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Chapter 16: Gathering for the Trial Atticus Uncovers Truths The Closing Argument: A Call for Equality Losing Innocence Aftermath References Harper Lee's classic, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, dives deep into big stuff like racism, justice (or lack of it), and growing up. It all happens in the American South during the 1930s. Chapter 16 is pretty huge for the story 'cause it throws a spotlight on the town's prejudices through Tom Robinson's trial. Let's chat about what goes down in Chapter 16 and why it's a big deal for the whole story, especially when we talk about racial inequality and losing that kid-like innocence. The chapter kicks off with everyone waiting around for the trial to start, and folks from town show up. People are hanging out outside the courthouse, curious but also showing their biases. Lee paints a picture of this scene, highlighting the divide between white folks and black folks. She writes something like, "The Negroes scattered when they saw Jem coming" (Lee 190). This bit shows just how much fear and mistrust exists within the African American community 'cause of all that deep-seated racism in Maycomb. Then there's how the white folks react to Atticus stepping up to defend Tom Robinson. It's kinda crazy how differently these two groups see race. Atticus Uncovers Truths The trial gets rolling, and Atticus starts questioning Bob Ewell to get to the truth. Hes super careful about picking apart Ewell's story, pointing out all its holes. One big thing he points out? Ewells left-handedness makes ya wonder about his claim that Tom attacked his daughter. This part is crucial because it challenges both the jury's racial bias and those age-old town prejudices. Even though theres solid evidence, those biases are like blinders for the jury. When Atticus asks, "You're left-handed, Mr. Ewell?" and Ewell replies kinda weirdly with, "I most positively am not, I can use one hand good as the other" (Lee 197), Lee highlights flaws in both justice and Maycomb's mindset. The Closing Argument: A Call for Equality Atticus really brings it home with his closing argument. He tries to tug at the jury's sense of justice and what's right or wrong morally. He argues hard that Tom Robinson is innocent everything points to it! He says something along the lines of "In this country, our courts are supposed to make everyone equal" (Lee 206). That hits at one of the novels main themes: equality and justice should be for everyone regardless of race. But even after Atticus' heartfelt speech, prejudice still wins out in that courtroom, leading to Tom Robinson's unfair conviction. Losing Innocence Aftermath After all this courtroom drama wraps up, Jem and Scout go through some real changes they start losing their innocence. These kids whove always looked up to their dad now see firsthand how unfair things can get due to racism. Lee does a great job showing this loss of innocence through Scouts eyes when she narrates something like: "It was Jem's turn to cry...I wondered why Atticus hadn't explained that it was because Tom Robinson was a Negro" (Lee 214). Here we see Jem and Scout grappling with understanding their community's prejudice. Keep in mind: This is only a sample. Get a custom paper now from our expert writers. In Chapter 16 of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee exposes racial inequality alongside that tough transition from innocence among kids in America's South back then during those 1930s times. References Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Grand Central Publishing, 1960. SparkNotes Editors. SparkNote on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. SparkNotes.com. Meyer, Michael J., editor. Harper Lees *To Kill a Mockingbird*: New Essays. Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010. Johnson, Claudia D., editor. *Understanding To Kill a Mockingbird*. Greenwood Press, 1994. Everybody from Maycomb heads downtown so that they Atticus suspiciously leaves that evening. The children decide to follow him. They find him in a chair outside of the jail reading a book. They continue to watch him when a group of men approach the courthouse. The group demands that Atticus let them get to Tom, but Atticus won't give in. Jem, Scout, and Dill burst into the scene, much to the shock of Atticus. Scout recognizes one of the men as Walter Cunningham and tries to strike up a conversation. Eventually this awkwardness breaks the group up and they leave. Tom calls out from his cell asking if the men have left. Atticus tells him everything is fine now. Mr. Underwood, editor of the local newspaper next door, calls out to them and says that he had his eye, and his gun, on the situation the whole time from his window above. Atticus takes the children home. Later in the afternoon, the children decide to head into town as well. The children see Dolphus Raymond, a white man sitting with all of the black citizens. Scout and Dill are confused as to why he would keep such company when it goes against most social rules. Jem explains that Mr. Raymond is gossiped about in town and prefers the company of the black community. The court is uncharacteristically crowded and the children cannot find anywhere to sit. Reverend Sykes, the minister from Cal's church, takes them to where the black citizens are sitting and finds them seats. When they are all seated, Sheriff Heck Tate is the first to take the stand. The night after their run-in at the town jail, Scout ends up sleeping in Jem's room after she starts crying in her own. At breakfast the next morning, no one except Jem has much appetite. Atticus says he's glad the kids came along, though Aunt Alexandra sniffs that Mr. Underwood would have made sure nothing too bad happened. Atticus comments that Mr. Underwood is a strange man he "despises Negroes" (16.5), yet he acted to protect Atticus and Tom Robinson. Scout wants coffee, but Calpurnia will only give her one tablespoon of the evil brew in a cupful of milk. Alexandra tells Atticus not to make comments like the one he just made about Mr. Underwood in front of "them" (16.8), i.e. Calpurnia, i.e. African-Americans. Atticus says that it's nothing Cal doesn't already know, and that anything that can be said in table conversation is fit for Calpurnia's ears. Alexandra thinks it encourages gossip among the town's African-American residents. Well, says Atticus, if the white people didn't do so much that was gossip-worthy the African-Americans wouldn't have so much to talk about. Scout wants to know why, if Mr. Cunningham is a friend of theirs, he wanted to hurt Atticus last night. Atticus says that Mr. Cunningham is a good man, he just has a few "blind spots" (16.18). Uh, okay. Then Dill bounces in, saying that the gossip mill is having a field day about how three kids fought off a hundred men with their bare hands. The kids head out to the porch to watch people passing on their way to the courthouse. Some of the personalities the kids spot: Mr. Dolphus Raymond, already drunk; a bunch of Mennonites; Mr. Billups, whose first name is simply X; Mr. Jake Slade, who's growing his third moustache; and the foot-washing Baptists, who pause to shout Bible verses about vanity to Miss Maudie in her revamped yard. (She responds in kind.) Finally, Scout, Jem, and Dill join the crowds at the courthouse. Among the strangers the kids spot Mr. Dolphus Raymond, who's drinking out of a paper sack; Jem says that in the bag is a Coca-Cola bottle full of whiskey. Dill asks why Mr. Raymond's sitting on the far side of the square with the African-Americans, and Jem says that he likes them better than the whites, and that he has several children by an African-American woman. Jem tells more about Mr. Raymond's history: he's from an old, respected family; he was engaged to a white woman, but she shot herself after the wedding rehearsal, perhaps because she found out about his African-American mistress; since then Mr. Raymond's been almost constantly tipsy, but is good to his "mixed" (16.61) children. Scout asks what a mixed child is, and Jem tells her that they're biracial, and also that they're "real sad" (16.69), because they don't fully belong on either side of Maycomb's strict racial divide, even when they don't look any different from the other African-Americans. Scout says that if you can't tell a person's racial heritage from looking at them, how does Jem know that the Finches are 100% white? Jem says that Uncle Jack says that they can't know for certain what happened centuries ago, but that in Maycomb "once you have a drop of Negro blood, that makes you all black" (16.81). If you're thinking this sounds completely nonsensical you'd be right. The lunch break ends, and everyone lines up to go back into the courthouse. The African-Americans let the white people be at the front of the line. Once they get inside the courthouse, Scout gets separated in the rush of people from Jem and Dill. Scout overhears some old men saying that Atticus was appointed by the court to defend Tom Robinson, and she wonders why Atticus hadn't told them that it would have been a convenient excuse in schoolyard brawls. By the time the boys find Scout, there's no room left in the white section. Reverend Sykes sees them standing in the lobby and offers to take them up to the balcony (where the African-Americans are segregated). Up in the balcony, four people move so that Scout, Jem, Dill, and the Reverend can have front-row seats. Scout surveys the scene below her; the jury, made up of farmers (since the townspeople usually got out of jury duty), the lawyers, and the witnesses. In charge of the court is Judge Taylor, whose sleepy demeanor conceals an eagle eye, and who has a habit of eating (yes, eating, not smoking) cigars during cases. The trial is already in progress, with Mr. Heck Tate on the witness stand. In order to continue enjoying our site, we ask that you confirm your identity as a human. Thank you very much for your cooperation. chapters 12-15 16-19 20-23 24-27 Chapter 16 opens with the start of Tom Robinson's trial. Almost everyone in the town seems to have shown up to see it. Perhaps the only exception is Miss Maudie, who doesn't want to see a man on trial for his life. One interesting character who does shows up to the trial is Mr. Raymond, and Jem has to explain some of his history. Scout, Mr. Raymond is involved with a black woman and has several children with her. Jem explains that these children are all "real sad" because they don't fully belong to either the black or the white community in Maycomb. Mr. Raymond himself is also a bit of an outcast. After a lunch break, Jem, Scout, and Dill attempt to sneak into the courtroom. Scout overhears someone saying that Atticus was actually appointed as Tom Robinson's lawyer, and she wonders why Atticus hadn't told her this. By the time the children get into the courthouse, there is no room for them to sit. They run into the reverend from Calpurnia's church-Reverend Sykes-and he offers them a seat in the balcony, where everyone from the African American community is seated. From the balcony, Scout has a good view of the courthouse. She sees that Judge Taylor is presiding over the case, a judge who has a reputation for being rather informal in the courtroom. The first person to take the stand is Heck Tate, the town sheriff. Mr. Gilmer, the prosecutor, questions him first. Guided by Mr. Gilmer's questions, Tate recalls how Bob Ewell came to him on November 21st and asked him to come to his home. Upon arriving at the Ewell home, he found that Bob Ewell's daughter-Mayella Ewell-had been badly beaten. Heck Tate asked who beat her, and Mayella asserted that it was Tom Robinson. She claimed, also, that he raped her. Tate retrieved Tom Robinson, brought him to Mayella, and she identified him. Atticus questions Tate next, asking first if medical help was sought. Heck Tate tells that he did not call for medical help. Additionally, Atticus makes a point of noting that all of Mayella's bruises, including a black eye, were on the right side of her face. This is a key point that Atticus will use to try and prove Tom Robinson's innocence. Bob Ewell takes the witness stand next, and Scout gives some background information about his family. They live behind the garbage dump in a run-down, filthy shack. There is only one nice section of the yard, an area where Mayella has a well-cared for patch of geraniums. On the night in question, Bob Ewell says he was coming home from the woods when he heard screaming coming from the house. Going inside, he allegedly saw Tom Robinson raping Mayella Ewell. He then ran for the sheriff. Atticus then steps in for his cross-examination of Bob Ewell and asks why no medical attention was sought. Ewell asserts that there was no need and that it was too expensive to see a doctor. Then, Atticus asks Bob Ewell to write his name, which he does, and shows that he is left handed. Atticus' point here is that a left-handed man would be more likely to leave bruises on the right side of Mayella's face. In Chapter 18, the trial continues, and Mayella Ewell is called to the stand. Scout notes that, for a Ewell, she is a relatively clean and well-kempt individual. However, she does look terrified. She is the oldest of eight children, has no mother, and seems not to interact with any people outside her family. According to her story, she asked Tom Robinson to come onto the property in order to help her break up a dresser. This is when, she claims, that Tom took advantage of her. When Atticus cross-examines her, he asks why she didn't scream so that any of her seven siblings might come to help; he also asks how Tom managed to beat her. As Atticus points out, Tom's left hand is useless because it was damaged in a cotton gin when he was young. However, Mayella begins to cry and refuses to answer any more questions. Next, Tom Robinson is called to the stand. He gives a very different account of what happened. He says that he often passed the Ewell house and that, sometimes, Mayella asked for help with certain chores. He notes that he felt bad for her, a statement that gets the entire courtroom into an uproar because, in Maycomb, a black man shouldn't be feeling sorry for a white woman. Tom goes on to tell how, on the day in question, Mayella asked him inside the house to help with chores. When he noticed the children were all gone, she tells him she had been saving up enough money for all the children to go buy ice cream at once-thus she planned for them to get out of the house. Unexpectedly, Mayella hugs him and then kissed him, saying she'd never been kissed by a man before. Tom tries to get away from her, but Bob Ewell appears at the window, swearing at the both of them. Afraid for his life, Tom then ran away. By the end of all this, Dill has started to cry. Scout takes him out of the courtroom. Dill tells Scout he is upset by what he has seen, especially by how Mr. Gilmer treated Tom Robinson with such disrespect, while Atticus was polite to Mayella. During their conversation, Mr. Raymond approaches and interrupts them, bringing chapter 19 to a close. The trial that appears in these chapters is often seen as some of the most pivotal scenes in the novel. As the trial progresses, it becomes more and more clear that Tom is very likely innocent. However, very few people in Maycomb seem to believe this. Instead, they are willing to believe a white man-whom everyone knows to be lacking in terms of integrity-without question simply because of his skin color. The reader is painfully aware that Tom Robinson's fate seems sealed before he ever even sets foot in the courtroom. And yet, suspense prevails in these chapters. As the trial progresses, it seems that Atticus has an airtight defense for Tom Robinson. Tom Robinson himself is a likeable and trustworthy character. Despite the fact that Mayella has doomed him a likely terrible sentence, he does not criticize her. Instead, he goes so far as to say he pitied her. Link Deas, Tom's employer, even stands up to defend Tom during the trial, saying that he is a hard-working and good man. All of this is, once again, Harper Lee giving the reader a window into Maycomb and, thus, a window into the South during this era. The blatant prejudice seen in this trial is appalling, and certainly an issue that the reader cannot ignore. However, it also becomes apparent throughout the trial that Tom Robinson is not the only victim. Mayella Ewell is clearly very different from her father, and she has suffered a seemingly endless torrent of physical, sexual, and verbal abuse throughout her lifetime. She has no friends or family to stick up for her. When she takes the stand and gives her testimony, the reader has no choice but feel sympathy for her, even though she is most certainly lying. She is so deprived of human contact, that she is even offended when Atticus-all politeness-calls her "Miss" because she thinks he is mocking her. When Tom Robinson tells his story, which we can presume is closer to the truth, it is incredibly sad to think that she schemed and saved so long just so she could have a moment of human contact. With her, Harper Lee seems to point out that there are injustices everywhere. While Tom Robinson is being assumed guilty simply because of his skin color, Mayella Ewell is also pitiable because she was born into a family-and a society- in which she never stood a chance at success or happiness. chapters 1-3 4-7 8-11 12-15 16-19 20-23 24-27 28-31 This Study Guide consists of approximately 71 pages of chapter summaries, quotes, character analysis, themes, and more - everything you need to sharpen your knowledge of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Tom Robinson's trial begins and all sorts of people are in attendance. An obvious person who is missing, is Miss Maudie because she objects to watching someone on trial for his life. The white people of Maycomb sit in the main section of the courthouse, while the black people are forced to sit upstairs in the balcony. Scout, Jem and Dill arrive at the last minute to avoid Atticus and Cal's minister lets them sit with him. From their vantage point, they have a bird's eye view of the entire courtroom. Chapter 16 Analysis Various things illustrate the divisions within Maycomb. Making the white people sit downstairs and the black people sitting the balcony show the divisions between the types of people in the town. There is also the horrible irony that a despicable man who is normally a laughing stock can destroy the... (read more from the Chapter 16 Summary) Copyrights *To Kill a Mockingbird* from Gale. 2005-2006 Thomson Gale, a part of the Thomson Corporation. All rights reserved.

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