes to the teacher:

- Provide students with login information as needed to authenticate BCPS Digital Content. Login information is on the **BCPS Digital Content** page in the [Apps Portal](#)
- Consider assigning organizers to students as a OneDrive Assignment using the [Schoolology Assignment App](#).
- Collaborate with your school library media specialist to implement this lesson.
- Headphones/speakers necessary for viewing videos.