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Lesson One

FOCUS: Biography

The author's life can inform and expand the reader's understanding of a novel. Some events in the novel mirror circumstances in Harper Lee's life. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee infuses the adventure with her experience as a lawyer's daughter and a tomboy growing up in the South. Although a work of fiction, the novel reflects a small Southern town during the Great Depression. And while we more fully understand the book as we learn about the author, the artistry of the novel does not succeed or fail based on the author's life. The novel—a work of art—has an internal structure independent of the author's personality.

Discussion Activities

Listen to the Big Read CD, Track One (15:45). Students should take notes as they listen. What do the students learn about Harper Lee from her biographer, Charles J. Shields and other contributors? What are the three most important points on the CD?

Copy Reader's Guide essays, "Harper Lee" (pp. 4-5) (or Handout One in this Teacher's Guide), "The Friendship of Harper Lee and Truman Capote" (pp. 6-7) and "How *To Kill A Mockingbird* Came To Be Written" (pp. 10-11). Divide the class into groups. Assign one essay to each group. After reading and discussing the essays, each group will present what they learned from the essay. Ask students to add a creative twist to make their presentation memorable.

Writing Exercise

The novel begins with an epigraph by Charles Lamb: "Lawyers, I suppose, were children once." Based on what you've learned from the CD, why do you think Lee chose this quote to begin her novel? Write two paragraphs on how this statement relates to what students have learned about Lee's life.

Homework

Read Chapters 1-3 (pp. 3-32)*. Prepare your students to read approximately 30 pages per night in order to complete this book in ten lessons. What happens to Scout on her first day of school? What kind of teacher is Miss Caroline, Scout's first grade teacher?

* Page numbers refer to the Warner Books 1982 edition of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.