



Discussion Questions for *Mockingbird* by Charles Shields

1. Hypothesize why, in light of Nelle Harper Lee's relationship with her mother, there is no mother in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.
2. On the surface, Truman Capote and Nelle Harper Lee appeared to be so opposite as children. What was it about their lives and circumstances that led them to become close friends?
3. Today, social services address many of the problems that were taken for granted about life in Monroeville, Alabama, in the 1930s. If Nelle Harper Lee was growing up in Monroeville now, how might her upbringing and experiences be different?
4. In his *New Yorker* magazine review of *Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee*, Thomas Mallon writes about Harper Lee's father: "Mr. Lee was a 'fond and indulgent father,' who, in addition to practicing law, edited Monroeville's local paper and served in the state legislature. He believed in segregation, low taxes, and noblesse oblige, and, as an elder of the First United Methodist Church, was prepared to scold the pastor for too much sermonizing about racial prejudice and unfair labor conditions ... Ambivalent and stretchable, he seems, all in all, a more interesting figure than Atticus Finch, the plaster saint for whom he provided the mold." How does Atticus Finch compare to Mallon's description of A. C. Lee?
5. When *In Cold Blood* was nearly ready for publication, Capote told one of the detectives on the Clutter case that Nelle wouldn't be given any special credit in the book because "she was just *there*." How would you describe Nelle's contribution to *In Cold Blood*?
6. Gregory Peck insisted that the film *To Kill a Mockingbird* be reedited several times to make the character of Atticus more prominent at the expense of the children's scenes. If you've seen the film, do you feel that it was better or worse for Peck getting his way?
7. What do you think was the Lee family's reaction to Nelle's success and why?
8. What do you think are some of the reasons that Harper Lee never published another novel?
9. Would you characterize Miss Lee as a "recluse" the way many reporters have?
10. In his introduction to *Mockingbird: A Portrait of Harper Lee*, Charles Shields writes: "Despite her desire for privacy, I believe it is important to record Lee's story while there are still a few people alive who were part of it and can remember. I have tried to balance her desire for privacy with the desire of her millions of readers who have long hoped for a respectful, informative view of this rarely seen writer." Do you agree with his reason for writing the book while Lee was alive, and do you think he accomplished his goal?