

Using
*Bloom's Taxonomy to
Explore Literature*

Levels of Understanding



***To Kill a
Mockingbird***
By Harper Lee

written by Stephanie Polukis



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Introduction to Levels of Understanding

FOR MANY STUDENTS, studying literature is like being lost in an alien universe, filled with hidden symbols, structures, and meanings that only a scholar can uncover. Without a teacher's direction, students lack the skills and confidence to evaluate a work of literature on their own, and instead, will frequently turn to resources such as the Internet for guidance. As a result, they assume another writer's views instead of developing their own.

Levels of Understanding breaks down complex questions students will encounter into smaller parts, showing the steps a critical reader should take in order to develop a sound evaluation of a text. Each section of the guide contains five types of questions representative of Bloom's learning domains—starting with the most basic and foundational skill, knowledge and comprehension, and gradually building to the highest skill, evaluation. All the way, reluctant students are provided with the scaffolding they need to advance from one level of understanding to the next.

The five types of questions, again, representative of Bloom's domains, are as follows:

- **Comprehension**—will ask the most basic questions to ascertain the students' fundamental understanding of the text: plot facts, character identification, etc.
- **Reader Response**—will ask the students to “respond” to the text by relating it to personal experience or by presenting an opinion on a character or event.
- **Analysis**—will require students to study how various techniques and literary or theatrical devices (diction, symbolism, imagery, metaphors, asides, soliloquies etc.) function in the text. Analysis questions do not ask the student to merely identify or define a literary, theatrical, or rhetorical device.
- **Synthesis**—will bridge the gap between the analysis and evaluation questions, requiring students to look at other scenes in the text and draw conclusions about themes, motifs, or a writer's style. Often, a synthesis question will require the student to draw on prior knowledge—what has been learned in class or through research—and/or information from sources other than the literary title being studied in order to arrive at a satisfactory answer.
- **Evaluation**—will ask the student to make a qualitative judgment on the text and determine whether a particular aspect of it is effective or ineffective.

Other books may list Bloom's taxonomy, define the terms, and offer a general example or two. *Levels of Understanding*, however, provides the teacher with the title-specific questions to allow you to effectively bring Bloom into your classroom.

In addition, unlike other available products that claim to address Bloom's “higher order thinking skills,” *Levels of Understanding* does not teach students how to answer questions about a particular text, but instead, helps them develop skills to evaluate literature critically and without guidance. These are skills that will not only help students prepare for standardized tests like the Advanced Placement Language and Literature exams, the SATs, and the ACTs, but will also give students the self-assurance to develop and articulate a personal view—a skill that will be highly advantageous to them in college.

This product, however, is not geared toward upper-level students only, but is a versatile guide that can be used for students of all ability levels—remedial through honors. The teacher may customize the product to fit the class's objectives and goals, determining which questions the students will answer. Additionally, the guide is entirely reproducible, and each major division begins on a new page, so you may use *Levels of Understanding* for the whole work of literature or only a specific section. ♡



How to Use this Unit

EACH *Levels of Understanding: Using Bloom's Taxonomy to Explore Literature* unit is intended to be a deep and rich component of your literature program, whether your goal is to prepare your students for a large-scale assessment like the AP Literature exam or to challenge your students to read carefully and to think deeply about what they have read.

The questions in this guide are designed to be flexible and meet your needs. They can be used as

- homework questions when students read the text independently.
- in-class reading check questions and “bell-ringer” journal entries.
- class discussion questions and prompts.
- focus questions for pre-writing and essay planning.
- review and study questions for assessment.

While the Teacher's Guide contains an answer key, you will find that the higher-order questions (especially synthesis and evaluation) have model answers that represent more than one possible response. It would be inappropriate to penalize a student whose well-reasoned and supportable answer did not match the “correct” answer in the guide.

For this reason, we strongly recommend that you view the questions in this guide as learning activities and not as assessment activities.

Many of your students are likely to find the higher domains new and perhaps intimidating. Others might be alarmed at having to support their reader-response reactions and their evaluations with an accurate comprehension of the text. The questions in this guide should act as both scaffolding and safety net, guiding your students through a new reading and thinking process and allowing them to practice without fear of “failure.”

The writing prompts, however, provide rich assessment and evaluation opportunities. Every prompt is designed to invite your students to operate in one of the higher order domains, thus giving students the opportunity to demonstrate their ability, and giving you the opportunity to evaluate their progress.

Whether you use *Levels of Understanding: Using Bloom's Taxonomy to Explore Literature* as the core of your literature curriculum or as a supplement, the guide and writing prompts are designed to help your students attain a deep understanding of the works they read. Ideally, they will gain the type of understanding demanded by Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and most state standards, including the Common Core State Standards of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association. 🍷



Introduction to *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Narrative Voice and Structure

Scout as a Narrator

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD is told through a first-person narrator, Jean Louise “Scout” Finch, who is also the protagonist of the story. An adult version of Scout recounts events that occurred in her hometown of Maycomb, Alabama while she was growing up. In the opening of the novel, Scout says,

When enough years had gone by to enable us to look back on them, we sometimes discussed the events leading to [Jem’s] 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 came to us, when Dill first gave us the idea of making Boo Radley come out.

The plot begins the summer of Dill’s first visit, and although the narrator remains the adult Jean Louise, the narrative perspective is that of Scout, a girl of seven. The story is filtered through a lens of childish innocence and misunderstanding; however, some of Scout’s observations seem too mature, indicating that either young Scout is extremely precocious or the adult narrator cannot completely refrain from intruding in the story of her young persona.

There are several advantages and disadvantages with having a first person narrator.

Advantages: First-person narration gives a personal touch to the story. The narrator is intimately acquainted with the other characters and events, and the story is meaningful to him or her; there is something about the story that gives the narrator a need or desire to tell it.

The voice of the first-person narrator—whether a participant in the events he or she narrates or merely a witness—allows readers to feel as if they are being given a glimpse of events as they are happening, as the narrator herself is experiencing or witnessing them. There is also, however, the added benefit that the first person narrator knows the outcome of the story before she begins telling it. Thus, key events can be alluded to or gained insights can be mentioned, enhancing the suspense and the reader’s desire to continue with the story.

The events in Jean Louise Finch’s story concern the young Scout, her father (Atticus), and her brother (Jem). Because Scout is the narrator, the reader can detect the strong love she feels toward her family. Through Scout, the reader feels a strong connection to the characters and is able to empathize with them. Additionally, since the narrator uses a Southern dialect and some juvenile slang,

the language reinforces the ideas that this novel is set in Alabama and the narrator is a young girl.

Disadvantages: The narrator is also a character in the story and is affected by the actions and attitudes of the other characters. The nature of interactions between other characters and the narrator inevitably color how these other characters are treated in the story. A third person narrator may be able to tell a story objectively, without bias; a first person narrator cannot.

Furthermore, an omniscient narrator is able to report on the actions and thoughts of all characters; there is an element of transparency in the narration and less of a chance of misunderstanding on the part of the reader. A first-person narrator, however, tells her story with her unique perspective and personal biases. Additionally, since the narrator knows only what she has witnessed, there is a chance that the narrator can be deceived. Since stories told through the first person point of view are subjective, they are also unreliable.

The text indicates that Scout is very close to her father and brother; hence, she probably portrays them in a positive way, overlooking some of their shortcomings. The Ewells, on the other hand, who oppose her father’s defense of Tom Robinson, are portrayed negatively. It is likely that Scout overlooks some of their redeeming qualities because of her personal resentment toward them. From the standpoint of writing technique, Scout also wants to establish them as antagonists. Moreover, Scout is young when the Robinson case takes place, and it is not likely that she understands everything that is happening. Even though the story is understood and reinterpreted through an adult Scout, the adult’s intrusion in the child’s story is minimal. As the adult narrator is relating events that happened decades earlier when she was a young child, it is also possible that the events did not happen exactly as she understood them then and remembers them now.

The Bildungsroman

A *bildungsroman*, a type of coming-of-age story, centers on the protagonist’s undergoing a psychological, intellectual, social, or emotional change as the result of events in the story. The protagonist is forced to leave home and go off on a journey to try to find his or her true self. Additionally, there is usually a conflict between the main character and society; he or she does not agree with the existing social conventions and/or is reluctant to take his or her place in society. Each trial the character faces gradually contributes to his or her self-actualization, and he or she returns home changed. The character sees the error of his or her previous way of thinking and willingly takes society’s

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Writing Prompts

Section One: Analysis, Synthesis:

At the beginning of the novel, Scout remarks, "the events leading to [Jem's] accident" did not begin with Dill's arrival in Maycomb, but with Andrew Jackson's "run[ning] the Creeks up the creek," allowing for the development of the South. Scout suggests that the underlying problem that drives the events of this story is not personal, but cultural.

Identify the central conflict of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and explain how the problem is deeply embedded in the culture of the novel.

Section Two: Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation:

Many people who evaluate literature using the Marxist theory believe that all forms of oppression are derived from a greater, underlying One: that One between the bourgeoisie's oppression of the proletariat. In addition to the apparent racism, anti-feminist views are evident in the community. In a well-organized and -supported essay, support or refute the Marxist argument.

Section Three: Analysis, Evaluation:

In a well-organized essay, explain how the episode in

Chapter 12, in which Scout and Jem's visit to the First Purchase Church develops and/or complicates the motif of racism in the novel. Focus on not only Scout and Jem's evaluation of the church, but the church's background, material possessions, parishioners, and sermon.

Section Four: Analysis, Evaluation:

Re-read the testimonies of the witnesses and Atticus's closing remarks in Chapters 17-20. Then, write a thoughtful, well-supported essay in which you evaluate Atticus's argument, analyzing the methods he uses to persuade the jurors, as well as any weaknesses in his argument.

Section Five: Analysis, Synthesis:

To Kill a Mockingbird is a bildungsroman or a "coming of age" story, in which the protagonists move from childhood to adulthood, learning several important lessons and acquiring more mature viewpoints. Write a well-supported essay in which you trace either Scout or Jem's development throughout the novel and explain how he or she has evolved. 🐦



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SECTION ONE: (CHAPTERS 1 - 7)

Comprehension

1. Identify the following characters. Who is he or she, and what is his or her relationship to other characters? What is his or her role in the plot?

2. Describe the town of Maycomb. What is the general pace of life in the town? What are the prevailing faith, politics, and social customs of the residents?

3. What does Miss Caroline learn about several of her students on the first day of school?

4. What does Atticus teach Scout about human nature toward the end of Chapter 3?

5. What rumors about Boo Radley circulate among the residents of Maycomb/children?

To Kill a Mockingbird

SECTION TWO: (CHAPTERS 8 - 11)

Comprehension

1. What causes Atticus to wake Scout and Jem in the middle of the night? Why?

2. How does Miss Maudie react to the fire in her home?

3. Why is Scout being harassed by some people in the community? What does Atticus advise her to do?

4. Who is Tom Robinson? What do we know about him?

5. Why does Atticus ask Jem to read to Mrs. Dubose?

Reader Response

1. Is Mrs. Dubose a sympathetic character? Why or why not?

To Kill a Mockingbird

SECTION THREE: (CHAPTERS 12 - 16)

Comprehension

1. What does the reader learn about Calpurnia's family and background in this section?

2. Explain why Calpurnia speaks differently when she is around other black people.

3. Why does Dill run away from home?

4. Who is Mr. Dolphus Raymond? What is his background? What is the most likely reason that he is treated like an outcast in the community?

5. Why does Scout's conversation with Mr. Cunningham cause him to break up the mob?

6. In the passage about Mr. Raymond's children, what is revealed about Maycomb's definition of "black?"

To Kill a Mockingbird

SECTION FOUR: (CHAPTERS 17 - 24)

Comprehension

1. Paraphrase the testimonies of the three witnesses: Mr. Tate, Bob Ewell, and Mayella Ewell, and of the accused, Tom Robinson.

2. Why does Mr. Dolphus Raymond pretend to be an alcoholic?

3. What is the “time-honored code” of Maycomb society that Atticus says Mayella had broken?

Reader Response

1. Do you agree or disagree with Atticus’s expressed sentiments about individuals and mobs: “A court is only as sound as its jury, and a jury is only as sound as the men who make it up,” and, “A mob’s always made up of people, no matter what ... Every mob in every little Southern town is always made up of people you know”? Explain your answer.

To Kill a Mockingbird

SECTION FIVE: (CHAPTERS 25 - 31)

Comprehension

1. What kinds of issues are discussed at the missionary circle meetings? Who are the Mrunas and J. Grimes Everett?

2. What happens to Tom Robinson following the trial?

3. What draws Scout closer to Aunt Alexandra at the end of Chapter 24?

4. Explain in detail what happens to Scout and Jem on the way home from the pageant.

5. How does Scout respond to meeting Boo Radley for the first time?

Reader Response

1. Are you surprised by the community's response to Robinson's conviction and death? Why or why not?
