In the small town of Maycomb, Alabama, in the middle of the Great Depression, six-year-old Scout Finch lives with her older brother, Jem, and her widowed father, Atticus.Atticus is a lawyer and makes enough to keep the family comfortably out of poverty, but he works long days.Scout, however, finds Calpurnia tyrannical and believes that Calpurnia favors Jem over her.Scout and Jem spend much of their time creating and acting out fantasies.The three children become friends, and, pushed by Dill's wild imagination, soon become obsessed with a nearby house called Radley Place.Local children believe that he's impossibly tall, drools, and eats neighborhood cats and squirrels.He relies on the family's black cook, Calpurnia, to help raise the kids.That year, Atticus is appointed by the court to defend a black man, Tom Robinson, who is accused of raping Mayella Ewell, the daughter of a poor, notoriously vicious white man named Bob Ewell.Atticus explains that Mrs. Dubose was a morphine addict and used Jem's daily reading to break herself of her addiction before she died--she wanted to die free.When they return home, Aunt Alexandra, Atticus's sister, is there to stay with them for "a while"--which in Maycomb, could mean any length of time--to provide a "feminine influence" for Scout. Scout is skeptical and takes major offense to Aunt Alexandra, especially when she forbids Scout from visiting Calpurnia's home. Aunt Alexandra's social views are, in general, more conservative than Atticus's. She treats Calpurnia more like a servant than a family member and tries to impress upon the children that the Finches are a "Fine Family" because they've been on the same land for generations.Atticus pleads with Scout to not beat people up when they hurl insults at her about it, something that Scout struggles with greatly at Christmas.Later in the winter, as Scout and Jem take out their new air rifles to hunt for rabbits, they discover a beloved Maycomb dog named Tim Johnson behaving strangely.Calpurnia recognizes that the dog has rabies, alerts the neighbors, and calls Atticus and the sheriff, Heck Tate.Jem is able to ignore her abuse for a while, until one day when she hurls slurs and insults at him about Atticus defending Tom Robinson.Later at home, Scout tells Uncle Jack where he went wrong: he never asked for her side of the story and punished her based on Francis's incorrect assertion, and she begs him to keep this entire situation a secret from Atticus.Jem retaliates by cutting the tops off of her beloved camellia bushes.Atticus admits that he made Jem read because he wanted Jem to see that courage isn't a man with a gun--it's doing something you know is right, even if you know you'll fail.Racial tensions in Maycomb flare.Scout and Jem become targets of abuse from schoolmates, neighbors, townspeople, and even some family members.His only advice is that it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.

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