

Dear English 10 Honors Students,

Hello, and happy summer to each of you! I know it's much too early to be thinking about next school year, but I want you to know that I am already excited to be your teacher. I look forward to spending time with you in Room 215.

Your summer assignment for our class is very simple:

Please read Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

(That's it.)

Here is a bit about *TKAM*:

*According to four million votes cast via PBS's *Great American Read* program, *Mockingbird* is our nation's favorite book (Knight).

*This novel was published in 1960, and many uphold the idea that it was a main catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement in this country. It won a Pulitzer Prize in 1961 (Levy).

*To date, Harper Lee's classic has been "translated into some forty languages, sold more than forty million copies worldwide, and is one of the most-assigned novels in American schools" (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia).

*When I was a sophomore in high school, I read *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It made me laugh ("pass the damn ham"! (Lee 90) and cry. The storyline filled me with abundant hope and raging frustration. It reminded me that what is right is not always popular, and what is popular is not always right. It offered me a host of characters to love for a lifetime: Scout Finch, Jem (her brother), Atticus (their dad), Calpurnia (how awesome is she?), Dill (I love Lee's description of him as "a pocket Merlin") (Lee 9), Tom Robinson, and Arthur Radley. Most significantly, it made me want to be a better version of myself. I hope you have a similarly enriching experience with this classic novel. **Important reminder:** *To Kill a Mockingbird* is not a Reel or a TikTok video. Hang in there with it. Give it a fair chance to work its magic.

FAQs:

Q: Is there a movie version?

A: Yes - and it's awesome! It's an Academy Award winner. We'll probably watch some of it in class!

Q: Sooooo, can I just skip reading the novel and watch the movie?

A: No way. You are welcome to watch the movie (again, it's really good!), but you must read the novel.

Q: When you say, "you must read the novel," does that mean I can just read summaries online and fake my way through my assignments?

A: Please be conscious of the first impression you are making as an English 10 Honors student. JUST READ THE BOOK!

Q: I've heard *TKAM* is on the banned books list. Is that true? If so, why?

A: Yes, it is true. Some places have chosen to ban it because it uses racist language that, sadly, was all too common during the 1930s when the book is set.

Pro tip:

As you are reading, please keep track of plot points/page numbers/direct quotations that relate to the following themes/“big ideas”:

1. “climb[ing] into [someone’s] skin and walk[ing] around in it” (Lee 33)
2. the limitations/dangers of relying on rumors, gossip, and/or potential misinformation to form an opinion about someone
3. a child’s passage from innocence to experience >>> childhood to maturity
4. the challenge of possessing “real courage” (Lee 128)

In closing:

Please bring *Mockingbird* to the beach or the backyard. Read it before bedtime or in the morning quiet with your cup of coffee. Pack the novel in your suitcase, and enjoy it on your travel adventures. Plan a reading date with your best friend from class; head to a park with your novels, a picnic, and two baseball gloves. Read together and discuss your findings; then, have a game of catch. Have fun - and enjoy adding your name to the extensive list of Americans who know and love this iconic story.

I trust, as Honors students, you will do a great job with this simple and straightforward task. More information about your specific assignment will be provided when we meet up in September.

I wish you all the best, and I hope you enjoy a safe and fulfilling summer,

Ms. Strout

Works Cited

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Pulitzer Prize". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 4 Dec. 2023,

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