

Activity 2. Part 1: Character Traits (Teacher’s Version)

Teachers will assign one or more sets of corresponding trial characters (defendants; defense attorneys; judges) to each group of students. Have each group work together to complete profiles of one set of characters using the worksheets in this packet.

Directions for students:

Fill in the name and role of the historical or fictional character in the trial. Use evidence gathered from your reading of the novel or information found in a secondary source; enter a quotation or descriptive passage about the character in the second column. Then identify a character trait that matches that description and enter it into the box in front of the passage.

Name of character: Haywood Patterson Role in trial: defendant, Scottsboro trial, 1933

Character trait	Passage from the text, fact from a secondary source or quotation
Defiant	Viewed as the guiltiest and the most defiant of the Scottsboro Boys, Haywood was chosen by prosecutors as their first target after the initial convictions from the first trials were overturned.
legal adult, dropout, vagrant, unemployed	Accused at age 18. African American. Son of a sharecropper...he left school after 3 rd grade, was working as a delivery boy. Already a veteran of the rails, having ridden trains from Ohio to Florida to Arkansas, Haywood had been looking for work since he was 14.
illiterate but quickly learned to read and write a quick study, smart, enterprising, tough	He entered jail illiterate, but within eight months he was writing letters home, reading, and challenging guards to name state capitals. His favorite prison reading, when he could get his hands on it, was the magazine, <i>True Detective</i> . Patterson's smarts, his enterprising nature, and his defiance helped him tolerate the tough conditions of Alabama prison life better than most of the other Scottsboro Boys.
moody	He was given to rapid mood swings; one letter might be hopeful and upbeat, while in the next he might be complaining of “ <i>nightmares and restless moments.</i> ”
loyal, militant, high spirited	Throughout the early years of the Scottsboro cases, Patterson was recognized as being the most loyal, most militant, and most spirited of the Boys.
straightforward, not emotional	“ <i>I was framed at Scottsboro.</i> ”
defiant of authority	Upon being found guilty, said, “ <i>I ain't got no fair trial. I ain't seen no women on that train.</i> ”

To Kill a Mockingbird and the Scottsboro Boys

Name of Character: Tom Robinson

Role in trial: defendant, To Kill a Mockingbird

Character trait	Passage from the text or secondary source, or quotation
"invisible", silent presence, soft spoken	Invisible through most of the novel. When the lynch mob turns up at the jail, he listens silently from inside. After they leave Tom's disembodied voice from the darkness: <i>"Mr. Finch?"</i> A soft husky voice came from the darkness above: <i>"They gone?"</i>
stable citizen, husband, family man, in trouble once for disorderly conduct	Tom was 25 years of age; he was married with three children; he had been in trouble with the law before: he once received 30 days for disorderly conduct...he owned up to this in his testimony saying, <i>"Got in a fight with another man, he tried to cut me."</i>
kind, compassionate, had pity for Mayella	Tom testifies to his feelings for Mayella saying, <i>"Yes, suh. I felt right sorry for her, she seemed to try more'n the rest of 'em —"</i>
gentle	Tom testifies, <i>"Mr. Finch, I tried. I tried to 'thout bein' ugly to her. I didn't wanta be ugly, I didn't wanta push her or nothin'."</i>
disabled	Tom Robinson's powerful shoulders rippled under his thin shirt. He rose to his feet and stood with his right hand on the back of his chair. He looked oddly off balance, but it was not from the way he was standing. His left arm was fully twelve inches shorter than his right, and hung dead at his side. It ended in a small shriveled hand...that it was no use to him.
scared	Asked why he ran from the incident with Mayella, Tom testifies, <i>"I was scared, suh."</i>
well mannered, courteous, a gentleman	It occurred to me that in their own way, Tom Robinson's manners were as good as Atticus's. Until my father explained it to me later, I did not understand the subtlety of Tom's predicament: he would not have dared strike a white woman under any circumstances and expect to live long, so he took the first opportunity to run—a sure sign of guilt.
brave or frightened and panicked	Tom's escape —running across a football-field sized prison yard to climb a fence in broad daylight with several armed guards watching—As Atticus says afterwards, <i>"I guess Tom was tired of white men's chances and preferred to take his own."</i>
"clean," church-going	Townpeople reflect on Tom's character saying, <i>"Just shows you, that Robinson boy was legally married, they say he kept himself clean, went to church and all that..."</i>
brave response under cross examination, intelligent	<i>"No suh, I's scared I'd be in court, just like I am now..."</i> <i>"No suh, scared I'd hafta face up to what I didn't do."</i>

To Kill a Mockingbird and the Scottsboro Boys

Name of Character: Samuel Leibowitz Role in trial: defense attorney, Scottsboro trial, 1933

Character trait	Passage from the text or secondary source, or quotation
excellent lawyer	He had a national reputation and was billed as “ <i>the next Clarence Darrow</i> ” due to 77 acquittals out of 78 trials.
mainstream liberal from the North	He was from New York City, of Jewish heritage. Neither a Communist nor a radical, Samuel Leibowitz was a mainstream Democrat who had never been associated with class-based causes.
his own man, not influenced by opinions of others, worked the case “ <i>pro bono</i> ”	After reading the record of the first trials and becoming convinced of the innocence of the Scottsboro Boys, Leibowitz accepted the case against the urgings of his wife and many friends who told him that the skin color of the defendants gave them no chance in the Alabama of the 1930s. He would work for the next four years on the Boys cases without pay or reimbursement for most of his expenses.
intense style in courtroom, master lawyer, thorough	His questioning was described as “ <i>gentle</i> ” but “ <i>satirical</i> .” He commanded a mastery of the facts. His brutal cross-examination of witnesses was “ <i>more like a dissection of a life than a cross-questioning</i> .”
excellent researcher	He was hailed as the “ <i>best investigator the Decatur courtroom ever saw</i> .”
flamboyant , dramatic in courtroom	He had a radical approach and a flair for the dramatic.
antagonized locals in Alabama by challenging status quo – no blacks on the voting rolls, brave, resolute, continued the case despite death threats	Leibowitz quickly became an object of loathing around Decatur when he opened his defense of Haywood Patterson by challenging Alabama’s exclusion of blacks from the jury rolls. Local hatred grew uglier as the trials went along. Death threats were made against him after his tough cross-examination of Victoria Price. Several people were overheard saying, “ <i>It’ll be a wonder if he gets out of here alive</i> .” Five uniformed members of the National Guard were assigned to protect Leibowitz during the trial, with another 150 available to defend him against a possible lynch mob.
not a quitter – wouldn’t give up, colorful expressions	Leibowitz was stunned by the jury’s guilty verdict in Patterson’s 1933 trial. He compared the verdict to “ <i>the act of spitting on the tomb of Abraham Lincoln</i> .” Back in New York after the trial, he vowed to defend the Boys “ <i>until hell freezes over</i> .”
determined, defendant strongly believed in him	Speaking before enthusiastic audiences sometimes numbering in the thousands, he promised to take guilty verdicts to the Supreme Court and back until Alabama finally gave up: “ <i>It’ll be a merry-go-round, and if some Klu Kluxer doesn’t put a bullet through my head, I’ll go right along until they let the passengers off</i> .” Leibowitz’s determined efforts won the affection of his clients. Haywood Patterson said of Leibowitz, “ <i>I love him more than life itself</i> .”

To Kill a Mockingbird and the Scottsboro Boys

Name of Character: Atticus Finch

Role in trial: defense attorney, To Kill a Mockingbird

Character trait	Passage from the text or secondary source, or quotation
intelligent, well read, integrity in his profession	Townfolk offered these conclusions "...thinks he knows what he's doing,"; "Oh-h now, I wouldn't say that," ... "Atticus Finch's a deep reader, a mighty deep reader..." "He reads all right, that's all he does." "... you know the court appointed him to defend this nigger." "Yeah, but Atticus aims to defend him..."
compassionate	Somehow, Atticus had hit her hard in a way that was not clear to me, but it gave him no pleasure to do so.
not cut-throat in the courtroom or in life, courteous	"Mr. Finch doesn't." "He's not an example, Dill, he's--" I was trying to grope in my memory for a sharp phrase of Miss Maudie Atkinson's. I had it: "He's the same in the courtroom as he is on the public streets."
fair, just, not an average man, exceptional	"Atticus says cheatin' a colored man is ten times worse than cheatin' a white man," I muttered. "Says it's the worst thing you can do." Mr. Raymond said, "I don't reckon it's- Miss Jean Louise, you don't know your pa's not a run-of-the-mill man..."
understandable – speaks in plain language	"He made it as plain and easy as-- well, as I'da explained it to you. You could've understood it, even."
soft spoken – did not yell, no drama	Atticus wasn't a thunderer...there was no drama; a grave disappointment to all present, it seemed. Atticus was proceeding amiably, as if he were involved in a title dispute. With his infinite capacity for calming turbulent seas, he could make a rape case as dry as a sermon.
highly respected by the African American community	All around us and in the balcony on the opposite wall, the Negroes were getting to their feet. Reverend Sykes's voice was as distant as Judge Taylor's: "Miss Jean Louise, stand up. Your father's passin'."
composed under any circumstances	Atticus was standing under the street light looking as though nothing had happened: his vest was buttoned, his collar and tie were neatly in place, his watch-chain glistened, and he was his impassive self again.
completes the work that others in the community do not want to do	A family friend discussing Atticus with the children said, "I simply want to tell you that there are some men in this world who were born to do our unpleasant jobs for us. Your father's one of them."

To Kill a Mockingbird and the Scottsboro Boys

Name of Character: Judge Horton

Role in trial: judge, Scottsboro trial, 1933

Character trait	Passage from the text or secondary source, or quotation
easy going and gracious, well liked, great legal ability, fair	The announcement that the gracious and easygoing Horton would take on the controversial Scottsboro Boys case was generally greeted with enthusiasm. Alabama newspapers praised the judge's " <i>unusually equable nature, great legal ability, and fairness.</i> "
initially thought highly of by the prosecution	Prosecutor Thomas Knight initially said that he thought Horton " <i>would make an excellent judge.</i> "
diligent	" <i>He performed his job with characteristic diligence.</i> "
relaxed and casual courtroom manner	His courtroom demeanor was relaxed and casual.
respected by legal community, reputation for being fair	Attorneys who tried cases before Judge Horton respected him. He was, above all, fair.
soft spoken — did not yell, dedicated to equal justice	Horton rarely raised his soft, conversational voice. Although his rulings neither consistently favored the prosecution or the defense, Horton made it abundantly clear that he stood on the side of fair process and fair treatment for all, regardless of color.
distinguished appearance	He " <i>looked like pictures of Abe Lincoln.</i> "
medical training	His early medical training influenced grasp of the case.
intolerant of mob rule	" <i>I absolutely have no patience with mob spirit, and that spirit that would charge the guilt or innocence of any being without knowing of their guilt or innocence.</i> "
devoted to equal justice for all under the law, his manner calmed inflamed courtroom environment after the concluding remarks by the attorneys	" <i>So far as the law is concerned it knows neither native nor alien, Jew nor Gentile, black nor white. This case is no different from any other. We have only to do our duty without fear or favor.</i> " Horton delivers a closing speech that seemed to have " <i>a soothing effect</i> " on an embittered courtroom.
courageous and unswayed by public opinion or other concerns, evidence based approach	After a careful, point-by-point review of the medical testimony and that offered by other prosecution witnesses, he found the testimony to be " <i>not only uncorroborated, but it also bears on its face indications of improbability and is contradicted by other evidence.</i> " He then shocked the assembly by announcing: " <i>It is therefore ordered...that the verdict of the jury in this case and the judgment of the Court sentencing this defendant to death be set aside and that a new trial is hereby ordered.</i> "
courageous decision ended judicial career	He know when he set aside the verdict and death sentence of Haywood Patterson that ordering a new trial would end his career as an elected circuit judge. " <i>My mother early taught me a phrase she said was her father's motto,</i> " Horton later recalled. " <i>It has frequently come to mind in difficult situations.</i> " The phrase Horton learned on his mother's knee was " <i>Justitia fiat coelum ruat — Let justice be done though the Heavens may fall.</i> "

To Kill a Mockingbird and the Scottsboro Boys

Name of Character: Judge Taylor

Role in trial: judge, To Kill a Mockingbird

Character trait	Passage from the text or secondary source, or quotation
<p>looked sharp, sleepy, typical appearance for a judge – very informal in his courtroom demeanor, casual</p>	<p>Judge Taylor was described as looking like a sleepy old shark, his pilot fish writing rapidly below in front of him. Townsfolk thought Judge Taylor appeared like most judges. He was amiable, white-haired, slightly ruddy-faced, a man who ran his court with an alarming informality — he sometimes propped his feet up, he often cleaned his fingernails with his pocket knife.</p>
<p>appears to be dozing, but very aware, doesn't miss a trick</p>	<p>In long equity hearings, especially after dinner, Judge Taylor gave the impression of dozing, an impression dispelled forever when a lawyer once deliberately pushed a pile of books to the floor in a desperate effort to wake him up. Without opening his eyes, Judge Taylor murmured, <i>“Mr. Whitley, do that again and it'll cost you one hundred dollars.”</i></p>
<p>learned in his profession</p>	<p>He was a man learned in the law, and although he seemed to take his job casually, in reality he kept a firm grip on any proceedings that came before him.</p>
<p>not what he appears to be on the surface. he comes across as not paying attention and dozing off, but is actually alert and his rulings were not wrong</p>	<p>Atticus had once told us that in Judge Taylor's court any lawyer who was a strict constructionist on evidence usually wound up receiving instructions from the bench. He distilled this for me to mean that Judge Taylor might look lazy and operate in his sleep, but he was seldom reversed, and that was the proof of the pudding. Atticus said he was a good judge.</p>
<p>intentionally put Atticus on the case – made an attempt to see that Tom Robinson was well represented and justice was done</p>	<p><i>“Did it ever strike you that Judge Taylor naming Atticus to defend that boy was no accident? That Judge Taylor might have had his reasons for naming him?”</i> <i>“It was no accident. I thought, Atticus Finch won't win, he can't win, but he's the only man in these parts who can keep a jury out so long in a case like that. And I thought to myself, well, we're making a step — it's just a baby-step, but it's a step.”</i></p>