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Dramatic Publishing

Harper Lee's

TO KILL A *Mockingbird*



Adapted by Christopher Sergel



TO KILL A *Mockingbird*

Drama. Adapted by Christopher Sergel. From the novel by Harper Lee. Cast: 11m., 6w. (flexible, extras). In 1935, Scout and her brother, Jem, are being raised by their widowed father, Atticus, and a strong-willed housekeeper, Calpurnia. Wide-eyed Scout is fascinated with the people of her small southern town, but there's a rumble of thunder just under the calm surface of life here. As tensions rise within the community, the bewildered girl turns to her father. Atticus, a lawyer, explains that these tensions stem from his legal defense of a young Negro wrongfully accused of a grave crime. When Scout asks why he is taking on such a hopeless fight, he replies, "Because if I didn't, I couldn't hold my head up." This play explores the racial tensions of the early 20th-century South and applauds the strength of those who fight injustice. Area staging. Approximate running time: 2 hours. Code: T34.

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TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

**a full-length play
by
Christopher Sergel**

**based upon the novel
by
Harper Lee**



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(TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD)

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Cover photo from the Mermaid Theatre production in London.
Starring Penny Gonslow as Scout and Alan Dobie as Atticus.
Cover design: Susan Carle

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

A Play in Two Acts
For Eleven Men* and Six Women, Extras

CHARACTERS

JEAN LOUIS FINCH (SCOUT)	a young girl
JEREMY FINCH (JEM)	her older brother
ATTICUS FINCH	their father
CALPURNIA	the housekeeper
MAUDIE ATKINSON	} neighbors
STEPHANIE CRAWFORD	
MRS. DUBOSE	
ARTHUR RADLEY (BOO)	
CHARLES BAKER HARRIS (DILL)	a young boy
HECK TATE	the sheriff
JUDGE TAYLOR	the judge
REVEREND SYKES	a minister
MAYELLA EWELL	a young woman
BOB EWELL	her father
WALTER CUNNINGHAM	a farmer
MR. GILMER	the public prosecutor
TOM ROBINSON	a young man
CLERK	of the court

*The play can be performed by a cast of nine men and six women. The roles of MR. GILMER and BOO RADLEY are easily played by one actor, and with a quick change it's possible for the roles of JUDGE TAYLOR and MR. CUNNINGHAM to be played by the same actor.

Extras: TOWNSPEOPLE, FARMERS. If available, extras can also be used as members of Reverend Sykes' CONGREGATION, as the MOB in front of the jail-house, and as SPECTATORS at the trial.

PLACE: Maycomb, Alabama

TIME: 1935

Acknowledgments...

This play, of course, begins and ends with Harper Lee's extraordinary Pulitzer Prize book.

Along the way, there has been important help with the play, initially with the editor Maurice Crain and later with two directors.

The first of these is Chris Hayes who produced and directed a production that toured regional theatres in the United Kingdom for nine months and then played seven months at the Mermaid Theatre in London.

Then director Robert Johanson of the Paper Mill Playhouse gave this playwright some creative suggestions that helped shape the final form of the play.

Christopher Sergel

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING about *To Kill a Mockingbird*...

“The *Mockingbird* script captured the humor and pathos of Harper Lee’s novel while offering opportunities for theatricality in the performance. The cast was challenged by the heartfelt characterizations and the crew by the set and lighting opportunities.”

*David Helmstetter,
North High School, Phoenix, Ariz.*

“A wonderful, warm, poignant story. You pulled the best sentiments of the novel into a two-hour story. I loved it.”

*Barb Dignon, Highlands Ranch High School,
Highlands Ranch, Colo.*

“*To Kill a Mockingbird* has been a great success, more so than we expected. Every performance has been sold out! This is a show everyone needs to see more than once. It teaches some wonderful lessons. Our actor who plays Tom Robinson said, ‘Everyone needs to see this show and be offended over and over again. It may be the only way they will learn.’”

*Tammy Morgan, Hale Centre Theatre,
West Valley City, Utah*

“We all enjoyed working on Christopher Sergel’s wonderful adaptation of Harper Lee’s novel. Rediscovering characters and allowing new audiences to enjoy this story was a real privilege. Thank you for this wonderful play...a truly great piece of drama.”

*Sheila Tabaka,
Southwest Minnesota University, Marshall, Minn.*

“Wow! I had strong misgivings about producing this show—we wondered how it would be received in rural Alabama in 2006. We sold out every performance and had to add an extra matinee (which sold out in one day).”

*Bill Nixon,
New Horizon Community Theatre,
Lafayette, Ala.*

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The houselights dim and in the darkness there are the soft sounds of birds and in the distance a dog barking.*

As the stage lights come up it's afternoon and MISS MAUDIE is revealed on her porch, which adjoins the short porch in front of the house of MRS. DUBOSE. MISS MAUDIE has been pruning a plant and she pauses now to listen to the sounds. SCOUT comes in from L, looks back, then crosses to the porch swing where she sits without swinging. She's upset. CALPURNIA calls from inside the house.

CALPURNIA (*off*). Scout—that you? You out there?

SCOUT (*after a brief pause*). I'm watching for Atticus.
(*SHE starts to swing.*)

CALPURNIA (*off*). Come in and wash before your father gets home.

SCOUT (*more annoyed*). In a minute, Calpurnia. (*Muttering.*) Always orders me around.

CALPURNIA (*off*). You hear me Scout?

SCOUT (*exasperated*). I have to talk to Atticus. (*Calling.*)
Hey, Miss Maudie.

CALPURNIA. Scout!

SCOUT. I'm talking to Miss Maudie.

MISS MAUDIE. Do you smell my mimosa? It's like angels' breath.

SCOUT (*uninterested*). Yessum.

MISS MAUDIE (*trying to encourage her*). And hear those birds! (*Curiously*.) You do hear the mockingbirds?

SCOUT (*conceding*). Yessum. (*Maybe SHE's being rude. Feeling SHE must say something.*) When Atticus gave Jem an' me air rifles, he asked us never to shoot mockingbirds.

MISS MAUDIE. And he's right. Mockingbirds just make music. They don't eat up people's gardens; don't nest in corncribs; they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.

SCOUT. Miss Maudie, this is an old neighborhood, ain't it?

MISS MAUDIE. Been here longer than the town.

SCOUT. No, I mean the folks on our street are all old. Jem an' me's the only children. Mrs. Dubose is close on a hundred and Miss Stephanie's old. So are you, and Atticus—he's ancient!

MISS MAUDIE (*tartly*). Not being wheeled around yet. Neither is your father.

SCOUT. He's nearly fifty! (*Truly concerned*.) Jem asked him why he was so old an' he said—(*What kind of an answer is this?*)—he got started late.

MISS MAUDIE (*emphatically*). You're lucky! You and Jem have the benefit of your father's age. If Atticus was thirty, you'd find life quite different.

SCOUT (*equally emphatic*). I sure would. (*Unhappily*.) Atticus can't do anything.

MISS MAUDIE (*exasperated*). What do you want him to do?

SCOUT (*wouldn't it be wonderful!*). Drive a dump truck for the county. Run for sheriff. Farm or work in a gar-

age or something else worth mentioning. (*Bitterly.*)

Other fathers go hunting, play poker, and they fish.

MISS MAUDIE (*bewildered*). Seems to me you'd be proud of him.

SCOUT (*a cry*). Why? He works in a law office and he reads.

BOY'S VOICE (*off.*) Hey, Scout—

SCOUT (*uneasily*). The way some folks are starting to go on, you'd think he was running a still.

BOY'S VOICE (*off*). Scout—how come your daddy defends niggers? (*SCOUT has risen and SHE comes to the porch rail, her fists clenched.*)

SCOUT (*shouting back*). I know it's you, Walter Cunningham. Keep this up 'n' I'll give you another whipping.

BOY'S VOICE (*off, defiant*). Scout's daddy defends niggers!

SCOUT. You gonna take that back, boy?

BOY'S VOICE (*off*). You gonna make me? My folks say that niggers oughta hang from the water tank.

SCOUT (*starting toward direction of VOICE*). I'll never speak to you again as long as I live! I hate you an' despise you, an' hope you die tomorrow!

BOY'S VOICE (*off, going*). Everyone says your daddy's a disgrace!

SCOUT (*close to tears*). Come back, you coward.

BOY'S VOICE (*off, further away*). Everyone!

SCOUT. Coward! (*But HE's gone. SCOUT looks after him, momentarily drained. MISS MAUDIE has the impulse to be helpful, but SHE can't think how.*)

(*CALPURNIA comes out of the house. Probably SHE has heard the shouts.*)

CALPURNIA (*her voice softer than before*). Scout—I told you to come in and wash up before your father gets home.

SCOUT (*defeated*). An' I told you—(*Starting*)—in a minute.

CALPURNIA. Your brother's already washed. (*SCOUT gives her a scowl, then scurries in as CALPURNIA follows her off.*) Why can't you behave as well as Jem?

SCOUT (*off*). Because he's older'n me and you know it. Ow! The water's too hot.

CALPURNIA (*off*). Keep scrubbing.

MISS MAUDIE (*conceding*). Even in 1935, Maycomb, Alabama is already an old town—a tired old town. In rainy weather the streets turn to red slop, grass grows on the sidewalks, the courthouse sags in the square. Old mules hitched to Hoover carts flick flies in the shade. There's no hurry because there's nowhere to go, nothing to buy, and no money to buy it with. Maycomb County had recently been told it had nothing to fear, but fear itself.

(*MISS STEPHANIE has come on during this, pausing to consider the Radley house with disapproval.*)

MISS STEPHANIE. Lack of money is no excuse for the Radleys to let their place go like this. At least they could cut the Johnson grass and rabbit tobacco. (*To MISS MAUDIE.*) But, of course, they're Radleys.

MISS MAUDIE. According to Miss Stephanie, *everybody* in Maycomb has a streak: a drinking streak, a gambling streak, a mean streak, a funny streak.

MISS STEPHANIE. They certainly do. (*Confides. This is delicious.*) No Atkinson minds his own business; every

third Merriweather is morbid; the truth is not in the Delafields; all the Bufords walk like that; and if Mrs. Grace sips gin out of Lydia Pinkham bottles, it's nothing unusual—her mother did the same. (*She takes a big breath, ready for the climax.*) As for the Radleys—

(*HECK TATE and JUDGE TAYLOR have strolled on during this and the JUDGE unintentionally interrupts.*)

JUDGE TAYLOR. Afternoon, ladies. (*Startled, MISS STEPHANIE freezes.*)

MISS MAUDIE. Judge Taylor...Sheriff.

HECK (*nods to LADIES. Then to business*). Atticus—you home?

(*CALPURNIA has come out on the porch.*)

CALPURNIA. Not yet, Mr. Tate. Afternoon, Judge Taylor.

HECK. Cal—tell him we were passing by. (*THEY nod and are starting off.*)

CALPURNIA. You want him to call?

JUDGE (*as THEY go. Pleasantly*). We'll be seeing him anyway.

(*SCOUT is coming back onto the porch drying her hands.*)

CALPURNIA (*passing SCOUT on her way in*). Change to a clean blouse.

MISS STEPHANIE (*picking up where she left off. In a loud whisper*). As for the Radleys—

SCOUT (*cutting in*). Do you think Boo Radley's still alive?

MISS MAUDIE (*calling over*). His name's Arthur, and he's still alive.

SCOUT. How do you know?

MISS MAUDIE. What a morbid question. I know because I haven't seen him carried out yet.

SCOUT. Jem says maybe he died an' they stuffed him up the chimney.

MISS MAUDIE. He just stays in the house, that's all. Wouldn't you stay in the house if you didn't want to come out?

SCOUT. But I wanta come out.

MISS STEPHANIE (*bursting to get into this. With a relish*). When that boy was in his teens, he took up with some bad ones from Old Sarum—(*Front.*)—probably drinking stumphole whiskey. They were arrested on charges of disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, and using abusive and profane language in the presence and hearing of a female. Boo Radley was released to his father, who shut him up in that house and he wasn't seen again for fifteen years.

MISS MAUDIE (*to SCOUT*). Now she'll tell you what happened fifteen years later.

MISS STEPHANIE (*gives MAUDIE a brief look*). Boo Radley was sitting in the living room cutting some items from *The Maycomb Tribune* to post in his scrapbook. As his father passed by, Boo drove the scissors into his parent's leg, pulled them out, wiped them on his pants and resumed his activities. Boo was then thirty-three. Mr. Radley said no Radley was going to any insane asylum. So he was kept home where he is till this day. (*Snippily.*) Or Miss Maudie would've seen him carried out.

SCOUT. All my life I've never seen him.

MISS STEPHANIE (*melodramatic*). I saw him. It was stormy, and I woke up in the middle of the night—and there was Boo Radley, his face like a skull—looking in the window, staring at me in my bed!

SCOUT (*fascinated*). What'd you do?

MISS MAUDIE (*helpfully*). She scared him away.
(*SCOUT and MISS STEPHANIE look to MISS MAUDIE.*)

SCOUT (*bewildered*). How?

MISS MAUDIE (*with a wicked smile*). She moved over in the bed to make room for him. (*MISS STEPHANIE stares at her for an instant, then gasps.*)

MISS STEPHANIE (*furious*). You have a streak, Miss Maudie. (*Starts off, then pauses to fire a parting shot.*) A streak I could not properly describe in front of a young lady.

(*As MISS STEPHANIE exits, MRS. DUBOSE is coming out onto her porch.*)

MISS MAUDIE (*nodding after STEPHANIE, with her smile*). She's right. (*Brightly.*) Afternoon, Mrs. Dubose. (*A grunt in reply does not daunt MISS MAUDIE.*) You must smell my mimosa—(*As SHE goes.*)—angels' breath. (*MRS. DUBOSE is carefully arranging herself in a shawl-draped chair.*)

(*JEM enters L with football.*)

JEM (*calling*). Hey, Scout! (*He tosses the football up, catches it, tucks it under his arm and starts dodging imaginary tacklers.*)

MISS MAUDIE (*front*). Alabama must be playing in the Rose Bowl with Jem Finch scoring a touchdown. (*She exits.*)

MRS. DUBOSE (*calling to him sharply*). Where are you going this time of the day, Jeremy Finch? Playing hooky, I suppose. I'll just call up the principal and tell him.

JEM. Aw, it's Saturday, Mrs. Dubose.

MRS. DUBOSE. I wonder if your father knows where you are?

JEM. 'Course he does.

MRS. DUBOSE. Miss Maudie told me you broke down her scuppernong arbour this morning. She's going to tell your father and then you'll wish you'd never seen the light of day!

JEM (*indignant*). I haven't been near her scuppernong arbour.

MRS. DUBOSE. Don't you contradict me! (*With MRS. DUBOSE calling after him, JEM puts his head down and plunges through the center of the opposing team and bulls his way offstage. MRS. DUBOSE after him.*) If you aren't sent to reform school before next week, my name's not Dubose.

SCOUT (*to herself*). Why's she so mean?

(Over the end of the above, the sound of a hymn being sung offstage gradually swells. REVEREND SYKES, a Negro minister, is coming on, possibly followed by a few of the SINGERS, members of his church.)

MRS. DUBOSE (*sternly*). Reverend Sykes, please. You must confine your choir to the colored church.

REVEREND SYKES. Excuse us, Mrs. Dubose. We're making a special visit to our parishioners. (*Calling.*) Miss Cal?

(*Annoyed at the singing, MRS. DUBOSE goes inside. CALPURNIA comes out.*)

CALPURNIA. Afternoon, Reverend Sykes.

REVEREND SYKES. It's about Brother Tom Robinson's trouble. We have to do more for his wife and children.

CALPURNIA. Yes, Reverend.

REVEREND SYKES. These are dark days. Days of trials and tribulations. (*The singing begins to swell again. MISS MAUDIE has come out to listen.*)

CALPURNIA. Yes, Reverend.

REVEREND SYKES. The collection for the next three Sundays will go to his wife.

CALPURNIA (*nodding with the music*). Yes.

REVEREND SYKES. Please encourage *everyone* to bring what they can. Everyone!

SCOUT. Why are you taking up a collection for Tom Robinson's wife?

REVEREND SYKES. To tell the truth, Helen's finding it hard to get work these days.

SCOUT. I know Tom Robinson's done something awful, but why won't folks hire Helen?

REVEREND SYKES. Folks aren't anxious to—(*He hesitates as he sees someone entering. Continuing, dropping his voice.*)—to have anything to do with his family.

(*MAYELLA EWELL has entered, followed by her father, BOB EWELL.*)

MAYELLA (*as they cross the stage*). Yes, Pa.

BOB EWELL. I told ya—stay outa town right now. Hear?

MAYELLA (*resigned*). I hear. (*They continue off.*)

MISS MAUDIE (*front*). Bob Ewell and his daughter, Mayella. Good times or bad they live off the county in a cabin by the garbage dump near a small Negro settlement. (*Smiles wryly.*) All Bob Ewell can hold onto that makes him feel better than his nearest neighbors is that if scrubbed with lye soap in very hot water—his skin is white.

SCOUT (*to REVEREND SYKES, puzzled*). Why'd you stop talking. Those are just Ewells.

MISS MAUDIE (*as SHE exits. Half to herself*). I'm not surprised they stopped talking. (*The singing has begun again.*)

REVEREND SYKES. We have a lot of calls to make. Goodbye, Miss Jean Louis.

SCOUT. Call me Scout.

REVEREND SYKES. See you Sunday, Miss Cal.

CALPURNIA. We'll bring all we can.

SCOUT (*after him*). Bye. (*As they exit, she turns to CALPURNIA. She wants to know.*) What did Tom Robinson do?

CALPURNIA. You mean what do they say he did? Old Mr. Bob Ewell accused Tom of raping his girl and had him arrested and put in jail.

SCOUT (*scornfully*). But everyone in Maycomb knows what kind of folks the Ewells are.

(*JEM has come back on, hearing the last of this.*)

JEM. What's the singing?

SCOUT. Jem—what's rape?

JEM (*after short consideration*). Ask Cal.

CALPURNIA (*even shorter consideration*). I think you better ask your father. (*Going.*) We'll be eating soon.

SCOUT. I'd just like to know—

(*SCOUT stops as DILL is entering.*)

SCOUT. Hey—

DILL. Hey, yourself. I'm Charles Baker Harris. I can read.

JEM. So what?

DILL. I just thought you'd like to know. Folks call me Dill. I'm staying with my Aunt Rachel.

SCOUT (*critically*). You're sort of puny.

DILL (*defensively*). I'm little, but I'm old.

SCOUT (*curious*). How old's your father?

DILL. I haven't got one.

SCOUT. Is he dead?

DILL. No.

SCOUT. Then if he's not dead, you've got one, haven't you? (*DILL is embarrassed.*)

JEM. Never mind her, Dill.

SCOUT (*persisting*). If his father isn't dead, how can he say he hasn't got one? How...(*SHE is interrupted by JEM who grabs her arm.*)

JEM. Scout! The Radley Place!

(*SCOUT stops at his tone, and turns to look with him at the Radley door, which is opening. NATHAN RADLEY, a pale, thin, leathery man is coming out.*)

SCOUT (*with relief*). Nathan Radley.

JEM (*clearing throat nervously*). Hidy-do, Mr. Nathan.

NATHAN (*preoccupied*). Afternoon. (*Exits.*)