ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

ROBERT MULLIGAN, DIRECTOR

Robert Mulligan’s career spanned almost 50 years and included award-winning work in both film and television. Mulligan was born in the Bronx and began his career in television at CBS where he worked his way up from the mailroom. In 1959, he won an Emmy Award for directing the made-for-television production, *The Moon and Sixpence*, based on the novel by Somerset Maugham and starring Laurence Olivier. He directed his first film, *Fear Strikes Out*, in 1957 and five years later received an Academy Award nomination for his most famous and acclaimed work, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

ABOUT THE FILM

In 1962, Harper Lee’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* was translated to film by screenwriter Horton Foote and director Robert Mulligan. Set in a small Alabama town in the 1930s, the story focuses on Atticus Finch (Gregory Peck) a respected lawyer and widower attempting to raise his children in an atmosphere free from hatred and prejudice. Atticus puts his reputation on the line when he agrees to represent Tom Robinson (Brock Peters), a black man accused of attacking a white woman. The trial and the events surrounding it are experienced through the eyes of Atticus’ six-year-old daughter Scout (Mary Badham). The film received three Golden Globe Awards and three Academy Awards and in 1995, was added to the National Film Registry. The American Film Institute listed it as the 25th greatest American movie of all time, and named Atticus Finch the greatest movie hero of the 20th century.

THINKING AHEAD

Q: In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the characters are challenged to take a stand against injustice. Have you ever been faced with a decision like that? What would you take a stand for in your own life?

Q: Jem and Scout, two young children, are main characters in the film. Do you think children and adults understand the world differently? In what ways? How might experiencing a story from the perspective of children influence your understanding of it?

Q: This film is based on a well-known book. Even though the story is the same, how is watching a movie different than reading a book? Is there one way you like more? Why?
THE FILM IN CONTEXT

JIM CROW: RACE AND JUSTICE IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

To Kill a Mockingbird is set in a small town in Alabama in the 1930s during a tragic period in American history known as the Jim Crow Era. After the abolition of slavery, a system of laws and rules commonly referred to as Jim Crow emerged in many Southern states to legalize the discrimination against former slaves. Did you know:

- During the Jim Crow era, state and local officials instituted curfews for blacks and posted “Whites Only” and “Colored” signs on parks, schools, hotels, water fountains, restrooms, and all modes of transportation.

- Laws against miscegenation or “race-mixing” (interracial marriage) deemed all marriages between white and black people not only invalid but also illegal.

- Jim Crow laws were inconsistently enforced so an offense such as “back talking” might get a warning in one town and a lynching in the next.

- Under Jim Crow, Southern white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan reached a membership of six million people.

- Between 1889 and 1930, over 3,700 men and women were reported lynched in the United States, many for challenging Jim Crow.

- The Civil Rights movement and the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 finally ended the Jim Crow laws but its legacy, and the legacy of slavery, lingers on throughout our culture to this day.

Adapted from The Big Read: To Kill A Mockingbird, National Endowment for the Arts (www.neabigread.org)

TAKE A WALK IN MY SHOES

In the film To Kill a Mockingbird, the character Atticus Finch explains to his daughter Scout that “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”

Q: What do you think Atticus means by this statement?

Q: Why do you think Atticus feels it is important for his daughter to learn to see things from another person’s perspective? Do you think it is possible to see the world from someone else’s point of view?

Q: Is there a time when you needed to step into someone else’s shoes and look at the world through their eyes? Did it change your opinion or impression of that person? Did it change the way you saw yourself?

Q: Has someone ever stepped into your shoes and tried to see the world through your eyes? How did it impact you?
HOW TO BE A CRITICAL VIEWER

Being a critical viewer is different than simply watching a movie. Critical viewing is about being able to examine the information that a movie, commercial, music video or TV show is giving you and ask meaningful questions about the information that you receive. Media makers create work for many reasons: to inform, persuade, entertain, shock, sell, etc. A critical viewer asks, “What goal is the media maker trying to achieve, and what impact do they want to have on me?”

A critical viewer is someone who:

• Listens carefully to what is being said in the movie
• Pays attention to the details used by the filmmaker to convey the message of the film
• Asks meaningful questions

Being a critical viewer will help you understand:

• The themes and issues that the filmmaker is addressing
• The reasons why the filmmaker chose to make the movie
• The message of the movie

In this study guide you will find background information, activities, and questions that will help you practice being a critical viewer.
CRITICAL VIEWING REFLECTION

Now that you've watched the film and worked through the Study Guide, take some time to reflect on the following questions. These worksheets are an important step in practicing your critical viewing skills. Write down your answers and compare with your friends and classmates.

Every film has a **MESSAGE** that the filmmaker wants to communicate. There are a few key questions you can ask yourself to help figure out a film’s message.

What do you think the film is about?

What is the filmmaker trying to say about the subject? What evidence is used?

Why do you think the filmmaker made this film?

**PRODUCTION** describes the process of making a film and includes writing the script, choosing different types of shots while filming, editing the final footage, and choosing music. The choices made during production affect how we experience the movie.

How is the story of the film told? Does it remind you of other films you have seen? If so, which ones and how? If not, how was it unique?

How does the way the film is made change the way you understand the topic? (Think about the structure of the film, the music, etc.)
CRITIQUE: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

When you CRITIQUE a film as a critical viewer you are doing more than saying whether you like it or not, you are forming your own opinions about the quality of the film, clearly explaining your thoughts, and using evidence from the film to support these opinions.

What did you find interesting about the film? Why?

Why is the film interesting to other viewers (even if it wasn’t interesting to you)?

Why do you think the filmmaker took the time to make this film?

What would you have done differently if you were the director?

What kind of audience is the film targeting? (Remember, one film can target many different kinds of audiences!)
FURTHER READING
IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT SOME OF THE ISSUES PRESENTED IN THE FILM, CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS.

**Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry**
By Mildred Taylor
Cassie’s family faces a real challenge: to hold on to land in the South during the Depression. This classic story follows a black family’s struggles to remain independent and proud against all obstacles.

**Warriors Don’t Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock’s Central High**
By Melba Pattillo Beals
In 1957, Melba Patillo, a sixteen-year-old student, was selected as one of nine students to help integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Based on her diary, this book is an inspiring and important firsthand account of the climate in the south during the Civil Rights Movement.

**Witness**
By Karen Hesse
The year is 1924, and a small town in Vermont is falling under the influence of the Ku Klux Klan. This book focuses on two girls, one black and the other Jewish, who are among those who are no longer welcome.

**Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South**
Edited by William H. Chafe, Raymond Gavins, and Robert Korstad
Compiled from over 1,200 interviews, this collection tells the story of the era of institutionalized racial discrimination in the US from perspective of the African Americans who experienced it first-hand.

FURTHER WATCHING
IF YOU LIKED THIS FILM, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE SOME OF THESE OTHER FILMS.

**The Secret Life of Bees**
Set in the racially tense 1960s South, 14-year-old Lily Owens (Dakota Fanning) escapes her dreary life on her father’s farm and heads to South Carolina with friend and caregiver Rosaleen Daise (Jennifer Hudson), spawning a life-changing journey of self-discovery.

**12 Angry Men**
In this tense, thought-provoking and groundbreaking film, a dissenting juror in a murder trial attempts to convince the others that the case is not as clear as it seems and in the process reveals the challenges and pitfall inherent in the American criminal justice system.

**The Rosa Parks Story**
Angela Bassett stars in the story that sparked the birth of the modern civil rights movement in the late 1950s. Rosa Parks took the only available seat in the first row of the “colored” section on a city bus. But when a white woman boarded and the driver demanded that the black riders change seats, Parks would not be moved.

**The Great Debaters**
When African American poet Mel Tolson (Denzel Washington, who also directs) creates a debate team at historically black Wiley College in the 1930s, he pushes the team to a level of excellence that allows them to take on Harvard University.

ONLINE RESOURCES
DISCOVER MORE INFORMATION ON THE WEB ABOUT THIS FILM AND RELATED TOPICS.

**African American Odyssey**
[http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaoauthl/](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaoauthl/)
This website provides resources on African American history using historical documents, photographs, drawings, fliers and other materials. The site contains links to related Library of Congress sites, including African American Perspectives.

**American Radio Works: Remembering Jim Crow**
A comprehensive audio archive of documentaries, interviews, podcasts and resources on the Jim Crow era, curated by the national documentary unit of American Public Media.

**The Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Project at Stanford University**
[www.stanford.edu/group/king](http://www.stanford.edu/group/king)
This website contains many of the thousands of documents by and about King; such as full texts of a few of King’s best-known speeches, personal letters and the King family history dating back to 1810.

**California Newsreel**
[www.newsreel.org](http://www.newsreel.org)
California Newsreel produces and distributes cutting edge, social justice films that inspire, educate and engage audiences. This website is a leading resource center for the advancement of racial justice and diversity, and the study of African American life and history as well as African culture and politics.

ABOUT THE BOOK

*To Kill a Mockingbird* was published in 1960 and is based on the author Harper Lee’s upbringing in a small Alabama town where she witnessed the racial injustice of Jim Crow first hand. The book won the Pulitzer Prize in 1961 and had a major influence in bringing the values of the Civil Rights Movement to mainstream America.
ABOUT TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES
This program provides NYC public school students and teachers with access to free, educationally-relevant and challenging films. Each screening is followed by a Q&A, study guides and supplemental educator materials are provided, and teachers are strongly encouraged to utilize films as part of their curriculum. This monthly-series strives to expose New York City students to independent films and help educators and students incorporate film-viewing into their classroom work. For more information about TFI’s youth programs, please visit www.tribecafilminstitute.org/youth or email youth@tribecafilminstitute.org

The Tribeca Film Institute (TFI) is a year-round nonprofit arts organization that empowers working filmmakers through grants, professional development and resources, while also helping New York City students discover independent film and filmmaking.