

Writing a Short Story Review

House three students will be required to complete a short story review. In order to complete this project, they will have to: read the instructions below, and access the following website:

Highlight the blue print: [Short Stories & Classic Literature](#). Copy and paste in a google or yahoo search engine. Click on: [Short Stories & Classic Literature from around the World](#) Once you open the page you will see the heading: American Literature. Click on SHORT STORIES for the listings of the stories you may read and select.

Read all the steps and procedures before you begin this project

Step 1: Read the following sample review

Here's an example review written about the book, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Read the sample review carefully, and try using it as a model as you begin thinking about your own story review. Research and define the highlighted words, and any other unknown vocabulary.

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

I've never been to Alabama, but novelist Harper Lee made me feel as if I had been there in the long, hot summer of 1935, when a lawyer named Atticus Finch decided to defend an innocent black man accused of a horrible crime. The story of how the whole town reacted to the trial is told by the lawyer's daughter, Scout, who remembers exactly what it was like to be eight years old in 1935, in Maycomb, Alabama.

Scout is the reason I loved this book, because her voice rings so clear and true. Not only does she make me see the things she sees, she makes me feel the things she feels. There's a lot more going on than just the trial, and Scout tells you all about it.

A man called Boo Radley lives next door. Very few people have ever seen Boo, and Scout and her friends have a lot of fun telling scary stories about him. The mystery about Boo Radley is just one of the reasons you want to keep turning the pages to find out what happens in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Scout and her big brother, Jem, run wild and play games and have a great time while their father is busy with the trial. One of their friends is a strange boy called Dill. Actually Dill isn't really so strange once you get to know him. He says things like "I'm little but I'm old," which is funny but also pretty sad, because some of the time Dill acts more like a little old man than a seven-year-old boy.

To Kill a Mockingbird is filled with interesting characters like Dill, and Scout makes them all seem just as real as the people in your own hometown. Here's how Scout describes Miss Caroline, who wore a red-striped dress: "She looked and smelled like a peppermint drop."

Dill and Boo and Jem are all fascinating, but the most important character in the book is Scout's father, Atticus Finch. You get the idea that Scout is writing the story down because she wants the world to know what a good man her dad was, and how hard he tried to do the right thing, even though the deck was stacked against him.

The larger theme of the story is about racial intolerance, but Scout never tries to make it a "lesson," it's simply part of the world she describes. That's why *To Kill a Mockingbird* rings true, and why it all seems so real.

The trial of the wrongly accused Tom Robinson takes place during the time of **segregation**, when black people were not allowed to socialize with white people. In that era, when a white man said a black man committed a crime, the black man was **presumed** to be guilty. The law required that they have a trial, but everybody knew the **defendant** was going to be **convicted**.

Atticus Finch, the quiet hero of the book, tries to persuade the jury that **bigotry** is wrong. His words are **eloquent** and **heartfelt**. He demonstrates that Tom Robinson couldn't possibly have **assaulted** the victim. Atticus even reveals the identity of the real **villain**, which **enrages** a very dangerous enemy. This act of courage endangers not only Atticus Finch but his family as well. They become the target of hate **mongers** and **bigots**.

Even though the story took place many years ago, you get the idea that parts of the events could happen today, in any town where people **distrust** and fear each other's differences.

In a just world an innocent man should be found not guilty. But if you want to know what this particular jury finally decides and what happens to Scout and Jem and Dill and Boo Radley and the rest of the people who live and breathe in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, you'll have to read the book!

Step 2: Writing Tips

Here are a few tips that will be helpful when you sit down to write about a book or story. Give them a try!

1. Before you begin writing, **make a few notes about the points you want to get across**.
2. While you're writing, **try thinking of your reader** as a friend to whom you're telling a story.
3. Try to **mention the name of the author and the book title in the first paragraph** — there's nothing more frustrating than reading a review of a great book but not knowing who wrote it and what the title is!
4. If possible, **use one paragraph for each point** you want to make about the book. It's a good way to emphasize the importance of the point. You might want to list the main points in your notes before you begin.
5. Try to get **the main theme** of the book across in the beginning of your review. Your reader should know right away what he or she is getting into should they choose to read the book!
6. Think about whether the book is **part of a genre**. Does the book fit into a type like mystery, adventure, or romance? What aspects of the genre does it use?

7. What do you like or dislike about **the book's writing style**? Is it funny? Does it give you a sense of the place it's set? What is the author's/narrator's "voice" like?
8. Try **using a few short quotes** from the book to illustrate your points. This is not absolutely necessary, but it's a good way to give your reader a sense of the author's writing style.
9. Make sure your review **explains how you feel** about the book and why, not just what the book is about. A good review should express the reviewer's opinion and persuade the reader to share it, to read the book, or to avoid reading it.
10. **Do research about the author and incorporate what you learn into the review.** Biographical information can help you formulate your opinion about the book, and gives your review a "depth." Remember, a book doesn't come directly from a printing press, it's a product of an author's mind, and therefore it may be helpful to know something about the author and how she or he came to write the book. For instance, a little research will reveal the following about author Harper Lee:
 - *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which won the Pulitzer Prize, is the only book she's ever published.
 - The town she called Maycomb is really Monroeville, Alabama. Many of the residents thought the author had betrayed them by writing the book.
 - Some people think she based the character Dill on Truman Capote, a famous writer who was her childhood friend.

Step 3: Writing Challenges

Every review is different, but each successful review includes a couple of key elements. As you think about what you want to say in your review, complete these challenges. They're designed to help you work on telling your reader what's most important.

- **Describe the setting of the book.** How does it compare or contrast to the world you know? A book's setting is one of its most vital components — particularly for a book like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which is set in the past. Does the author make you feel like you're a part of the setting? Can you picture the book's setting if you close your eyes? As you write, try to pass on to your reader the sense of the setting and *place* that the author has provided.
- **Describe the book's main characters.** Does the writer make you believe in them as people? Why or why not? Think about whether you like the characters and about how liking them or disliking them makes you feel about the book. As you write about the characters, use examples of things they've said or done to give a sense of their personalities.
- **Give your reader a taste of the plot, but don't give the surprises away.** Readers want to know enough about what happens in a book to know whether they'll find it interesting. But they never want to know the ending! Summarize the plot in a way that will answer some questions about the book, but leave other questions in the reader's mind. You may want to make a list of questions about the book before you begin.

Once you're done with the challenges, you're ready to write a first draft of your review! Take these elements and weave them together into a complete review. Be sure to incorporate some of the writing tips from **Step 2, too! When you've finished the first draft, you'll be ready to move on to the revision process.**

Step 4: Revision Guidelines

Now that you've completed the challenges and written your first draft, it's time to begin revising. As many published writers will tell you, rewriting is one of the most important parts of writing anything — from book reviews to actual books! These guidelines will help you prepare the second version of your review.

1. Check back through the writing tips in [Step 2](#) and make sure you've incorporated as many of the suggestions as possible.
2. Read through each paragraph and make sure the main point is clear. For instance, the point of one of your paragraphs might be to describe the book's main character. As you read that paragraph, make sure that it gets across what you most want to say about the character. That way, the character will be vivid in your reader's mind.
3. If a sentence or paragraph seems awkward or unclear, it has to be rewritten — and rewriting is what separates good writing from bad. Begin by trying to simplify. Here's an example of an awkward or unclear sentence:

Boo Radley is this mysterious man that lives next door to where Scout lives, and she and her friends tell stories that are scary about Boo, except they don't really know much about him, which is one of the reasons *To Kill a Mockingbird* is so suspenseful.

Let's break these thoughts up into three clearly defined sentences that stand alone as a paragraph:

A man called Boo Radley lives next door. Very few people have ever seen Boo, and Scout and her friends have a lot of fun telling scary stories about him. The mystery about Boo Radley is just one of the reasons you want to keep turning the pages to find out what happens in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

4. Check to make sure you're not repeating yourself. (This can be easy to do when you're trying to get an important point across!) Make sure you state your main points clearly and vigorously. Afterwards, explain *why* the point is important, instead of saying it again. Repetitive writing makes for dull reading.

Thus, do you think you're ready to publish your review? Go for it, but if you are not sure what to say? Keep these tips in mind:

Be honest: Give your review personality and remember that kids want to know what you REALLY think.

Be detailed: Tell us exactly what you liked or didn't. Was it a story you couldn't put down? Were the characters just like people you know? What made it special?

Be accurate: Be sure to get the title, author, and character names right, plus double-check your spelling and grammar. We aren't able to post reviews that don't make sense or have the wrong information.

DON'T spoil it: Please don't give away the ending! Tell readers enough about the plot to hook them, but keep them hanging so that they want to read the book.

NOW YOU ARE READY TO CHOOSE YOUR STORIES

1. Access the American Literature website given in the introduction.
2. Browse through the short stories listed in this website and choose the three that you will completely read and analyze.
3. Follow Step 2: **Writing Tips** to gather detailed notes for each of the three stories.
4. Choose the one story you will use for the final written review. Use Step 3: **Writing Challenges** and Step 4: **Revision Guidelines**
5. **Your grade will be based on the following:**
 - a. **Evidence of analysis of the three stories in your own words, in note form (10 points per story)**
 - b. **First draft of story review (20 points)**
 - c. **Final story review will be scored using the six +1 writing traits: IDEAS, ORGANIZATION, VOICE, WORD CHOICE, SENTENCE FLUENCY, CONVENTIONS AND PRESENTATION.**
6. Be prepared to share your peers once classes resume.