



ORLANDO SHAKESPEARE THEATER IN PARTNERSHIP WITH UCF

Page to Stage

This 10-20 minute activity may be used to compare drama to fiction by turning narrative into dialogue.

Bringing a book to life on stage is difficult. It sometimes means cutting out events, storylines and even whole characters. In the play adaptation of *To Kill A Mockingbird*, when playwright Christopher Sergel turned Harper Lee's prose into dialogue for actors, he eliminated description in the narrative that would later be turned into stage directions.

Read the following excerpt from the book.

"H-ey, Atticus!"

I thought he would have a fine surprise, but his face killed my joy. A flash of plain fear was going out of his eyes, but returned when Dill and Jem wriggled into the light.

There was a smell of stale whiskey and pigpen about, and when I glanced around I discovered that these men were strangers. They were not the people I saw last night. Hot embarrassment shot through me: I had leaped triumphantly into a ring of people I had never seen before.

Atticus got up from his chair, but he was moving slowly, like an old man. He put the newspaper down very carefully, adjusting its creases with lingering fingers. They were trembling a little.

"Go home, Jem," he said. "Take Scout and Dill home."

We were accustomed to prompt, if not always cheerful acquiescence to Atticus's instructions, but from the way he stood Jem was not thinking of budging.

"Go home, I said."

Jem shook his head. As Atticus's fists went to his hips, so did Jem's, and as they faced each other I could see little resemblance between them: Jem's soft brown hair and eyes, his oval face and snug-fitting ears were our mother's, contrasting oddly with Atticus's graying black hair and square-cut features, but they were somehow alike. Mutual defiance made them alike.

"Son, I said go home."

Jem shook his head.

"I'll send him home," a burly man said, and grabbed Jem roughly by the collar. He yanked Jem nearly off his feet.

"Don't you touch him!" I kicked the man swiftly. Barefooted, I was surprised to see him fall back in real pain. I intended to kick his shin, but aimed too high.

"That'll do, Scout." Atticus put his hand on my shoulder. "Don't kick folks. No—" he said, as I was pleading justification.

"Ain't nobody gonna do Jem that way," I said.

"All right, Mr. Finch, get 'em outa here," someone growled. "You got fifteen seconds to get 'em outa here."

In the midst of this strange assembly, Atticus stood trying to make Jem mind him. "I ain't going," was his steady answer to Atticus's threats, requests, and finally, "Please Jem, take them home."

I was getting a bit tired of that, but felt Jem had his own reasons for doing as he did, in view of his prospects once Atticus did get him home. I looked around the crowd. It was a summer's night, but the men were dressed, most of them, in overalls and denim shirts buttoned up to the collars. I thought they must be cold-natured, as their sleeves were unrolled and buttoned at the cuffs.

Some wore hats pulled firmly down over their ears. They were sullen-looking, sleepy-eyed men who seemed unused to late hours. I sought once more for a familiar face, and at the center of the semi-circle I found one.

"Hey, Mr. Cunningham." The man did not hear me, it seemed.

"Hey, Mr. Cunningham. How's your entailment gettin' along?"

Mr. Walter Cunningham's legal affairs were well known to me; Atticus had once described them at length. The big man blinked and hooked his thumbs in his overall straps. He seemed uncomfortable; he cleared his throat and looked away. My friendly overture had fallen flat.

Mr. Cunningham wore no hat, and the top half of his forehead was white in contrast to his sunscorched face, which led me to believe that he wore one most days. He shifted his feet, clad in heavy work shoes.

"Don't you remember me, Mr. Cunningham? I'm Jean Louise Finch. You brought us some hickory nuts one time, remember?" I began to sense the futility one feels when unacknowledged by a chance acquaintance.

"I go to school with Walter," I began again. "He's your boy, ain't he? Ain't he, sir?" Mr. Cunningham was moved to a faint nod. He did know me, after all.

Now read the following scene from the play. Then, take a highlighter and highlight all the stage directions (*italics, in parentheses*). Then, go back to the previous page from the novel and highlight all the text that you think is represented in the stage directions

SCOUT (*as SHE comes*). H--ey, Atticus!

ATTICUS (*startled, afraid for her*). Scout! (*JEM and DILL are following into the circle of light.*)

JEM (*apologetic*). Couldn't hang onto her.

ATTICUS (*urgently*). Go home, Jem. Take Scout and Dill and go home. (*JEM is looking at the GROUP.*) Jem -- I said, go home.

JEM (*back to ATTICUS*). Will you be coming with us?

ATTICUS. Son, I told you -- (*A FOURTH MAN grabs JEM.*)

FOURTH MAN. I'll send him home.

SCOUT. Don't you touch him!

FOURTH MAN. I'm telling you to — (*SCOUT kicks the FOURTH MAN in the shins, and HE cries out, letting go of JEM and hopping back into the GROUP.*)

ATTICUS. That'll do, Scout. Don't kick folks.

SCOUT (*indignant*). But he —

ATTICUS. No, Scout.

SCOUT. Nobody gonna do Jem that way.

THIRD MAN. All right, Mr. Finch, you get 'em outa here.

BOB EWELL. Give ya fifteen seconds.

JEM. I ain't goin'

ATTICUS. Please, Jem, take them and go.

JEM (*grimly determined*). No, sir. (*The CROWD is stirring with impatience.*)

CROWD (*muttering angry*). Had about enough — the kids are his worry — Can't stand around all night -- come on -- get 'em outa the way -- let's get that nigger! (*The LAST SPEAKER is interrupted as SCOUT thinks SHE recognizes a MAN in front.*)

SCOUT. Mr. Cunningham -- that you? (*Coming closer*). Hey, Mr. Cunningham. (*MR. CUNNINGHAM does not reply. The OTHERS are watching. SCOUT is more confused.*) Don't you remember me? I'm Scout. You brought us a big bag of turnip greens, remember?

ATTICUS (*perplexed*). Scout --

SCOUT (*struggling for recognition*). I go to school with your boy Walter. Well, he's your boy, ain't he? Ain't he? (*MR. CUNNINGHAM is moved to a small nod. SCOUT is relieved.*) Knew he was your boy.

Pick a chapter or scene from a book you are reading in class. (Small scenes with 6 or fewer characters are best.) Turn it into dialogue by assigning lines to the characters involved. Write in stage directions where needed. Then read your scene aloud for the rest of the class.