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## Aunt Alexandra

Alexandra Finch is Atticus and Uncle Jack's sister, Jem and Scout's aunt, Francis's grandmother. She lives at Finch's Landing, which is associated with a past of cotton-growing and slave-owning. Unlike her brothers, she has not moved away and made a new life for herself and perhaps consequently, as Scout discovers, she holds onto traditional views and is obsessed with family heredity. Although Aunt Alexandra is not favourably portrayed by Scout, she has several redeeming moments, and these give a more rounded picture than if her character had remained the same throughout.

- Aunt Alexandra first features in the story when Atticus, Jem and Scout go to spend Christmas at Finch's Landing.
- Aunt Alexandra disapproves of Scout's tomboy ways. She is very concerned with turning her niece into a 'lady', and thus provides a contrast to other main adult characters like Atticus and Miss Maudie.
- Aunt Alexandra becomes a major character in the plot when she invites herself to stay at the Finch home to help Atticus with the children during the difficult trial period.
- Aunt Alexandra and Atticus have fundamentally different attitudes to child rearing and servant supervision, Aunt Alexandra displaying prejudiced behaviour and applying strict rules of conduct.
- When Aunt Alexandra expresses sympathy for Atticus at the news of Tom Robinson's death, detaching herself from the hypocritical Missionary Society meeting, Scout is suddenly able to appreciate the dignity of her aunt's behaviour.

## Miss Maudie Atkinson

As Scout and Jem's neighbour, who is always working in her garden, Miss Maudie is a source of information and company for the children. As with Calpurnia, the reader feels positive towards this character because Scout and Atticus like and value her. Her major role in the plot seems to be to reinforce Atticus's philosophy, and to be a constant and reassuring model for the children when Atticus is busy elsewhere.

Miss Maudie may be a mouthpiece for Harper Lee's views, as at certain times are Atticus and Scout. For instance, Miss Maudie shows her disapproval of 'foot-washers' who 'think women are a sin by definition' (Chapter 5, p. 51). She despises prejudice of any kind. This is shown by Scout's first description of her – she 'loved everything that grew in God's earth' (Chapter 5, p. 48) with the exception of nut grass, which is hugely symbolic of prejudice that can sweep through a society.

- Miss Maudie is an especially important female role model for Scout.
- After major stressful events in the novel, Miss Maudie is always there for the children to provide sensible human philosophy.
- When Miss Maudie's house burns down and she does not seem too upset at losing her largest material possession, her reaction has a big impact on the children.
- Miss Maudie disapproves of neighbourhood gossip. She dislikes how the town comes out to watch 'a poor devil on trial for his life' (Chapter 16, p. 165), and silences Mrs Merriweather over her hypocrisy at Aunt Alexandra's tea-party.

### KEY QUOTE

Scout comments on her aunt's arrival: 'Aunt Alexandra fitted into the world of Maycomb like a hand into a glove, but never into the world of Jem and me' (Chapter 13, p. 137).

### KEY QUOTE

Miss Maudie: 'Why, one sprig of nut-grass can ruin a whole yard ... the wind blows it all over Maycomb County!' (Chapter 5, p. 48)

## Other Maycomb characters

### THE EWELLS

The Ewells are a poor, ill-educated family, who represent the prejudiced element of the community. The comments about Burris Ewell at school help to build an impression of a dysfunctional and uncared for family, and Mayella Ewell is the white woman who accuses Tom Robinson of rape.

Mayella has no mother and has no help in bringing up a large family. She is shown to be lonely and neglected. This lack of love, warmth and human contact leads Mayella to grab Tom, as she wants to be kissed by a man. She is a pathetic figure at the trial.

Robert Ewell, the father, has his major scene at the trial, where he is rude, bigoted and foul-mouthed (see **Language: The language characters speak**). There is a strong indication that he abuses Mayella and that it was he who beat her up. His vicious acts of revenge against Tom, Atticus and Judge Taylor are the driving force of the final chapters.

Through Robert Ewell's death at the end, the novelist seems to be saying that he is beyond hope, or perhaps that justice must be seen to be done. Perhaps his death represents hope for the future, as the fear he caused, which created a barrier to truth and understanding, has been removed. Mayella's flowers at the Ewell residence can now begin to flourish.

### THE CUNNINGHAMS

The Cunningham family is also poor, but, in contrast to the Ewells who are from the city, they are country folk, whose pride is evident from the outset, when Walter refuses to accept something he cannot repay on his first day of school. Mr Cunningham also shows this family trait by paying Atticus for his law work in ways other than money. He shows a basic goodness by dispersing the racist mob once his eyes are 'opened' by Scout.

A different member of the family, one of the jurors, has great difficulty finding Tom guilty. Harper Lee is showing that if groups of people like these can, if only for a moment, stand in another's shoes and see their viewpoint, then there has to be hope for the future.

### MRS HENRY LAFAYETTE DUBOSE

Mrs Henry Lafayette Dubose is another Finch neighbour, who is known as the 'meanest old woman who ever lived' (Chapter 4, p. 41). She is an important character as Jem has to read to her after he beheads her camellia bushes, and when she dies the children learn that she was struggling to combat a morphine addiction. Atticus uses this episode to teach them a lesson on courage.

### KEY QUOTE

Atticus: 'I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand' (Chapter 11, p. 118).



## Further questions



## EXAM-STYLE QUESTIONS

- Prejudice is an important theme in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. What does the author say about prejudice and what methods does she use to present her ideas to the reader?
- Read the following extract: 'But when he noticed us dragging around the neighbourhood, not eating, taking little interest in our normal pursuits, Atticus discovered how deeply frightened we were ... he said, "What's bothering you, son?"' (Chapter 23, p. 224). Write about how Harper Lee presents Atticus and Jem in this passage. What does it say about their relationship?
- Look at how Harper Lee portrays Tom Robinson in the trial scenes. How does the author encourage the reader both to admire and to pity Tom? Support your answer with details from the text.
- Read the passage from 'The back of the Radley house was less inviting than the front ...' to 'He ran to the oak tree in his shorts.' (Chapter 6, pp. 58–60). How does Harper Lee create mood and atmosphere here?
- How do you respond to Aunt Alexandra in the novel? Write about:
  - What Aunt Alexandra says and does that makes you respond in the way you do.
  - How Harper Lee evokes the reader's response to this character through the methods she uses to write about her.

## CONTROLLED ASSESSMENT-STYLE QUESTIONS

## Themes and ideas

- Explore the importance of a novel's setting

Write about the importance of Maycomb as the novel's setting and how it influences key ideas and allows for key themes to be developed.

- Explore the effect of a title on the way we read a novel

Write about the title '*To Kill a Mockingbird*' and why the writer may have chosen it, in the light of the key themes and ideas in the text.

## Characterisation and voice

- Write about a key relationship that develops over the course of a novel you have read

How does the writer present the characters of Jem and Scout and their relationship as they grow up over the course of the novel?

- Explore the ways a novelist conveys the voice of his/her central character

How does Harper Lee use Scout's voice to tell the story, and what techniques does she use to bring her to life?

## Literary terms

Literary term	Explanation
autobiography	the story of the author's life
atmosphere	a mood or feeling
bildungsroman	a novel that describes a character's development from childhood to maturity, focusing on their experience, education and identity
character(s)	either a person in a play, novel, etc., or his or her personality
chronological	when the events in a story are told in the order they happened. It is possible to have a chronological <b>narrative</b> containing <b>flashbacks</b> as long as the main narrative continues to move forwards through time
colloquial	the everyday speech used by people in ordinary situations
dialect	accent and vocabulary, varying by region and social background
epigraph	a heading or quotation that writers sometimes use at the beginning of their work as an indication of theme
figurative language	elaborate (as distinct from plain) language. Commonly <b>metaphor</b> and <b>simile</b>
first-person narrative	stories told by an 'I' figure who is directly involved. This contrasts with the 'omniscient narrator' where the storyteller knows all and stands outside the story
flashback	a sudden jumping back to an earlier point in the <b>narrative</b> (see 'echoing' in <b>foreshadowing</b> )
foreshadowing	close to the idea of prophesying, an instance or reference to an incident coming later in the text. A contrast to 'echoing' (looking backwards)
genre	a type of literature, for instance poetry, drama, biography, fiction
imagery	descriptive language that uses images to make actions, objects and characters more vivid in the reader's mind. <b>Metaphors</b> and <b>similes</b> are examples of imagery
irony	when someone deliberately says one thing when they mean another, usually in a humorous or sarcastic way
leitmotif	see <b>motif</b>
malapropism	confused, amusing, inaccurate use of long words, so called after Mrs Malaprop in Sheridan's play <i>The Rivals</i> (1775), who refers to another character as 'the very pineapple of politeness' instead of pinnacle (malaprop from the French phrase <i>mal</i> – English equivalent, inappropriate)
maxim	a short, pithy statement proposing model human behaviour
metaphor	when one thing is used to describe another thing to create a striking or unusual image