### *To Kill A Mockingbird Reading Comprehension*

### Activity 1: Deconstructing and Reconstructing a Text

1. Highlight key words in *History of Alabama* extract below. What is the main idea (as pithy as possible) of each paragraph and what evidence such as key words supports this conclusion?
2. Take notes on or summarise the text below – use the headings you worked out above, key words and other clues in the text to help you write clearly and logically. Now reconstruct the text from your notes without reference to the original text. Focus on paragraphing separate ideas and using *organising phrases* and *text connectives* to make the text cohesive.
3. Compare and contrast the position and power of white and black Americans in Alabama in this extract.

# History of Alabama

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Early European settlement**

[Alabama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alabama) became a [state of the United States of America](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._state) on December 14, 1819. After the Indian wars and [removals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_removal) of the early 19th century forced most Native Americans out of the state, white settlers arrived in large numbers, bringing or importing African slaves in the domestic trade.

In antebellum Alabama, wealthy planters created large cotton [plantations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plantations_in_the_American_South) based in the fertile central [Black Belt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Belt_%28region_of_Alabama%29) of the upland region, which depended on the labour of enslaved [Africans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_people). Tens of thousands of slaves were transported to and sold in the state by [slave traders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_slave_trade) who purchased them in the [Upper South](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_South). Elsewhere in Alabama, poorer whites practiced [subsistence farming](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subsistence_agriculture). By 1860 blacks (nearly all slaves) comprised 45 percent of the state's 964,201 people.

**Impact of Slavery Debate and Civil War**

The state's wealthy planters considered slavery essential to their economy. As one of the largest slaveholding states, Alabama was among the first six states to secede. It declared its [secession](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secession_in_the_United_States) in January 1861 and joined the [Confederate States of America](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confederate_States_of_America) in February. During the ensuing [American Civil War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War) [Alabama had moderate levels of warfare](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alabama_in_the_American_Civil_War). The population suffered economic losses and hardships as a result of the war. Lincoln's [Emancipation Proclamation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation_Proclamation) freed all enslaved people in Confederate states. The Southern capitulation in 1865 ended the Confederate state government. A decade of [Reconstruction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reconstruction_era_of_the_United_States) began, a controversial time.

After the war, planters worked to get their vast cotton plantations back into production. African Americans chose to exert some independence as free tenant farmers and sharecroppers, rather than working in labour gangs. Wherever possible, African-American women left the fields. Small farms, which produced general crops before the war, turned to cotton as a cash crop. The market for cotton was overloaded, and prices dropped 50%.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Alabama#cite_note-1)

**Impact of Racial and Social Division**

For a half century after the Civil War, Alabama was a poor, heavily rural state, with an economy based on cotton; most farmers were tenant, sharecroppers or labourers who did not own land. Reconstruction ended when conservative white [Democrats](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_United_States_Democratic_Party), calling themselves "[Redeemers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redeemers)" regained control of the state legislature by both legal and extra-legal means (including violence and harassment). They established political and social dominance over African Americans. In 1901, Southern Democrats passed a state Constitution that effectively [disfranchised most African Americans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disfranchisement_after_Reconstruction_era) (who in 1900 comprised more than 45 percent of the state's population), as well as tens of thousands of [poor whites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poor_White).[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Alabama#cite_note-autogenerated1-2)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Alabama#cite_note-3) By 1941, a total of 600,000 poor whites and 520,000 African Americans had been disfranchised.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Alabama#cite_note-autogenerated1-2) In addition, despite massive population changes in the state that accompanied urbanization and industrialization, the rural-dominated legislature refused to [redistrict](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Redistricting) from 1901 to the 1960s, leading to massive [malapportionment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malapportionment) in Congressional and state representation. For decades, a rural minority dominated the state, and the needs of urban, [middle class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_class) and industrial interests were not addressed.

African Americans living in Alabama experienced the inequities of [disfranchisement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disfranchisement), [segregation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racial_segregation), violence, and underfunded schools. Tens of thousands of African Americans from Alabama joined the [Great Migration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Migration_%28African_American%29) out of the South from 1915 to 1930[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Alabama#cite_note-4) and moved to better opportunities in industrial cities, mostly in the North, especially the Midwest. The black exodus escalated steadily in the first three decades of the 20th century; 22,100 emigrated from 1900 to 1910; 70,800 between 1910 and 1920; and 80,700 between 1920 and 1930.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Alabama#cite_note-5)[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Alabama#cite_note-6)

**Retrieving Directly Stated Information**

For the below questions on Chapter 1 you must use at least one quote to support your answer. Make sure you explain how the quote is supporting your answer.

1. Why did Simon Finch come to America?
2. Where in the United States is Maycomb?
3. How would you describe the town of Maycomb?
4. Who is Dill?
5. What happened to Boo Radley?
6. Why are the kids so interested in the Radley place?

**Reflecting on texts**

1. Using the whole of Chapter One – identify at least 5 clues to this being a novel.

Remember Atticus is a lawyer: “When my father was admitted to the bar, he returned to Maycomb and began his practise… Atticus’ office in the courthouse contained little more than a hat rack, a spittoon, a checkerboard and an unsullied Code of Alabama.”

1. What do you think the bar is in this quote?
2. What is the word “unsullied” telling us in this context?
3. What is the Code of Alabama?

“…Atticus derived a reasonable income from the law. He liked Maycomb, he was Maycomb County born and bred; he knew his people, they knew him, and because of Simon Finch’s industry, Atticus was related by blood or marriage to nearly every family in the town.”

1. What kind of industry is being referred to here?

“Calpurnia was something else again. She was all angles and bones; she was nearsighted; she squinted; her hand was wide as a bed slat and twice as hard.”

1. Why has the author used semi-colons here?
2. Is this description fact or opinion? How can you tell?

“Jem gave a reasonable description of Boo: Boo was about six-and-a-half feet tall, judging from his tracks; he dined on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch, that’s why his hands were bloodstained – if you ate an animal raw, you could never wash the blood off. There was a long jagged scar that ran across his face; what teeth he had were yellow and rotten; his eyes popped, and he drooled most of the time.”

1. Explain what the author means by “reasonable” here. Give evidence from the extract to support your answer, remembering to explain how the evidence is supporting your argument.

“[Calpurnia] was always ordering me out of the kitchen, asking me why I couldn’t behave as well as Jem when she knew he was older, and calling me home when I wasn’t ready to come. Our battles were epic and one-sided. Calpurnia always won, mainly because Atticus always took her side. She had been with us ever since Jem was born, and I had felt her tyrannical presence as long as I could remember.”

1. How (to what end) has the author used emotive language here? Give examples.

**Interpreting explicit information**

“When enough years had gone by to enable us to look back on them, we sometimes discussed the events leading to the accident. I maintain that the Ewells started it all, but Jem, who was four years my senior, said it started long before that. He said it began the summer Dill come to us, when Dill first gave us the idea of making Boo Radley come out…we were far too old to settle the argument with a fist-fight, so we consulted Atticus. Our father said we were both right.”

1. Why does Jem say it all started the summer Dill came?
2. Why does Atticus say they are both right?

“All we had was Simon Finch, a fur-trapping apothecary from Cornwall whose piety was exceeded only by his stinginess. In England, Simon was irritated by the persecution of those who called themselves Methodists at the hands of their more liberal brethren, and since Simon called himself a Methodist, he worked his way across the Atlantic to Philadelphia, thence to Jamaica, thence to Mobile, and up the Saint Stephens. Mindful of John Wesley’s strictures on the use of many words in buying and selling, Simon made a pile practicing medicine, but in this pursuit he was unhappy lest he be tempted into doing what he knew was not for the glory of God, as the putting on of gold and costly apparel. So Simon, having forgotten his teacher’s dictum on the possession of human chattels, bought three slaves and with their aid established a homestead on the banks of the Alabama River…”

1. What does this quote tell us about Simon’s character? Make sure you use evidence and explain its relevance.

“Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow, it was hotter then; a black dog suffered on a summer’s day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oaks on the square. Men’s stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o’clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with frosting of sweat and sweet talcum.

People moved slowly then. They amble across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, took their time about everything. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County.”

1. Use evidence to explain what mood is created here.
2. What literary techniques are used in this extract and how (to what end)? You must discuss at least 3.

**Interpreting Implicit Information**

“So Jem received most of his information from Miss Stephanie Crawford, a neighbourhood scold, who said she knew the whole thing. According to Miss Stephanie, Boo was sitting in the livingroom cutting some items from *The Maycomb Tribune* to paste in his scrapbook. His father entered the room. As Mr Radley passed by, Boo drove the scissors into his parent’s leg, pulled them out, wiped them on his pants, and resume his activities.

Mrs Radley ran screaming into the street that Arthur was killing them all, but when the sheriff arrived he found Boo still sitting in the livingroom, cutting up the *Tribune*. He was thirty-three years old then.”

1. What does this story tell us about Miss Stephanie?

After Arthur and his friends got in trouble, “the other boys attended the industrial school and received the best secondary education to be had in the state; one of them eventually worked his way through engineering school at Auburn. The doors of the Radley house were closed on weekdays as well as Sundays, and Mr Radley’s boy was not seen again for fifteen years.”

1. Why were the doors of the Radley house closed all week now?

Extra questions not from a provided quote:

1. Why did Scouts words in front of the jail to the Cunninghams save Tom from being lynched?
2. Why was it so shocking when Mr Gilmore elicits in court that Tom felt sorry for Mayella?
3. Why is Bob Ewell so bent on revenging himself on Atticus?
4. Why do Bob and Mayella take Tom to court?