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SNEAK PREVIEW

Using *Watchman* in the Classroom

How can Harper Lee's newly published novel *Go Set a Watchman* deepen students' engagement with *To Kill a Mockingbird*? *Watchman* is not a sequel to *Mockingbird*, but it is a companion work that can shed light on the characters, context, and themes that Lee explores in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Facing History examines in the *Teaching Mockingbird* study guide.

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JEAN LOUISE AND CALPURNIA

Overview

As *Go Set a Watchman* opens, 26-year-old Jean Louise Finch travels from New York City to her hometown of Maycomb, Alabama, to visit her aging, ailing father, Atticus. It is the mid-1950s, and many in Maycomb are resisting the advances of the civil rights movement, including, to her shock, her own father. As Jean Louise struggles with these revelations, she reaches out to Calpurnia, who has retired from the Finch household but remains an important figure in her life.

In this lesson, we pair Chapter 12 of *Mockingbird*, when Scout and Jem attend church with Calpurnia, with an excerpt from Chapter 12 of *Watchman*, when Jean Louise goes to Calpurnia's home after Cal's grandson Frank has been charged with manslaughter. A historical source, "You Worked Long Hours," features the recollections of domestic worker Essie Favrot about the white families she worked for, and Maya Angelou's poem "The Mask" raises questions about how African Americans concealed their true identities and emotions to survive in a segregated world.

The accompanying discussion questions and activities can be used to guide writing and conversation about these readings in your classroom. (In these activities, we use "Jean Louise" to indicate the character in *Go Set a Watchman* and "Scout" to refer to *To Kill a Mockingbird*.)



@facinghistory
facinghistory.org

Facing History and Ourselves,
16 Hurd Road, Brookline, MA 02445
617-232-1595

Historical Context

In the periods when *Mockingbird* and *Watchman* are set, the social world of the South was governed by rigid rules of racial segregation, and the lives of blacks and whites were shaped by racial power dynamics. Blacks were often only able to find employment serving white families as domestic workers and nannies. These jobs involved many hours of labor, encompassed much of the household and parenting work, and were often characterized by real affection, leading some to even describe black maids as surrogate mothers to the white children they cared for.

In *Mockingbird*, Calpurnia is a “tyrannical presence” in the Finch house and a respected partner to Atticus in raising the children, yet she sleeps on a cot in the kitchen when she stays overnight and respectfully calls Jem “Mister Jem” when he reaches adolescence. In *Watchman*, the elderly Calpurnia has retired from the Finch household, but she’s still regarded with respect and affection by Jean Louise, who seeks out Calpurnia during her fraught visit to Maycomb.

Materials

- Novel Excerpt: Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Chapter 12
- Novel Excerpt: Harper Lee, *Go Set a Watchman*, Chapter 12, starting at the bottom of page 157, “Calpurnia was sitting in a wooden rocking chair in a corner of the room...,” and ending at the section break on page 160, “...Finally, Calpurnia shook her head.”
- Primary Source: “You Worked Long Hours,” from Susan Tucker, *Telling Memories Among Southern Women*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988.
- Poem: Maya Angelou, “The Mask”

Suggested Activities

I. The following questions can guide classroom reflection and discussion in a variety of ways.

One approach is to have students spend time independently with the much longer excerpt from *Mockingbird*. For example, ask students to read Chapter 12 of *Mockingbird* and respond to question 1 in their journals, supporting their answers with evidence from the text. Then read the *Watchman* excerpt aloud and use the next two questions to compare the excerpts. Questions 4 and 5 can be effective writing prompts, or use a *Think, Pair, Share* teaching strategy to provide opportunities for students to both thoughtfully respond in writing and engage in meaningful dialogue with a peer and ultimately the whole class.

1. After going to Calpurnia’s church, Scout states, “That Calpurnia led a modest double life never dawned on me.” In what sense does Calpurnia lead a double life? What does Scout learn when she accompanies Calpurnia to church? About Calpurnia? About Maycomb? About herself?
2. What details in the scene from *Go Set a Watchman* reveal Jean Louise’s childhood relationship with Calpurnia? What clues suggest that there is now distance between the two women?
3. How is Scout’s visit to Calpurnia’s church similar to Jean Louise’s visit to Calpurnia in *Go Set a Watchman*? How are the two visits different?
4. What does Calpurnia mean when she asks Jean Louise, “What are you all doing to us?” What factors might account for Calpurnia’s treatment of Jean Louise in this scene? How does Jean Louise respond to Calpurnia?

5. In what sense might the visit to Calpurnia's church be a pivotal moment for Scout? How do you think the visit to Calpurnia's home is a pivotal moment for Jean Louise? What new perspectives does Scout/Jean Louise gain from these experiences?

II. Broaden students' context for the relationship between Scout/Jean Louise and Calpurnia by following up your comparison of the two novel excerpts with southern domestic worker Essie Favrot's recollections in "You Worked Long Hours."

1. How does Harper Lee's portrayal of Calpurnia in the two novels connect to Essie Favrot's account of working for white families? What are the similarities and differences? How does Favrot's story extend your thinking about Calpurnia?

III. Another way to deepen students' understanding of Calpurnia is by reading and discussing Maya Angelou's poem, "The Mask."

1. Who is the speaker in "The Mask"? What kind of "mask" does the speaker wear and why? In what context might you or someone you know wear a "mask"?
2. Does Calpurnia wear a "mask" in *Mockingbird* and *Watchman*? Cite evidence from the text. What does the poem add to your thinking about the character and behavior of Calpurnia in each of these two novels?

IV. In addition to digging into the relationship between Calpurnia and Scout/Jean Louise, students can focus on the larger impact of the scenes on Scout/Jean Louise, and look for parallels in their own lives. Students can respond to the following question in discussion or their journals, or if you have done the "Memory Maps" activity included on page 5 of *Teaching Mockingbird*, they may want to add this reflection to their maps.

1. In the scenes from both books, Scout/Jean Louise enters an unfamiliar social world. How does that experience affect her in each scene? What experiences have you had in unfamiliar environments? What can we learn from such experiences?

“You Worked Long Hours”

(from Susan Tucker, *Telling Memories Among Southern Women* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 118–119.)

Born in 1910, Essie Favrot worked for several decades for Southern white families as a domestic worker. In an interview, she described some of the situations in which she worked:

I finished out the eighth grade in the country. But by then my very oldest sister had come to stay with my aunt, and she decided it was time I came, too.

The onliest thing then was for a black girl to do was to get domestic work. So, I worked. First it was just about a two-hour job per day, five days a week for this lady that just had come up to me and asked me to work. I'd go down there to her house, clean up the house, do a little washing, and that was it. Fifty cent a day was what I made. They were poor people. They were probably just about as poor as I was, but the lady worked for a department store!

Then, I think, my brother's mother-in-law told me that this lady needed somebody to keep her kids. So I went there and worked. I was living on the place, and that's when I met my husband. This was in '39, and I remember the salary had gone up to a dollar a day. I was making seven dollars [a week] because I was living on the place. And I worked every day from seven to seven. You worked long hours, but you were making a dollar a day.

I slept up in the bedroom with the little boy. There was a servant house in the backyard, but it was occupied by the cook, which was a male. It was considered his house, but I used the bathroom there.

They were rich people. I guess they owned stock. And when my mother-in-law decided to sell half her land, I don't know why but it came for me to borrow the money. My husband had been working for his people much longer than I had. Anyway I asked them for fifty dollars to pay for the property, and they readily gave it to me. But they said they wouldn't help me to build a house. They had got stung with another maid borrowing from them. We paid the money back right quick, and they were surprised.

After that, I worked thirteen years for the Elliots. Now they weren't rich people. They both worked, and they had six children. I took over the running of the house. I did everything for them—the groceries, the cleaning up, the kids. I did all for the kids—took them to the park, to school, bought their clothes, saw that they wore the right clothes to parties, all that. My neighbors used to laugh 85 because those Elliots were such poor people. Everyone knew they were. I mean not poor white trash—no. Just working people like myself. I was fond of those kids. I still am. I worked for them until my son was born. We still keep in touch. One of the girls just died. She had cancer;

that was very sad. And their mother, I worry about her. She's had a hard time. Working for them—since they had all those kids, it was more like family for me there.

I feel still sort of protective and maternal towards them. Not like I do my own family, no, but like I would any children I'd cared for that much, watched grow up. I'd help them still anyway I could. I would . . . not go back to work, but I'd help them any other way I could.

After that, I worked days till my son got old enough to go to school. Then I worked for the Helms. I worked there for a while. And they had four kids. Two were up in age, school-age children. And they had two little kids. And I just figured, since I was taking care of her kids and cooking for them, I'd have supper done when they got there and the kids fed and clean. They both worked. And they were so congenial at first. So, when my son started school not far from where they lived, I figured they wouldn't mind him coming down there after school and then going home with me.

But the first day after I did it, Mr. Helms say, "What happened, Essie? Did your son miss his bus?" I say, "No, he didn't miss his bus. It's nobody at home in the evening, so I just took your two children, and when we were on our way back from the park, we picked him up."

"I don't think it's going to be such a good idea, him coming down here. That lady next door . . . Mind you now, it's not us," he said. "But that lady next door don't want him playing down here."

So his wife she thought she could come home early so I could go home early, too. And the next evening she said, "I think I might enjoy coming on home, getting here early." I didn't say a word, because I knew I wasn't going to work for nobody who had two that were not toilet trained and I had to clean both of them up and I had to cook dinner for the whole family and clean the apartment and wash their clothes. I felt if I was doing all of that for her children and her, and mine couldn't come there in the evening, that they could have their job. After she paid me, I said, "Now you be sure and get you somebody." I was headed to my car when I said it. And I left there and never went back. . . .

The Mask

By Maya Angelou

We wear the mask that grins and lies.
It shades our cheeks and hides our eyes.
This debt we pay to human guile
With torn and bleeding hearts...
We smile and mouth the myriad subtleties.
Why should the world think otherwise
In counting all our tears and sighs.
Nay let them only see us while
We wear the mask.

We smile but oh my God
Our tears to thee from tortured souls arise
And we sing Oh Baby doll, now we sing...
The clay is vile beneath our feet
And long the mile
But let the world think otherwise.
We wear the mask.

When I think about myself
I almost laugh myself to death.
My life has been one great big joke!
A dance that's walked a song that's spoke.
I laugh so hard HA! HA! I almos' choke
When I think about myself.

Seventy years in these folks' world
The child I works for calls me girl
I say "HA! HA! HA! Yes ma'am!"
For workin's sake
I'm too proud to bend and
Too poor to break
So...I laugh! Until my stomach ache
When I think about myself.
My folks can make me split my side
I laugh so hard, HA! HA! I nearly died
The tales they tell sound just like lying
They grow the fruit but eat the rind.
Hmm huh! I laugh uhuh huh huh...
Until I start to cry when I think about myself
And my folks and the children.

My fathers sit on benches,
Their flesh count every plank,
The slats leave dents of darkness
Deep in their withered flank.
And they gnarled like broken candles,
All waxed and burned profound.
They say, but sugar, it was our submission
that made your world go round.

There in those pleated faces
I see the auction block
The chains and slavery's coffles
The whip and lash and stock.

My fathers speak in voices
That shred my fact and sound
They say, but sugar, it was our submission
that made your world go round.

They laugh to conceal their crying,
They shuffle through their dreams
They stepped 'n fetched a country
And wrote the blues in screams.
I understand their meaning,
It could and did derive
From living on the edge of death
They kept my race alive
By wearing the mask! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!