

## ESSENTIAL QUESTION: WHAT DOES SCOUT REALLY KNOW ABOUT CALPURNIA?

### TEACHER'S GUIDE

#### OVERVIEW

This brief excerpt comes from an interview published in *Understanding To Kill a Mockingbird* in which three white women from prominent southern families discuss what their lives were like in the South of the 1930s. In the excerpt, the women discuss their relationships with and perceptions of the black people they interacted with. The reading allows students to think through Scout's blindspots about the lives of the black characters in the novel, particularly Calpurnia, and to analyze the brief but intriguing presence of the rebellious Lula.

#### TIMING

The reading can be used just prior to or just after students have read chapter 12, in which Scout and Jem attend Calpurnia's church.

Consider the following guidelines regarding when to undertake the different activities:

Essential Question for Discussion and Writing	Objective	Suggested Timing	Suggested Rubric	Additional Research
A. What is a positive stereotype?	SW consider word choices and point of view in order to analyze the use of positive stereotypes in the interview.	any time – this set of questions doesn't require any knowledge of <i>Mockingbird</i>	A	N
B. What is the backstory here?	SW research sharecropping and the black mammy in order to analyze the broader historical context underlying this interview.	any time - this set of questions doesn't require any knowledge of <i>Mockingbird</i>	B	Y
C. What did white children really know about their black nurses?	SW use their analysis of the interview to consider what Scout and Jem don't know about Calpurnia.	after chapter 12 (when Calpurnia takes Scout and Jem to her church)	A	N
D. What is Lula so angry about?	SW use their analysis of the interview to consider what the character of Lula represents and why	after chapter 12 (when Calpurnia takes Scout and Jem to her church)	A	N

	Lee may have chosen to include her in the novel.			
<b>Class activity</b>				
Interviewing Calpurnia and Lula	SW use their understanding of the interview and insights into the characters of Calpurnia and Lula to create an interview in which Calpurnia and Lula reflect on what life was like working for white families in Maycomb.	after chapter 12 (when Calpurnia takes Scout and Jem to her church)	Rubric included	N

### NOTES ON THE ARTICLE

- Students need to be cautioned to do more than simply dismiss the women as racist. They should be pushed to think through the ways in which the women manifest their racist attitudes and to think about how racism can appear not just in the form of hatred and discrimination but also in the form of positive stereotypes (e.g., black children love to dance).
- Key vocabulary: prominent, instilled, implicitly, proceeds, traits, minded, sharecroppers

### SUGGESTED MEDIA LINKS

- Clips from films featuring black women as nurses/nannies: *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *The Help* (2011)
- Images of Aunt Jemima
- Georgia State University Library has a collection of resources related to Dorothy Bolden, who worked as a domestic in the 30s and eventually founded the National Domestic Workers Union. Interviews with Bolden about her experiences as a black domestic activist from the *Voices of Labor* Oral History Project and the Georgia Government Documentation Project are also accessible through the Georgia State University Library website. These materials might be particularly helpful for students needing insight into the ideas of black domestic laborers for the class activity.
- Cornell University's Kheel Center has a collection of 1937 photos by photographer Louise Boyle of both black and white tenant farmers (a variant of sharecroppers), showing their working and living conditions, available on Flickr.

**VOCABULARY WARM-UP**

L.9-10.4, L.9-10.5, L.9-10.6

WORDS TO OWN: prominent, instilled, implicitly, proceeds, traits, sharecroppers

**Section A: Use context clues:** Read the following sentences and use context clues to determine the meaning of the underlined words.

1) When describing how African-American caregivers taught and influenced the white children they looked after, the interview includes the statement that “the black people that took care of these little white children instilled in us the most wonderful traits.” Based on the context, what does it mean to instill something in someone?

2) Sharecropping began to be used widely in the south during the period of Reconstruction, after the Civil War. Usually sharecroppers work land owned by someone else. Either the worker pays to work the land or they share the profits or crops with the land’s owner. What do you think are the costs and benefits of sharecropping?

3) Camille explains that in her family, after the farming was done, her grandmother would “split the proceeds” with the sharecroppers who worked for her. Based on the context and assuming that proceeds were not actual farm products, what do you think the proceeds were? Does splitting the proceeds seem fair to you? Why or why not?

**Section B: More context clues: Here your task is to use context clues to understand the word’s meaning AND to practice your context clues skills.**

1) Mary Anne says that “the black people that took care of these little white children instilled in us the most wonderful traits. They stood for everything that was honest and Christian.” Traits here means

- a) qualities
- b) Christianity
- c) kindness
- d) traditional

2) Which word(s) from the sentences in Question 1 best helps the reader understand the meaning of traits?

- a) everything
- b) instilled
- c) stood for
- d) little white children

**Section C:** Sometimes common words are used in uncommon ways. Use the dictionary in order to understand the **uncommon meanings of these common words**.

- 1) “And you minded your nurse.” Here, Cecil doesn’t mean you were bothered by your nurse. She is using the word “mind” in a different way. What, as Cecil is using the term, does it mean to mind someone?
- 2) You might proceed to the bank in order to deposit the proceeds of your work. Explain.

**Section D:** Use the dictionary to look up the underlined words and answer the following questions based on their definitions.

- 1) If your sister offers to split the proceeds of your joint babysitting venture, what does that mean she is offering you?
- 2) Would you expect someone who lived in a prominent neighborhood to be rich or poor? Why?
- 3) Some rules are explicit and some are implicit. Make a list of rules in your school and explain which are explicit and which are implicit and why.
- 4) What traits do you look for in a friend? Why?

**Section E: Practice using the word correctly** by choosing the right form of the word that best fits in the blank within the following sentences.

- 1) I am uncomfortable with my parents’ \_\_\_\_\_ disapproval of my summer plans; even though they haven’t said anything, I can tell that they think I have made a poor decision.
  - a) implicitly
  - b) implicit
  - c) implies
  - d) implicits
- 2) Our teachers want to \_\_\_\_ in us good work habits, but shouldn’t they care less about how we do our work and more about the quality of the final product?
  - a) instilled
  - b) instills
  - c) instill
  - d) instilling

**Section F: Vocabulary skits**

Use the model sentences and definitions to understand the words in question. Create a skit in which you address the given topic. Every member of the group must use the vocabulary word at least once during your performance of the skit.

1) traits – characteristics of a person or a thing

- It is usually considered racist to ascribe particular traits to groups of people based on race or ethnicity.
- What personal traits distinguish you from your peers and have contributed to your success?
- Terriers are high-strung, sometimes anxious dogs; if you aren't prepared for this type of dog, you should look for a breed with different traits.

**Scenario:** Create a skit in which a teenager meets with a manager and assistant manager of a store in the hope of securing a summer job. The manager and assistant manager are interested in knowing what traits the teenager possesses that will prepare him for this position.

2) prominent – standing out, important, well-known

- In history class, we learn about the prominent men and women in our country's history.
- It is my ambition to become a prominent physician; I hope to be known as the doctor who discovers the cure for cancer.
- It annoys me that some people care more about social prominence than character; people should be respected for who they are rather than how well they are known.

**Scenario:** Create a skit in which a group of teenagers meets to discuss the speaker they plan to invite to their high school graduation. The school principal insists that the person should be appropriately prominent within the community, but a person of integrity and character, not just a celebrity.

**Essential Question:**  
**What does Scout really know about Calpurnia?**

**INTRODUCTION**

In this brief excerpt, from an interview first published in *Understanding To Kill a Mockingbird*, three white women discuss their relations with the black people in their lives, particularly their black nannies, whom they call nurses, in the South of the 1930s, the time when Lee set *Mockingbird*.

**“Interview: A Perspective on the 1930s”**

*Interviewer:* As members of prominent families, what was your relationship with black people when you were little girls of Scout Finch's age?

*Mary Ann:* Your first experience with a black person was with your nurse. And the black people that took care of these little white children instilled in us the most wonderful traits. They stood for everything that was honest and Christian.

*Cecil:* I remember complaining to my nurse Lessie that a little boy had hit me. And she said, "Well, go hit him back." Part of your character came from your nurses.

*Mary Ann:* And they were really religious.

*Cecil:* And you minded your nurse.

*Camille:* I remember the black sharecroppers who worked for my grandmother. She supported them all year long and paid all their medical bills. Then when the farming was done, they split the proceeds. She got half and they got half, with the understanding that their medical costs would come out of their half. And they trusted her implicitly. I loved to go down to Hale County on settlin'- up day when they were paid because I could spend the day with the little black children. And that's where I learned to love to dance.

**Reflect on the Essential Question:** What does the question suggest to you? [fix this after we nail down the question]

**Reflect on the Introduction:** The introduction tells you that the piece you are about to read is an interview. Why do you think the interviewer was interested in asking the three women these questions? Why do you think their answers might matter to us?

**Reflect on the title “Interview: A Perspective on the 1930s”:** What kind of reading will this be? What does the title tell us about the focus of the reading?

**Vocabulary:** The interviewer identifies the women as “members of prominent families.” Why do you think the interviewer mentions this? Do you think white women from less wealthy families would share the opinions these women offer here?

**Key Idea:** Mary Ann suggests that the black people “stood for everything that was honest and Christian.” What is she saying? Is it still stereotyping to attribute positive qualities to a particular group of people?

**Reflect:** The sharecroppers split the proceeds of the farm with Camille's grandmother, but they had to pay their medical costs out of their earnings. Does this seem fair?

**Reflect:** Camille says that the black sharecroppers “trusted her [grandmother] implicitly.” How would Camille know this? Do you find her assertion her believable?

**Reflect:** Mary Ann asserts that she (she uses the term “we” to include other white people) was “incredibly attached to the black people we knew well,” but Cecil suggests that the black people may not have felt the same way. Do you see any justification in this interview for this assertion about how the black people might have felt towards the white people? What in this brief interview might suggest that these women did not know the black men and women in their lives very well?

*Mary Ann:* We were incredibly attached to the black people we knew well.

*Cecil:* But I read somewhere in a book on the South that while the white people felt very attached to the black people back then, the black people didn't feel that way about us.

Source: Claudia Durst Johnson, *Understanding To Kill a Mockingbird*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994.

**CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING**

RI.9-10.1. RI.9-10.4. RI.9-10.6

- 1) In this interview, Camille states that the black sharecroppers trusted her grandmother “implicitly.” By “implicitly,” she means
- explicitly
  - simplicity
  - completely
  - partially
- 2) The interviewer describes Camille, Cecil, and Mary Ann as members of “prominent” families. The best definition of the term “prominent” in this context is
- rich
  - important
  - well-known
  - all of the above
- 3) Camille states: “I loved to go down to Hale County on settlin'-up day when they were paid because I could spend the day with the little black children. And that's where I learned to love to dance.” In the first sentence above, “they” refers back to
- the little black children
  - the black sharecroppers
  - the nurses
  - the little white children
- 4) In the quotation cited above (in question 3), Camille implies what about dancing?
- The little black children loved to dance.
  - The farmers loved to dance.
  - She dislikes dancing .
  - Children are better dancers than adults.
- 5) Which adjectives best describe the point of view of Camille, Cecil, and Mary Ann towards black people in the interview?
- patronizing and open-minded
  - patronizing and insular
  - tolerant and open-minded
  - warm and insular



## WRITING AND DISCUSSION

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RI.9-10.1, RI.9-10.2, RI.9-10.3, RI.9-10.4,  
RI.9-10.5, RI.9-10.6, W.9-10.2, W.9-10.4,  
W.9-10.5, W.9-10.9, SL.9-10.1, L.9-10.1,  
L.9-10.2, L.9-10.3, L.9-10.5

### A. What is a positive stereotype?

**1. Discuss:** What is stereotyping? How does it work? Compare positive and negative stereotypes? How are they different? Discuss how both positive and negative stereotypes may be different but are still damaging to the group being stereotyped.

**2. Discuss:** What stereotypes do the white women invoke about the black men and women they discuss? *Use Table A-1 to list the different stereotypes and pay careful attention to the way the women use stereotypical language to make comments about groups of people rather than individuals.*

**3. Write:** Discuss the white women's view of the black men and women they knew. Carefully analyze the white women's word choices in order to consider their points of view and ideas about the black men and women they knew. Use evidence from the interview in your response.

**Table A-1: Stereotypes**

<b>Stereotypes</b>	<b>Stereotyping use of language</b>	<b>Your reflections</b>
Black nurses were “really religious”	“they were really religious”	Probably not <i>all</i> black nurses were <i>really</i> religious

**B. What is the backstory here?**

RI.9-10.1, RI.9-10.2, RI.9-10.3, RI.9-10.4,  
RI.9-10.5, W.9-10.2, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.5, W.9-  
10.7, W.9-10.8, W.9-10.9, SL.9-10.1, SL.9-  
10.3, L.9-10.1, L.9-10.2, L.9-10.3, L.9-10.5

**1. Discuss:** The white women here paint a simple, happy story of black/white relations in the time when

*Mockingbird* was set. What is the story they tell? Do you think they are seeing and/or telling the whole story? Do you find their version of events reasonable and/or plausible? Why or why not?

**2. Research:** Conduct some basic research to think through some of the elements of this story. Focus on either 1) the stereotype of the black nurse (the mammy) or 2) the institution of black sharecropping.

**3. Write:** Using what you have learned from your research, discuss the backstory to the interview. How do the women either 1) traffic in stereotypes in their discussion of the black people they knew and/or or 2) misrepresent the realities of labor for black men and women during this time? Use evidence from the interview in your response.

**C. What did white children really know about their black nurses?**

RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.3, RI.9-10.1, RI.9-10.2, RI.9-10.3, RI.9-10.4, RI.9-10.5, W.9-10.2, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.5, W.9-10.9, SL.9-10.1, L.9-10.1, L.9-10.2, L.9-10.3, L.9-10.5

**1. Discuss:** In chapter 12, Calpurnia takes Scout and Jem to church with her. In her community and her world, the children see a different side to Calpurnia and come to think about her differently. *Use Table C-1 to discuss what the children learn in this chapter about Calpurnia.* Why do you think there is so much the children don't know and/or haven't thought about in relation to Calpurnia?

**2. Write:** Use what you have learned in Chapter 12 to think about what the white women in the interview might not know or have known about their nurses and the black sharecroppers. If Calpurnia had not taken Scout and Jem with her to church that day, what would the children have *not known* about Calpurnia? Use these insights to consider how much these white women really knew about the black men and women from their childhoods. Use evidence from the interview and *Mockingbird* in your response.

**Table C-1: What do the children learn about Calpurnia?**

<b>What the children learn</b>	<b>Textual evidence</b>	<b>Reflections</b>
The children learn that Calpurnia is older than Atticus.	“I’m older than Mr. Finch, even.”	To children, all adults seem old or older, but it is interesting that Calpurnia seems ageless compared to Atticus whom Jem sees as old and “feeble.”

**D. What is Lula so angry about?**

RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.3, RL.9-10.4,  
RI.9-10.1, RI.9-10.2, RI.9-10.3, RI.9-10.4, RI.9-  
10.5, W.9-10.1, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.5, W.9-10.9,  
SL.9-10.1, L.9-10.1, L.9-10.2, L.9-10.3, L.9-10.5

**1. Act out:** In groups of 4, act out the brief encounter between Lula, Calpurnia, and the children at Calpurnia's church.

**2. Discuss:** Based on the text, what do we know about Lula? Why do you think Lula speaks out the way that she does towards these two white children? *Use Table D-1 to record what you know and your reflections about Lula.* What do you think of Lula?

**3. Discuss:** Lula objects to the children's presence at the church. She says to Calpurnia: "You ain't got no business bringin' white chillun here – they got their church, we got our'n. It is our church, ain't it, Miss Cal?" What is Lula saying here? What do you think of her objections?

**4. Discuss:** Compare Lula's attitude towards the children in this chapter with how they are treated by Reverend Sykes, Calpurnia, and Zeebo. *Use Table D-2 to record how the children are treated by the different characters.* Why do you think each character behaves as they do toward the children?

**5. Write:** In the interview, Cecil mentions that she read in a book that "the black people didn't feel [very attached] about us." Use Cecil's remarks here to reflect on the character of Lula. What do you think Lula represents? How is she different from the other black characters? Why do you think Lee chose to include her in the novel? Use evidence from the interview and *Mockingbird* in your response.

**Table D-1: What do we know about Lula?**

<b>What do we know about Lula?</b>	<b>Textual Evidence</b>	<b>Reflections</b>
She is described as physically unusual looking	“She was bullet-headed with strange almond-shaped eyes, straight nose, and an Indian-bow mouth. She seemed seven feet high.”	Lula seems, as Scout perceives, to be an imposing figure and to be of a mixed-race heritage.

**Table D-2: How are the children treated at the church?**

<b>Character</b>	<b>Textual Evidence</b>	<b>Reflections</b>
Lula	“they got their church, we got our’n.”	Lula doesn’t want the children there.
Calpurnia		
Reverend Sykes		
Zeebo		



**CLASS ACTIVITY**

RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.3, RI.9-10.1, RI.9-10.2, RI.9-10.3, W.9-10.1, W.9-10.2, W.9-10.3, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.5, W.9-10.6, W.9-10.9, SL.9-10.1, SL.9-10.2, SL.9-10.4, SL.9-10.5, SL.9-10.6, L.9-10.1, L.9-10.2, L.9-10.3, L.9-10.5, L.9-10.6

**Task:** You have read an interview with three white women talking about their experiences with black nurses during the time of *Mockingbird*. Your goal is to create a second, fictional interview, this time featuring two black nurses talking about their working experiences in Maycomb. One of these nurses is Calpurnia; another is Lula. What would they have to say about Atticus, the children, and the community? What would they have to say about their work? You will have to conjecture much more in creating Lula's responses than Calpurnia's. Be sure to include specific details from *Mockingbird* in your interview.

**You will present your work to the class.** During your presentation, you will read through the transcript of your interview and discuss the thinking behind your ideas as well as what you were trying to accomplish. Be prepared to answer questions about your work.

**In addition, each individual must produce:**

**1. A narrative explanation.** Write a narrative in which you explain what your group was trying to accomplish and the choices you made in fulfilling the requirements of the assignment. Justify (with textual evidence) how your responses make sense in terms of your understanding of the two characters, Calpurnia and Lula, the interview you read, the novel, and the time period.

**2. A discussion of your group dynamic.** Write a narrative in which you explain your role in the group. What tasks did you take responsibility for? How successfully did you collaborate with your peers? What struggles did your group face in tackling the project?

**Class Activity Rubric**

<b>Category</b>	<b>4 - Excellent</b>	<b>3 – Good</b>	<b>2 – Satisfactory</b>	<b>1 - Unsatisfactory</b>
<b>Interview</b>	Interview shows outstanding understanding of and insight into the texts and characters	Interview shows good understanding of and insight into the texts and characters	Interview shows limited or uneven understanding of and insight into the texts and characters	Interview shows insufficient or inaccurate understanding of and insight into the texts and characters
<b>Narrative Explanation</b> (cite relevant and sufficient textual evidence)	Narrative explanation is clear, coherent, and shows excellent insight into the texts	Narrative explanation is solid and shows good insight into the texts	Narrative limited or uneven explanation and shows some insight into the texts	Narrative explanation is unclear and/or incoherent and shows little insight into the texts
<b>Collaboration</b> (initiate and participate effectively in collaboration)	Student takes responsibility for his or her own work; collaborates well with others; negotiates group dynamics well	Student takes responsibility for his or her own work; collaborates sufficiently with others; shows some success negotiating group dynamics	Student takes limited responsibility for his or her own work; collaborates minimally with others; attempts to negotiate group dynamics	Student takes no responsibility for his or her own work; student does not collaborate with others; student struggles to or is unable to negotiate group dynamics
<b>Vocabulary</b> (use domain-specific vocabulary)	Several “words to own” from the unit are used correctly	Some “words to own” from the unit are used correctly	One or more “words to own” from the unit are used but perhaps not correctly or effectively	No “words to own” from the unit are used
<b>Class presentation</b> (presentation of knowledge and ideas)	Presentation of the project is effective, concise, logical, and organized	Presentation of the project is generally but not fully effective, concise, logical, and organized	Presentation of the project is somewhat effective, but with some issues of brevity, logic, and organization	Presentation of the project is not effective, with serious problems in brevity, logic, and organization