



8th Grade Summer Reading Guide

Brownell Talbot's eighth graders are asked to read two novels over the summer: S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The following considerations and questions are provided to guide the students' reading to give some direction to their efforts toward annotating the texts.

The Outsiders was published in 1967 when the author was 17 years old. Its appeal stems primarily from the 15-year-old narrator whose narrative voice is starkly genuine. When reading this novel consider:

- Which events and scenes in the novel support the idea that the book is about the loss of innocence?
- How do the characters in the novel help the reader to reimagine the definition of family?
- Look up the four words that share the Greek root word for "emotion" (sympathy, empathy, apathy, antipathy) and apply each to one of the characters in the novel. Additionally, which character do you believe best exemplifies one of BT's Core Values (Compassion, Integrity, Respect, and Responsibility)?
- What type of conflict do you think the novel employs most effectively to advance its plot and engage the audience? Is this a novel more about internal conflict (character vs. self) or external conflict (character vs. character)?
- The author of this novel's full name is Susan Eloise Hinton—its abbreviation is done in part to make her name appear gender neutral, or possibly even masculine; given the subject matter of the book, and the realities of book publishing in the 20th century, why do you think she employed a *nom de plume* on the cover of the novel?

To Kill a Mockingbird will be treated in a four-week unit of study. I recommend that, of the two books required, you read this one last. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was published in 1960 during the Civil Rights Movement and is credited with helping raise awareness of racial injustice in America. When reading this novel consider:

- What scenes/events in the novel connect it to the Civil Rights Movement?
- Compare / contrast the setting of this novel (Maycomb, Alabama) to the Tulsa, Oklahoma setting of *The Outsiders*. Which novel is more effective in immersing the reader in the world in which it is set?
- Look up the four words that share the Greek root word for "emotion" (sympathy, empathy, apathy, antipathy) and apply each to one of the characters in the novel. Additionally, which character do you believe best exemplifies one of BT's Core Values (Compassion, Integrity, Respect, and Responsibility)?
- For most of the novel, Boo Radley is a tertiary character existing outside the novel's other highly charged moments of tension and conflict, yet by the end he is arguably the most pivotal character in the whole book—is his appearance at the novel's climax a sort of *deus ex machina* (look it up), or are there instances throughout the earlier chapters that set up his prominent appearance at the novel's close?
- If the novel teaches lessons, what lessons can be drawn from it?

Bonus: both of these novels have prominent film and theatrical adaptations that are easily viewed through streaming services / YouTube; AFTER reading the books, pick one live-action visualization and describe how well (or not) it fit with your own conceptualization of the novel's characters, settings, conflict, and so on.