

To Kill A Mockingbird: Parallels to Jim Crow America

By Paul Horton, Courtney Lubs, and Rick Vanderwall, Iowa

Overview

This nine-week, 45-minute class period, integrated language arts/social studies unit, although centered on the reading of Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*, seeks to broaden the context of the novel. This is accomplished as students explore the tragic case of the Scottsboro Boys in a WebQuest, an introduction to the Jim Crow System through supplemental readings, and research into actual demographic statistics of Monroeville and Monroe County, Alabama, of the 1930s. The unit plan includes literature circle response discussion and a variety of supplemental readings and activities to complete the picture of rural Alabama presented in the novel.

American Literature Curriculum Standards

- Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g. sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics)
- Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes
- Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities
- Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information)

Social Studies Curriculum Standards

- Reconstruct the meaning of a historical passage
- Read historical narratives imaginatively
- Utilize visual and mathematical data
- Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas
- Differentiate between historical facts and interpretations
- Consider multiple perspectives
- Compare competing historical narratives
- Interrogate historical data
- Identify the gaps in the available records and marshal contextual knowledge and perspectives of the time and place
- Identify issues and problems in the past
- Marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances
- Identify relevant historical antecedents

Week One

Pre-reading Activities:

- Read the essay "What Was Jim Crow?" (Used by permission)
<http://www.ferris.edu/news/jimcrow/what.htm>

- Read the essay "Scottsboro Case"
<http://www.blackhistory.eb.com/micro/533/34.html>

Reading Assignments:

- Read chapters one through four, pages 7-45

Activities:

Maycomb Graveyard Quiz: A Review of the Deep South Historical Context

By Paul Horton

The Maycomb graveyard quiz reviews pertinent historical context for understanding *To Kill A Mockingbird*. One class period at the beginning of the unit should be devoted to covering the elements of the definition and evolution of the Jim Crow system as presented in the supplemental essay by David Pilgrim, "What Was Jim Crow?"

[<http://www.ferris.edu/news/jimcrow/what.htm>] Further information about the Jim Crow System is included for discussion in student-produced narratives of individuals who represent the histories of the Ewell, Robinson, and Finch families. Students will use notes and consult Internet sources to produce three one page typed narratives that provide insight into each family history.

A Southern Town in the 1930s: A Tale of Two Towns

By Paul Horton

Students will review and analyze Harper Lee's descriptions of Maycomb and then review and analyze John Dollard's sociological description of a typical town in the deep South in the 30s. Students will be asked to contrast Lee's description of Maycomb with Dollard's description of "Southerntown." Students will then use both descriptions to draw a composite map of a southern town and a southern county. Students will understand that the South was very rural during the 1930s and that most people lived in the country surrounding towns like Maycomb.

Week Two

Reading Assignments:

- Read chapters five through eight, pages 46-78

Activity:

The Origins of Segregated Education in the South: Why Scout Did Not Have Any African-American Classmates

By Paul Horton

In the world described in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Scout goes to school and does not have any black classmates. Indeed, her teacher comes from an area of North Alabama where there are very few African Americans. Students will read accounts of attempts made by the Klu Klux Klan during the Reconstruction Period to keep schools segregated. These accounts are taken from testimony given to a Senate committee that investigated Klan activities in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Students will identify the intentions of the Klan by answering questions. They will then produce a radio documentary set in the thirties entitled: "The Origins of School Segregation in the South."

Week Three

Reading Assignments:

- Read chapters nine through eleven, pages 79-116

Activity:

***To Kill A Mockingbird* Literature Circle Activity**

By Rick Vanderwall

Literature Circles are a reading response activity widely used in current language arts classrooms. Students are divided into discussion groups of three to five students. Each member of the group is assigned a specific role to fulfill during the discussion. Artifacts of the fulfillment of that role are an expectation of the activity. In this case, students will be processing a discussion of part one of the novel.

Week Four

Reading Assignments:

- Read Chapters Twelve through Fifteen, pages 117-157

Activity:

Seeing Maycomb County Objectively: A Look at What the U.S. Census Reveals About Monroe County, Alabama in the 1930s

By Paul Horton

Students will examine census data on Monroe County, Alabama in the 1930s to make generalizations about the ways that race and class operated in the deep South. Although Harper Lee strongly denied that Monroeville of Monroe County, Alabama, was the setting for *To Kill a Mockingbird*, statistics on Monroe County are used because they are typical of south Alabama counties below the fertile cotton region, or "black-belt." Census data offers an important balance to the perceptions of Scout who learns about race and class in a series of life lessons within the novel. Students will divide into pairs to examine census data and answer questions on a worksheet. Each student will then write a paragraph profile of Monroe County that makes use of the their responses to the worksheet questions. The paragraph prompt is question number 10.

Week Five

Reading Assignments:

- Read Chapters sixteen through eighteen, pages 158-192

Activities:

***To Kill a Mockingbird* and Courtroom Procedures I: Who are the People in the Courtroom?**

By Courtney Lubs

The purpose of this set of lessons is to help students gain a better understanding of the trial in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, as well as to prepare them for an upcoming mock trial/classroom courtroom activity and a WebQuest. In this first lesson, students will examine the members of a criminal courtroom, ultimately creating job descriptions for each member. Students will collect information using a film clip (here, I use *The Rainmaker*, but many options are possible). In the second portion of this lesson, a guest speaker is recommended. And in the third portion of this lesson, students will conduct a classroom courtroom/mock trial using *To Kill A Mockingbird* as the source of evidence. This set of lessons should begin following the reading of chapter 16 (the beginning of Tom Robinson's trial) in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. These lessons are designed with a 45-minute class period in mind.

***To Kill A Mockingbird* and Courtroom Procedures II: Interview with a Criminal Attorney (Research for the Mock Trial)**

By Courtney Lubs

This is a three-day lesson. Plan for two days to write interview questions, and one day to interview a local attorney. Before beginning, the teacher will need to contact a criminal attorney in the community who is willing to visit the classroom. (This contact must be made well in advance, as the visit is vital, in terms of timing, to this set of lessons. Parents of students are usually a good resource.) This attorney will serve to help students delineate the reality of a criminal trial from any glorified fiction they may have received from media such as TV or film. Students will use this opportunity to collect information for conducting their own criminal trial, following the reading of the trial scenes in *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

Week Six

Reading Assignments:

- Read chapters nineteen through twenty-three, pages 192-230

Activity:

***To Kill A Mockingbird* and Courtroom Procedures III: The Mock Trial**

By Courtney Lubs

This is the third lesson in a set of lessons designed to teach students about the process of a criminal trial. This lesson can be modified to fit the class time availability. By this time, students should be familiar with the trial in *To Kill A Mockingbird*, as well as courtroom procedures. Now, they will use this knowledge to construct a case of their own, from the charge to the handing down of the verdict.

Week Seven

Reading Assignments:

- Read chapters twenty-four through twenty-eight, pages 230-269

Activity:

***To Kill A Mockingbird* Literature Circle Activity II**

By Rick Vanderwall

Literature Circles are a reading response activity widely used in current language arts classrooms. Students are divided into discussion groups of three to five students. Each member of the group is assigned a specific role to fulfill during the discussion. Artifacts of the fulfillment of that role are an expectation of the activity. In this case, students will process a discussion of part one of the novel.

Week Eight

Reading Assignments:

- Read chapters twenty-nine through thirty-one, pages 269-273

Activity:

Scout Meets Leonard Haskins: Experiencing Life Beyond Scout's Maycomb, A Culminating Assignment

By Paul Horton and Rick Vanderwall

Harper Lee's Scout sees the world through her experience. As a young, white girl growing up in a southern town, Scout's world is carefully circumscribed. While she sees glimpses of an African-American world through Cal, she is, nevertheless, sheltered from the harsher everyday realities of Jim Crow. In part, she sees the world through her father's explanations. And, of course, the racial assumptions that form the core of Jim Crow thinking are brought to the forefront by the trial. The purpose of this assignment is to encourage students to imagine a fuller range of experience between Scout and a young, African-American man. Students are asked to imagine a one-day get together between Scout and Leonard Haskins, who is, for our purposes, Cal's nephew. Students will describe the day from Scout's point of view and from Leonard's point of view in separate narratives. Before writing, students will consider what they have learned thus far about the racial divide in Maycomb. They will then view Works Progress Administration images of African American life in the South during the 1930s before writing their narratives.

Week Nine

Activity:

To Kill A Mockingbird* and The Scottsboro Trial WebQuest: *The Trials of Our Times

By Courtney Lubs

This lesson allows students to examine the Scottsboro trial and compare it to the trial in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. They will complete three preliminary activities before the culminating assignment: a comparison/contrast essay between the two trials. All resources are self-contained within the WebQuest, including Web Sites, activities, and rubrics for assessment. Teachers should allow 4-5 class periods for completion of the WebQuest, though students can access the WebQuest at home as well.