

USING FICTION

to teach human rights.

To Kill a Mockingbird - Harper Lee



Penguin
Random House
UK



” The one thing
that doesn't abide
by majority rule
is a person's

CONSCIENCE.



” 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.”

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD



The power of fiction

‘All human beings are
born free and equal in dignity and rights.’

Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Fiction has the power to help us understand what human rights mean and why it is important to uphold them. In touching our minds and emotions, fiction can widen our horizons and help us develop the ability to imagine what it might be like to be someone else. This skill is empathy and it is crucial in standing up against intolerance, prejudice and conflict.

Of all 20th century novels, Harper Lee’s *To Kill A Mockingbird* has become a byword for human rights values. Today, many cite it as the most formative book of their teenage years, the novel that had the greatest impact on how they see and interact with the world around them. It is an object lesson in how fiction can inspire a profound understanding of the values that underpin our human rights.

This teaching resource focuses on the human rights at the heart of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. We hope it will open up new worlds in the classroom and inspire stimulating reflection and debate.



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Equality

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Discuss:

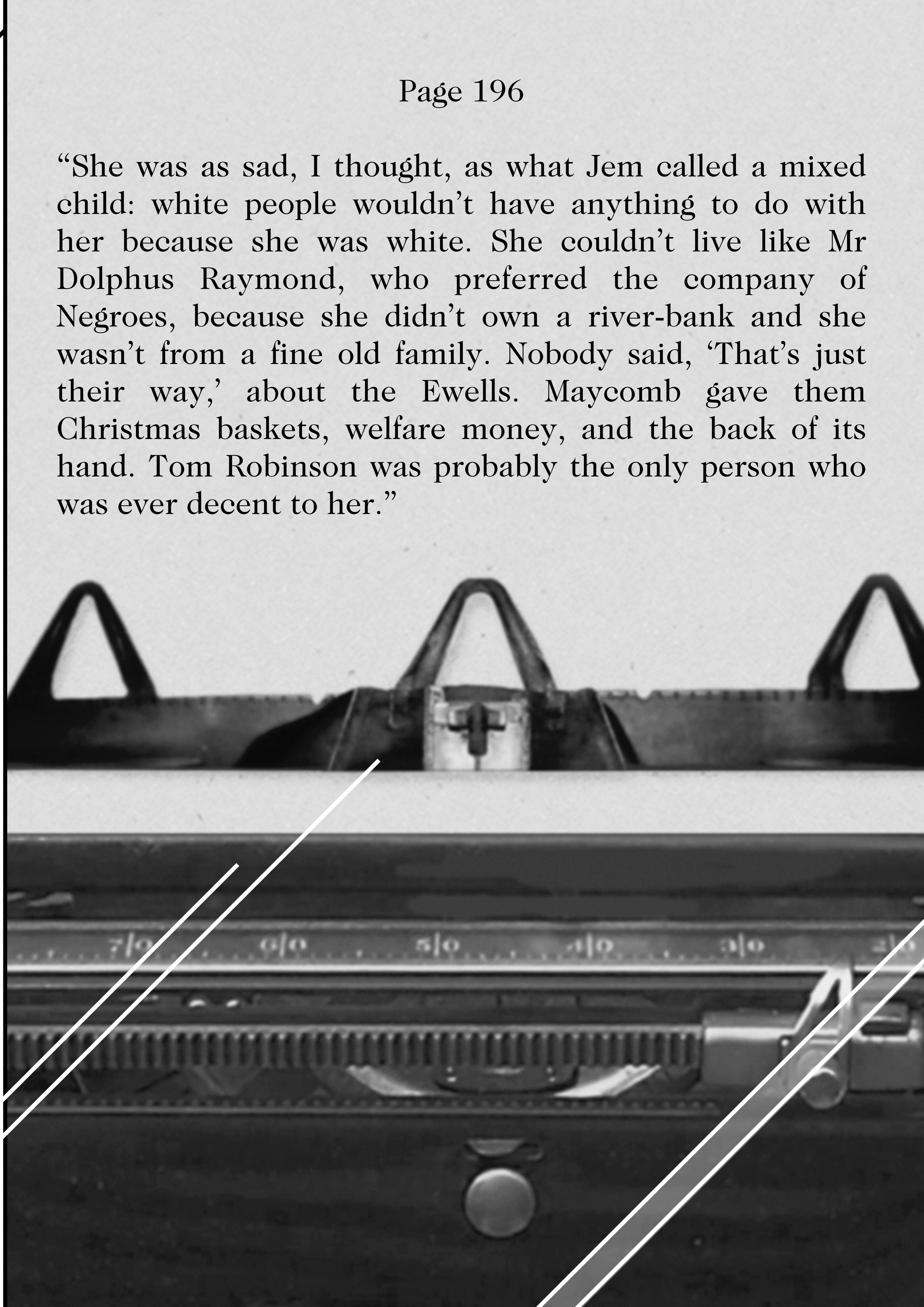
★ Scout feels that Mayella Ewell must be the ‘loneliest person in the world’ because she is so isolated. Discrimination runs throughout Harper Lee’s novel. Who is discriminated against and why?

★ Dill has to leave the courtroom during the trial of Tom Robinson: “It ain’t right, somehow it ain’t right to do ‘em that way. Hasn’t anybody got any business talkin’ like that – it just makes me sick.” How do the other characters react to the injustice they witness?

★ When Scout attends Calpurnia’s church, she comments ‘Again, as I had often met it in my own church, I was confronted with the Impurity of Women doctrine that seemed to preoccupy all clergymen.’ How is Scout supposed to behave as a girl?

★ Scout feels that, unlike Atticus, Uncle Jack is not fair: “You gonna give me a chance to tell you? I don’t mean to sass you, I’m just tryin’ to tell you.” Are children’s rights respected in the novel?

“She was as sad, I thought, as what Jem called a mixed child: white people wouldn’t have anything to do with her because she was white. She couldn’t live like Mr Dolphus Raymond, who preferred the company of Negroes, because she didn’t own a river-bank and she wasn’t from a fine old family. Nobody said, ‘That’s just their way,’ about the Ewells. Maycomb gave them Christmas baskets, welfare money, and the back of its hand. Tom Robinson was probably the only person who was ever decent to her.”



Justice

Article 7: All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection before the law.

Discuss:

★ Atticus reminds the jury of what the Declaration of Independence states and that all are equal before the law. Why is it necessary for Atticus to do this?

★ Atticus says “I’m no idealist to believe firmly in the integrity of our courts and in the jury system – that is no ideal to me, it is a living, working reality.” What do you think he means by this?

★ Miss Maudie explains why killing a Mockingbird is a sin: ‘Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t eat up people’s gardens, they don’t nest in corncribs, they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us.’ Who is innocent in the novel?

★ The execution of the Haverfords was the beginning of Atticus’s ‘profound distaste for the practice of criminal law.’ Why does Atticus continue to be a lawyer?



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Dignity

Article 25: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care

Discuss:

★ Scout tells Miss Fisher about the Cunninghams in order to help her understand why Walter won't borrow money from her for lunch. How does Harper Lee represent the Cunninghams?

★ 'Walter Cunningham's face told everybody in the first grade he had hookworms. His absence of shoes told us how he got them. People caught hookworms going barefooted in barnyards and hog wallows.' What role does poverty play in the events of the novel?

★ 'Miss Stephanie said old Mr Radley said no Radley was going to any asylum, when it was suggested that a season in Tuscaloosa might be helpful to Boo. Boo wasn't crazy, he was high-strung at times. It was all right to shut him up, Mr Radley conceded' What do you think should have been done about Boo?

” They don't have much, but they get along on it.”

Education

Article 26: Everyone has the right to education.

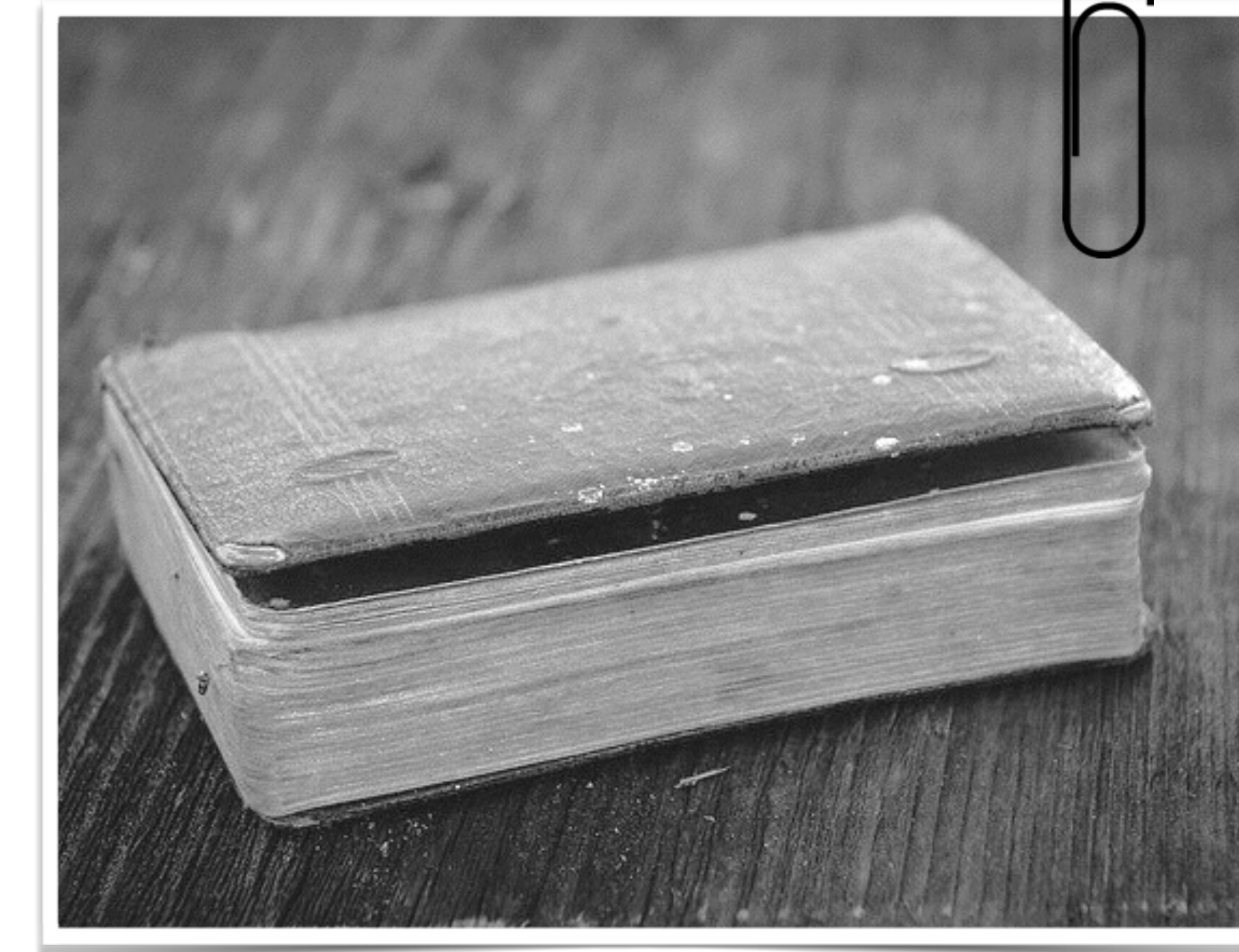
Discuss:

★ Scout disagrees with Jem about why some people can read and write; she is astute in her understanding that the key is education. Why is education so important that it is included in the UDHR? Why might education be considered dangerous?

★ Scout tries to persuade Atticus to let her stop going to school. Miss Fisher 'patted the palm of my hand with a ruler, then made me stand in the corner until noon' but this isn't Scout's main complaint. Why doesn't she want to go to school?


★ Walter Cunningham says "Reason I can't pass the first grade, Mr Finch, is I've had to stay out ever' spring an' help Papa with the choppin'." How might missing school affect Walter?

★ Burrell Ewell walks out of school having "done my time for this year." How might the isolation of the Ewells from school contribute to their isolation from Maycomb?




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” Naw, Jem, I think
there’s just one
kind of folks.

FOLKS.



Amnesty International

Amnesty International’s vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards. Our mission is to undertake research, educate and take action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of human rights. We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion.

Changing lives

As a global movement of eight million men, women and children across the world standing up for humanity and human rights, Amnesty’s purpose is to protect individuals wherever justice, fairness, freedom and truth are denied. We believe ordinary people have the power to make extraordinary change. Harper Lee describes lawyer Atticus Finch’s moral stand in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Less than a year after the book’s publication, young British barrister Peter Benenson also did what he believed to be right and in so doing changed the course of international human rights: he was so outraged to read about two young Portuguese students imprisoned for raising a toast to freedom that he founded Amnesty International.

You and your students can stand up for human rights too. You can take action on behalf of individuals whose human rights are being violated. You can make a huge difference.



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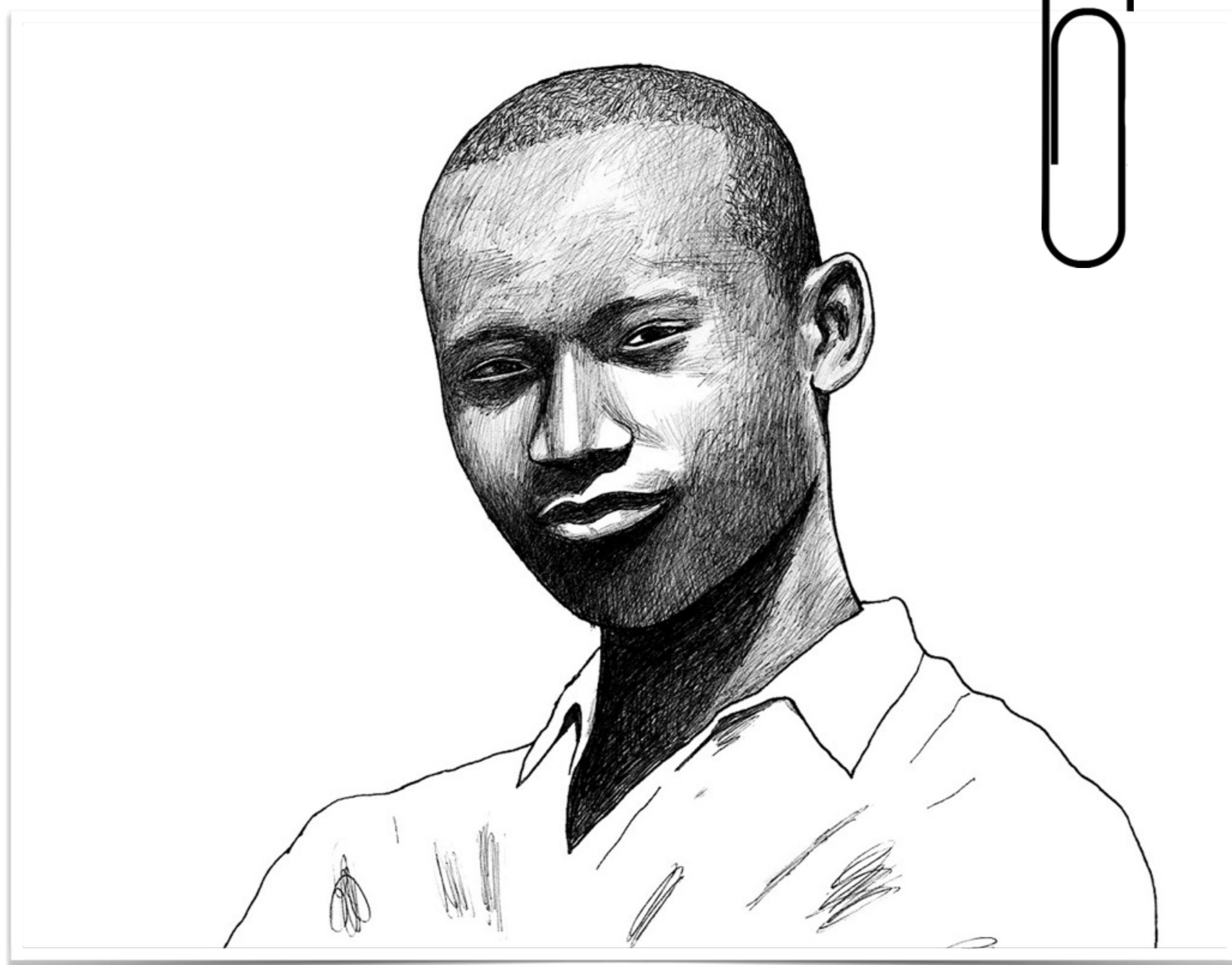
Letter-Writing Changes Lives

Every day Amnesty supporters send messages of hope to individuals at risk, as well as appeals to authorities. It works. All these actions can help free a prisoner, stop an execution or help a bereaved family receive justice.

Do remember that situations change - please check our website for up-to-date information before you take action.

'I am overwhelmed. I thank Amnesty International and their activists for the great support that made me a conqueror in this situation. Amnesty International members and activist are my heroes.'

Moses Akatugba



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The story of Moses Akatugba

On 27 November 2005, 16-year-old Moses Akatugba was awaiting the results of his secondary school exams when his life changed forever. He was arrested by the Nigerian army and shot in the hand, beaten and charged with stealing mobile phones. His finger and toe nails were extracted with pliers. He was forced to sign two 'confessions'. After eight years in prison, he was sentenced to death by hanging.

Amnesty took on Moses's case. Forty thousand people signed our petition calling on the Nigerian authorities to commute his death sentence and investigate his claims of torture. Many Amnesty youth activists protested outside the Nigerian embassy in London and wrote Facebook messages calling for Moses's freedom. Simply hearing that people cared made a difference to Moses.

'I am so grateful for everything that people are doing in the UK to help me. The letters I have received give me hope. When I hear about the level of support and everything that is being done for me by Amnesty International, it makes me the happiest man on earth.'

On 28 May 2015, after nearly 10 years in prison, Moses was pardoned.

www.amnesty.org.uk/moses



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Take action for Raif Badawi and Waleed Abulkhair: champions of free speech

In 2012 Raif Badawi was heavily fined and sentenced to 10 years in prison and public floggings of 1,000 lashes. His crime? He had created a website 'Saudi Arabian Liberals', which he envisaged as a forum for political and social debate. He was found guilty of breaking Saudi Arabia's technology laws and insulting Islamic religious figures by creating and managing an online forum.

Raif's lawyer Waleed Abulkhair was jailed for 15 years in 2014 after setting up Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia, a Saudi human rights organisation. He was charged with 'setting up an unlicensed organisation' and 'breaking allegiance with the ruler'. But his requests to license the organisation had been denied. Amnesty has declared him a prisoner of conscience, who has been punished for defending human rights – much as lawyer Atticus Finch does in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

You and your students can stand up for Raif, Waleed and others with a few simple actions. See more at www.amnesty.org.uk/raif

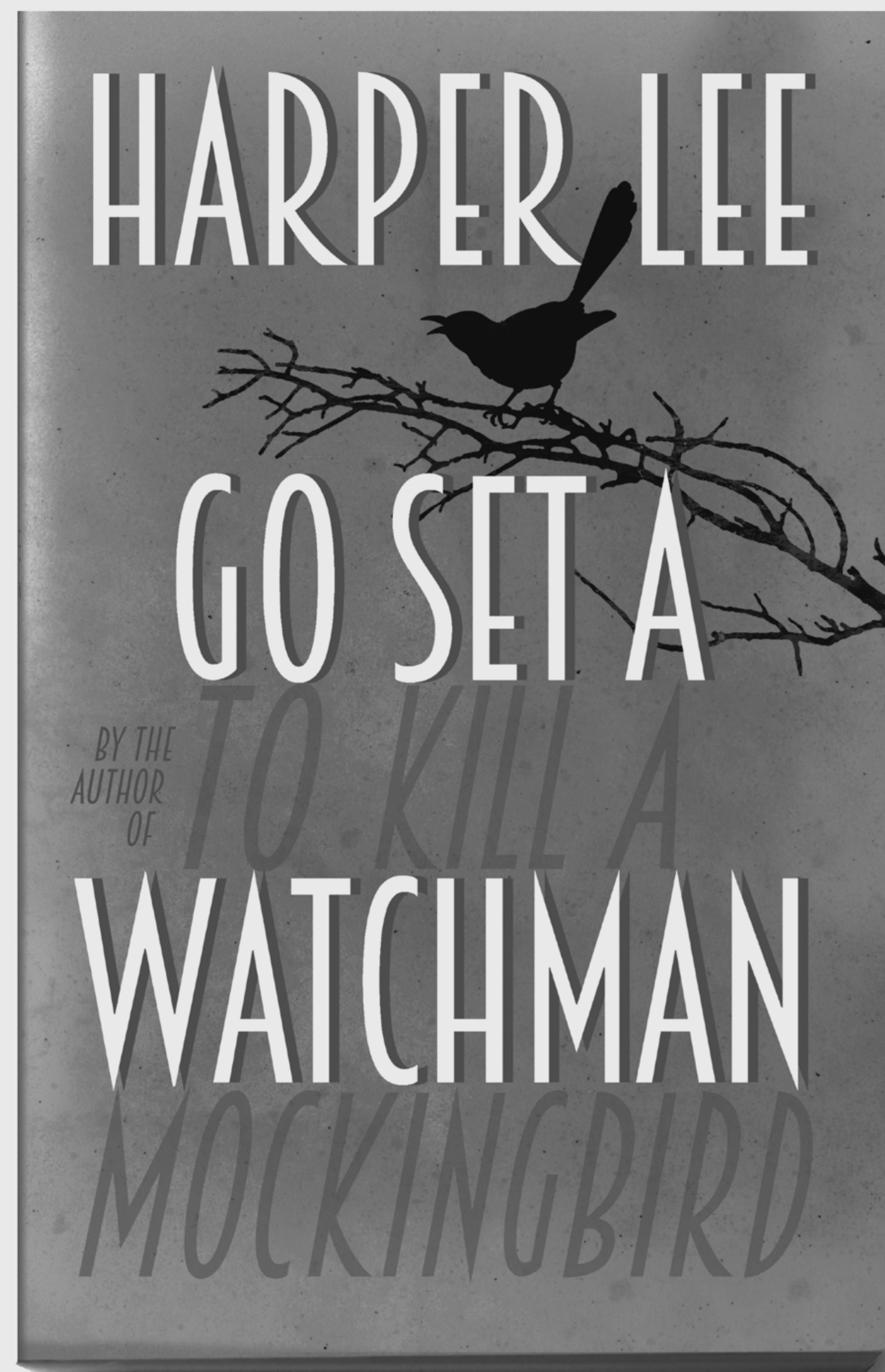
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Scout Finch is all grown up
and returning to Maycomb



Read the rediscovered novel from the author of
TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

THANK YOU

We hope you have found this guide inspiring and useful. You can find out more about Amnesty International UK's work on fiction and human rights at www.amnesty.org.uk/books

You can also find many free human rights education resources, including further fiction notes, at www.amnesty.org.uk/education

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